

## IMPERFECT TENSE: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE ARCHIVE\*

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I often think, fleetingly, how fine it would be to have a ‘private secretary’ to classify and otherwise help with my myriad of notes, papers, books (I’ve written), writing paraphernalia, until I remember that directing a human being is worse than one’s other obligations. As I see no end to my research and writing, I know that only the end of me will end these annoyances.<sup>i</sup>

A letter from Peggy Golde sent to Ruth Landes in 1967 suggests the beginning of a careful ordering, revision and re-reading of determined events that helped shape a professional and personal life history.<sup>ii</sup> However, it would be somewhat rash to explain away this event as no more than Landes’s attempts to reminisce on the past. Other events helped ensure that different memory exercises were begun. Landes had returned to Brazil the previous year, thanks to financial support from the Canadian company Brazilian Traction, Light and Co. Ltd. and from McMaster University, with a project on development and urbanization. As she herself underlined in a letter to her funders, “in my middle-age, I’m returning quickly to find out what has happened in the space of 27 years.”<sup>iii</sup> Landes met up once again with Édison Carneiro. She wandered the centre of a modernized Rio de Janeiro in his company and shared memories of Salvador in the 1930s. The following year, the Brazilian edition of her *The city of women* (1947) was published following her friend’s careful revision and finishing touches.<sup>iv</sup> But Landes was also immersed in other evocative memories long before her return to Brazil, recorded in different versions of the manuscript for a book that was never to be finished, described by herself as “a slightly fictional autobiography” – her misfortunes as a lecturer at Fisk University, a black college located in Nashville, Tennessee, in the south of the United States, at the end of the 1930s.<sup>v</sup>

The oldest daughter of immigrant Jewish parents, Ruth Schlossberg Landes was born in New York on October 8<sup>th</sup> 1908. Her mother, Anna Grossman Schlossberg, was born in the Ukraine in 1881, but was educated by her maternal aunt in Berlin until 1900 when the family emigrated to the United States. It was in New York that Anna met Joseph Schlossberg, Ruth’s father. The oldest son of a large family from Belarus, Joseph moved to New York in 1888, fleeing the advance of the pogroms and the anti-Semitism rife in Europe. During his adolescence, Joseph joined socialist union groups and wrote in union publications edited in Yiddish. In 1914, he began work as treasurer of the recently created Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACW), editing its weekly journal, the *Advance*. As well as being active in socialist unionism, Schlossberg

took part in fronts and campaigns in support of Jewish immigrants arriving from Europe, as well as the expansion of the Zionist movement in the US and campaigns for the creation of the State of Israel.

This paternal figure, recurrently cited in various texts by the author, was responsible for the secular family environment in which Ruth Landes grew up, in a city experiencing accelerated growth and profound cultural, ethnic and social transformations (Park & Park 1988; Cole 2003). The involvement of middle-class women, especially those coming from immigrant Jewish families, in New York schools, universities, intellectual and artistic circles and the labour market was intense during the 1920s. Ruth Landes belonged to a generation that challenged the restrictive spaces of a modern capitalist society in expansion, breaking the barriers of family protection, custody and subordination (Di Leonardo 1998).

After finishing her undergraduate degree in sociology at New York University, in 1928, and completing her master's degree at New York School of Social Work (Columbia University) a year later with a dissertation on a group of dissidents from the UNIA (United Negro Improvement Association) — led by Marcus Garvey — popularly known as 'black Jews' who met at a synagogue in Harlem (Beth B'nai Abraham), Landes became definitively linked to the most important generation of students and lecturers in anthropology at Columbia University, under the supervision and protection of Franz Boas. Her interest in the ethnic-religious and political-cultural transgressions promoted by followers of the Barbadian leader Arnold J. Ford — mostly Caribbean immigrants from British-ruled islands, who combined Judaism with the anti-segregationist struggle in the country — spurred Landes to continue her academic training. It was a personal friend of her father and one of Boas's students, Alexander Goldenweiser, who guided her towards anthropology and Columbia (Landes 1986 [1970]; Park & Park 1988; Cole 2003).

After intensive fieldwork among the Ojibwa of Canada, carried out between 1932 and 1934 under the supervision and personal care of Ruth Benedict, Landes completed her doctorate in anthropology at Columbia in 1935 (Landes 1969). Based on her field experiences among the Ojibwa — involving the collection and production of life histories — the author widened her studies of North American indigenous groups: the Sioux in Minnesota, 1933, and the Prairie Potawatomi in Kansas, 1935 (Cole 1995a, 2002, 2003). In 1937, at the invitation of Robert E. Park, Landes headed for Nashville to assume a post of instructor at Fisk University. The move was encouraged by Benedict and Boas, who saw the experience as a necessary 'laboratory' phase for future research in Brazil. Landes lived in Nashville for about seven months, giving classes and revising her book manuscripts. This was the environment in which she first came into contact with literature on Brazil as well as other students of Brazilian society: Donald Pierson and Rüdiger Bilden, as well as Park himself who had passed through Rio de Janeiro and Salvador at the end of a voyage through India, China and South Africa. Landes arrived in Brazil in January 1938, leaving the country in July 1939. In a short and tumultuous period of field research in some of the most eminent Afro-Bahian *terreiros* — as well as visits to the Rio de Janeiro umbanda *terreiros* —, Landes collected material that would later become her most iconic study, *The City of Women*, written almost ten years after leaving Brazil (Landes 1967 [1947]).

Although the kinds of situations experienced by Landes in Brazil have provoked different authors to produce a variety of analyses on sexism, conflicts and intellectual authority, Landes continued to write and remained interested in a range of

themes, especially the imposition of ethnic, cultural and linguistic boundaries on minority groups. In the 1940s, she researched populations with Latin American origins in California and Acadians in Louisiana; during the 1950s, with a grant from the Fulbright Commission, she undertook research among Caribbean immigrants in London. In the 1960s, an interest in ethnic and political conflicts in bilingual societies took Landes to the Basque Country, South Africa, Switzerland and Canada. These experiences in different societies resulted in books, unfinished manuscripts and, ironically, a constant professional instability. Landes worked in institutions and universities in the United States for limited periods before finally obtaining her first post in the Department of Anthropology at McMaster University, in Hamilton, Ontario. It was following her move to Canada that she began to transcribe her memoirs.

Jogging her memory by setting her thoughts down on paper seems to have been a far from easy task for Landes in what was essentially exile in Canada. Between 1967 and 1991, the year of her death, she devoted herself almost daily to compiling marks, fragments and signals that testified to her links and deep emotional involvement with the past. This, at least, is the impression given by the clues to different memory exercises left in the letters, cards, notes, scattered annotations, yellowing photographs, unfinished projects, re-written manuscripts, field diaries, family documents and reports produced by Landes over a career spanning more than 60 years. One of the results of this careful attention to documenting the past was the organization of her personal and professional paperwork for donation to the National Anthropological Archives (NAA), a body belonging to the Smithsonian Institution, after her death. This was not common practice among the anthropologists of her generation, whose personal and professional papers were usually inadvertently left to the care of third parties or, in the words of Richard Price and Sally Price (2003:2), transformed by the latter into 'relics.' At another equally uncommon extreme, they might be burnt in the fire of deliberate forgetting. This was the attitude adopted by E. E. Evans-Pritchard on learning of the wish for his documents to be preserved. Legend tells that he stuffed them into a sack and burnt them in his garden (Burton *apud* Grootaers 2001/2002).

My first contact with the Landes collection, in 2000, brought me face-to-face with countless questions. The uses, stories and relevance attributed to Landes — as a persona — and to her iconic book seemed to me to be reconfigured as a result. The archive offered an almost sedimentary view, allowing some of the personal and institutional investments in her professional career to be observed from a comparative perspective. My contact with these kinds of archives was part of a project examining the network of intellectual and political dialogues that had enabled the creation of a distinctly conceived study area in the United States, Cuba and Brazil between the 1930s and 1940s: 'Afro-American studies.' By crossing national frontiers and investigating the institutional configurations that allowed the archives and collections of members of this generation of anthropologists to be kept and made publicly visible, I realized there was much more than just diaries, letters and manuscripts to be read. Highlighting their uses and institutional policies for preservation, I decided to examine the form in which archives could be employed within a broader inquiry into the nature of ethnographic work. I therefore began to study archives and the collections contained in them as the result of successive procedures for compiling and ordering knowledge, undertaken not only by the archivists but also by their virtual users. This line of inquiry allowed me to examine, for example, how particular *sources* — what Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls *instances of inclusion* (1995:48) — are constituted, sedimented and utilized. The

observation, description and interpretation of these *instances* – voices, truths, logics of classification, uses, forms of transmitting the content and value of the artefacts contained by the archives and their collections – could therefore be conceived as an ethnography: a modality of anthropological investigation that takes determined sets of documents, more specifically the personal collections and archives of people who were or are practitioners of the discipline, as a *field* of interest for any critical understanding of the forms in which anthropological histories are produced.

Rather than conceiving archives as the final product of a series of technical procedures – such as the supposedly *natural* activities of classification, ordering and application of thematic and chronological markers sometimes performed by archivists – this text focuses on them as its object of study. Observation of the collaborative process undertaken by Landes herself in preparing her papers for a future collection – the Ruth Landes Papers (RLP) – provides us with key insights into the singular process of compiling an archive. Before turning to this topic, we need to examine briefly the relationship between ethnography and archival research.

### **Ethnography and archive**

The relationship between anthropologists and archives runs parallel to the various processes involved in the institutionalization of the discipline: the production of knowledge concerning a singular type of subjectivity, alterity and difference (Richards 1992, 1993). The information *preserved* by the archives is closely linked to the production of colonial knowledge and the practices of its direct and indirect agents. As well as being a source and icon of power and knowledge, the colonial archives invented and perfected specific forms of producing them. Among these forms, we can highlight the creation of specific technologies for maintaining and ordering diverse sets of documents, particularly notable in the persistent attention of their *specialists* in preserving for eternity everything that could testify to and record the contact, the forms of domination, the violence and the power of the racial and cultural superiority of the metropolises over their colonial subjects. As well as techniques for ordering and controlling everything that would otherwise almost certainly be subject to disappearance and dispersal, *artefacts* designed according to the same classificatory logic were created: these inventories, catalogues, chronologies, classifiers and criteria of value composed a rich universe of knowledge practices, instruments and archival technologies. The archive became the “institution which canonizes, crystallizes and classifies the knowledge required by the State, making it accessible to future generations in the cultural form of a neutral repository of the past” (Dirks 2001:107).

Over recent years, anthropologists have joined historians and archivists in turning their attention to archives as producers of knowledge. Rather than storing secrets, relics, events and pasts, they are seen to contain marks and inscriptions on the basis of which they themselves should be interpreted. Hence they signal multiple temporalities inscribed in social events and structures, which are transformed into narratives subsumed by the chronology of history through classificatory devices. These attempts to inscribe event and structure in the topography of archives imply continual procedures of transformation. The archives thereby became territories where *history* is not discovered but contested, since they comprise *loci* in which other historicities are suppressed (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992; Hamilton *et al.* 2002; Price 1983; Steedman

2002; Stoler 2002). Thus the artificial, polyphonic and contingent nature of the information contained in archives — as well as the modalities of use and readings they allow — have been brought to the fore (Davis 1987; Farge 1989; Ginzburg 1991). Different analyses and perspectives concerning the use and nature of archival collections converge on the same point: namely, the need to conceive the items of knowledge contained in archives as a system of statements, partial truths, historically and culturally constituted interpretations — subject to re-reading and new interpretations (Foucault 1986:149).

Despite anthropology's close familiarity with archives, the relationship between the two is subject to different appropriations. The identification of archival research with anthropological practices, among them field research and the production of ethnographies, remains a point of tension: indeed, it has more often been associated with the impossibility of *being there* and secondary forms of contact between observers and 'natives,' mediated by impassable and contaminated layers of interpretation. Describing and interpreting on the basis of information contained in documents is conceived as a *peripheral* activity, complementary to and distinct from field research and its narrative modalities. Hence, the presence of archives in anthropological practice is either temporally removed from what anthropologists in fact do — typifying the practice of so-called *armchair anthropologists* — or comprises a boundary marker between anthropology and other disciplines — since archives are linked to the practice of historians, museologists and archivists (Clifford 1994; Stocking Jr. 1986).<sup>vi</sup>

Mary Des Chenes (1997) has questioned the naturalization of archival sources and the place assigned to archival investigations within the discipline. She notes, for example, the legitimacy conferred to ethnographic texts as a result of their description and *documentation* of supposedly direct interpersonal relations, and the slight importance attributed to documents derived from archives, seen as cold kinds of reports, tarnished by imprecise levels of interpretation. The exclusion of archives as a potential *field* of ethnographic activity presumes the centrality of specific research modalities. "Documents found 'in the field,'" argues Des Chenes, "are treated as a category distinct from those deposited in other places" (1997:77). Their apparently artificial nature and their supposed potential to destroy native voices and consciences puts archives in a disadvantageous position among the places in which anthropological knowledge is possible.

Archival research consequently appears as the antithesis of field research, while its transformation into an ethnography is looked upon with scepticism. This position is due in large part to the discipline's functionalist legacy, which postulated the centrality of field work as a locus of anthropological practice. But not only this. After all, documents do not speak and the dialogue with *them* — when they become focus of experimentation — imply techniques that are not exactly similar to those used in the *field*. However, anthropologists have always aimed to do much more than just hear and analyze the interpretations produced by the subjects and groups they study: they also look to understand the social and symbolic contexts of their production. Here, I think, we can locate an Achilles heel that allows us to approach archives as an ethnographic field. Although the possibility of sources 'speaking' is no more than a metaphor reinforcing the idea that historians must 'listen to' and, above all, 'dialogue with' the documents used in their research, interlocution is possible if the conditions of production of these voices are taken as an object of analysis — that is, the fact that

archives have been assembled, fed and maintained by people, social groups and institutions.

“Among the places visited by anthropologists when they go to the field is the archive.” The provocation made by Mary Des Chenes (1997:76) adroitly captures transformations that have been changing the face of anthropology since at least the 1980s. The discipline’s *historical turn* in the United States and the relativization of the notion of *field* enabled various methodological experiments in the ways of conceiving and using archives. How to react, then, when anthropologists turn to archives as a *field* from which they look to observe and reflect on the practices of their peers and the perspectives informing (or that used to inform) these practices? *Ethnographic* archives, traditionally recognized as repositories of information about the ‘others,’ become recognized as places where the process of constructing their objectification can be comprehended.

The problematization concerning the production of histories of the discipline and their connection with discussions on the use of personal archives is still fairly timid. This is partly due to the vicissitudes of the *history of anthropology* as an area of interest. In one of the texts outlining a *program* for a retrospective appraisal of the area, George W. Stocking Jr. (1983:3) observes that prior to becoming a specialist area, the history of the discipline was the exclusive concern of ‘aged anthropologists’ and ‘errant historians.’ In the 1980s, a series of injunctions led anthropologists to engage in a critical analysis of the knowledge produced by their peers. Many of the studies from this period were conducted within the broad context of debates on a perceived ‘crisis’ in anthropology, involving political and ethical questions related to *field research*. This retrospective scrutiny of the discipline was therefore marked by political questionings and ethical debates marking the present of its producers. The internal critical context resulted from a process of autophagy and ‘cannibalization’ (Handler 2000:4) in which the discipline’s history was consumed as one of its most important objects. This question lent a particular bias to projects aiming to trace professional careers, flows of ideas, funding policies and histories involving the tense relation between the discipline and the constitution of colonial and imperial knowledge (Stocking Jr. 1991; Thomas 1994). Even so, some questions remained unanswered: what are the sources of the data, information and records used to produce such histories? What form do they take and how where they used? Where they comprise documental units or sets produced by a particular author, how are they arranged/organized and to which institutions/people do they belong? Finally, from what places and which perspectives have these histories of the discipline been produced?

Even those analyses concerned with exposing the mechanisms that enabled the development of research studies, inter-institutional relations, intellectual debates, funding policies and, finally, the conditions that allowed the finalization of ethnographies, have naturalized the sources that allowed such questions to be aired. More or less partial truths were found in the slippery terrain of the texts and very little was noticed concerning the regimes of power which made them relevant as objects to be stored and preserved in archives – questions such as *when* and through which operations these marks of the past ceased to be *personal acts* and became *social facts* (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992:34). Sparse allusions sometimes appear in explanatory notes in published books and articles, along with the *date* and *source* of cited documents. The archival sources are conceived as constructions ready to be used and interpreted by specialized readers. Their organization, differentiation and internal hierarchy are not

observational material. When a large number of sources are involved, they are described so as to inform the reader of their quantity and very little about their nature, uses and purposes.

It is interesting to note that although much of the effort to store and protect the archives of anthropologists, as well as the vast bibliographic production on histories of the discipline, originated in the United States,<sup>vii</sup> it is French anthropologists – for various reasons, deprived of such policies and incentives – who have cultivated an intense reflection on the epistemological status of these kinds of historical/biographical projects and the sources that make them possible (Duby 1999; Jamin & Zonabend 2001/2002; Jolly 2001/2002; Mouton 2001/2002; Parezo & Silverman 1995). This varied perspective offers us a double view of the ways in which the reflection on the place of histories of anthropology and anthropologists has been experienced. By comprehending their strategic places, their positionings and hierarchies, and their uses in biographical and autobiographical texts, it is possible to conceive of *archives* as a *field* of ethnographic practice (Cook & Schwartz 2002; Des Chenes 1997; Kaplan 2002; Stoler 2002). They thereby become key *places* for observing how anthropology transforms into the language and style of production of particular ‘singular histories.’

### **Ethnographic and personal**

But all said and done, what are the borders that delimit and the criteria that define what I have been calling *ethnographic archives*? Like other scientific archives, those assembling written, visual and iconographic documents gathered, produced and/or collected by anthropologists during their professional and personal lives are typically fragmentary, varied and – paradoxically enough – extremely subjective. Ethnographic archives and their double, personal archives, are cultural constructions whose comprehension is fundamental to our understanding of how certain professional narratives were produced and how their *invention* results in an intense dialogue involving imagination and intellectual authority.

Papers transformed into *documents* kept in institutional archives disclose much more than biographical vicissitudes; they reveal various kinds of professional and intellectual ties and power relations. For a variety of authors, their specificity lies precisely in that which makes anthropology emblematic in its constant desire for subjectivization: ethnographic archives supposedly conserve desires – and sometimes unsuccessful projects – to identify, classify and describe the ‘other.’ Jean Jamin and Françoise Zonabend (2001/2002) refer to a constitutive duplicity that singularizes the documents kept/produced by anthropologists. The authors draw attention to the fact that

Among the other human sciences, anthropology is finally authorized to constitute its own ‘archivistics’ by placing on stage and in writing the epistemological tension existing between processes of objectification (monographs, articles, treaties and manuals) and subjectivization (field and research diaries, memoirs and autobiographies), notably represented by now iconic collections and works, [which] appear to add a literary aura to an ethnologist’s scientific authority and which, properly understood, raise questions of self and other, near and far, intimate and public (Jasmin & Zonabend 2001/2002:61).

Such efforts result in “archives in face of the presence of the other, as if the ethnography should develop into a liberated legitimacy, restoring an autobiography or even a poetics to its social image or its empirical work” (Jamin & Zonabend 2001/2002:61). What the authors call an ‘archivistics’ particular to the discipline and its modes of consecration – through the prominence given to documents that legitimize the ethnographer/researcher’s authority and allow it to be projected into the future – leads us to one of the elements most frequently highlighted in attempts to define the singularity of ethnographic archives in comparison to other sets of documents. There is no clear distinction between what the archivists define as ‘personal’ and ‘professional.’ *Personal* domains sometimes inform those treated as *professional*, and vice-versa. At the same time, these domains involve social relations. As Hilda Kuper argues, “‘personal histories’ seem to hold a universal appeal, but the ways in which they are expressed are culturally defined. Autobiographies, biographies, case studies and life histories are essentially Western genres or styles, and the complex interaction between an ethnographer and a central personality (or personalities) is highly relevant to all those interested in social research methods” (1984:212).

Sometimes the communication between documents relating to a person’s life, career and profession is not the product of a mechanical practice undertaken after their death, but from their own desire, feelings and memories (Artières 1998; Vianna *et al.* 1986). Using the expression *ethnographic archive* to differentiate collections within this genre implies widening our understanding of the nature of the documents included in such deposits, the manner in which they become part of the collection and the places where they were produced. What are ‘ethnographic’ materials, in fact? The criteria used at the beginning of the process of institutionalizing the discipline – when anthropologists supplied museums, universities and research centres with remnants from distant cultures – seem to reside in the premise that these personal and professional papers contain pieces, sources, information and relics preserved from ‘other’ societies. Although these *fragments* are products of the ethnographic gaze, relation and encounter, they seem to possess a unique value. Diaries and field notes, among other materials, therefore occupied a pivotal role. Inferences concerning the nature of the relations between researcher and researched, as well as their place of production, dominate the classificatory logic. This distinction is problematic since *diaries* and *field notes* are not always produced in the *field*, just as notes, photos, cards, letters and newspaper cuttings are sometimes the result of the presence and interaction between observers and observed (Clifford 1990; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Sanjek 1990a).

Curiously, both apparently secondary and personal fragments, and diaries and field notes are produced to be read by a single reader. They are written to be re-read by the person who produced them, stimulating ideas and memories. They are not written to be published or displayed. If field notes have a distinct characteristic, it is the singularity of their form and style. In this sense, they can also be considered *personal* documents. But there is something working against this understanding. Since anthropologists in general use a specific language to talk about the ‘other,’ field notes and diaries – especially, those framed and protected by the institutional structures that maintain the archives and collections belonging to anthropologists – are transformed by contingent, posthumous and unexpected uses. This is when objects, documents and rhetorics on the ‘other’ preserved in archives belonging to ethnographers become part of the construction of an ‘ethno-history’ by historians, anthropologists, descendants of the studied groups/subjects or the institutions/movements that ‘represent’ them. Faced by

these questions, it seems to me problematic to further deepen the instituted boundaries based on random markers concerning what defines the more or less personal – or ethnographic – nature of many of the papers that populate anthropological collections.

The ordering, selection, identification and classification of the Ruth Landes papers obeys a logic of treatment similar to that adopted in the organization of other archives belonging to people transformed into *public personalities*. In general, the material making up their *archives* – documents produced and/or handled by them which were in their keep when the process of donation took place – is selected according to the kind of document involved. Whatever their nature, they are distinguished as *correspondence* (sent and received), *intellectual production* and *manuscripts* (of the owner or third parties, whether manuscripts or publications), *photographs* and miscellaneous documents that are sometimes incomplete, fragmentary and identified (frequently) as *miscellanea*.

After being classified according to their *nature*, the documents are subdivided and stored in boxes or folders following a second classificatory logic – they are grouped in chronological and/or alphabetical order. Specialization in the treatment of some archives within the genre – such as, in particular, those belonging to anthropologists – have enabled documents of the same kind, such as letters, to be sometimes grouped according to different logics (chronological or alphabetical). In other words, the collation, researching and identification of *autographs* has meant some letter writers are selected and later identified in an onomastic index available in inventories, while others are kept in a wider set of folders organized chronologically and/or alphabetically.

The RLP is divided into 75 boxes, subdivided thematically. Firstly, the ‘documents’ or ‘biographical material’ not only include the texts collated during the research undertaken by George Park and Alice Park (1988) when compiling a biographical entry on Landes, but also ‘newspaper cuttings,’ ‘letters’ (sent and received), ‘writings and classes’ (a miscellaneous collection of unpublished manuscripts, draft versions of published texts) and ‘reviews’ (on texts/books by Landes). Secondly, the so-called ‘notebooks:’ field material – for the most part diaries – subdivided by themes or geographic region. The so-called ‘didactic material’ comprise course texts and programs. Sets less specifically entitled ‘Research projects,’ ‘Contracts, reviews and publishing announcements,’ ‘Financial papers’ and ‘Miscellanea’ (a set of fragments and notes on a variety of subjects). Finally, ‘Photographic material’ (photographs – slides and negatives – and postcards).

It would be difficult for us to sustain that – faced by the tenuous boundaries permeating our definition of *field* and likewise those that distinguish the kind of narratives originating from it – any and all archives or collections in the name of a past or present anthropologist are by definition *ethnographic*. This qualification results from a diversity of readings. In some cases, it is the institutions maintaining these archives that produce this distinction and qualification *internally*, that is, in the routine activity of selecting and indexing the documents, and *externally*, in the policies and rhetorics involved in legitimizing and divulging these archives. In other cases, this distinction is produced by the anthropologists themselves in the process of selecting, organizing and donating their papers. The Ruth Landes Papers (RLP) not only reproduce the overlapping of professional and personal domains, they also present us with a particular configuration of what Jamin & Zonabend call ‘archivistics.’ Landes selected and identified her personal and professional writings after her decision to donate them to the

NAA.<sup>viii</sup> This process enabled the meaning of certain documents to be continually re-evaluated, an aspect I now wish to analyze in detail.

### Time to remember

Peggy Golde's invitation to Landes to write a memorialistic text on her *field research* allowed her to draft texts and revisit themes, events and paths of innumerable versions of her unfinished writings. Two experiences that until then had been cited exclusively in letters – especially those swapped with Ruth Benedict back in the first half of the 1940s – became the object of special attention in the text Landes eventually sent to Golde. In the innumerable notes, comments and letters that she produced or *rewrote* during the last thirty years of her life, her experiences in Nashville (1937-1938) and in Brazil (1938-1939) received passionate attention and stimulated her to engage in a continual mnemonic exercise. They framed her view and comprehension of the *past* that she wanted to remember and, in a certain way, re-encounter. In observing the process of reorganizing the marks that made these *events* relevant, we can comprehend how *professional time* and *personal time* interweave so as to condition our reading and apprehension of her archive and personal memoirs.

Based on her unique experience in South America, and at the indication of Sol Tax and Margaret Mead, Landes was invited to collaborate in an intellectual project with a strong feminist focus – the collection of essays *Women in the field: anthropological experiences*, edited by Peggy Golde (Golde 1986b [1970]; Landes 1986 [1970]). The letter-invitation suggests that one of the main selection criteria was the regional/geographical plurality and, to a lesser extent, the importance of the research and researchers involved. Golde asserted in her first paragraph that “it will involve depicting the experience of field work from the viewpoint of the women who have conducted research in different regions of the world.”<sup>ix</sup> Curiously, in the project objectives described in the annex to Golde's letter, this criterion is pushed into the background. The key aspect was to collect accounts of field experiences by female anthropologists and the implications of these experiences in the development of the professional careers as narrated in the *first person*.

[...] ideally, each narrative would move back and forth among different levels, interweaving three separated but related kinds of materials and reference points: 1) personal and subjective, 2) ethnographic and 3) theoretical or methodological.

First and foremost, the account should be personal, tracing the inward history of the field experience, perhaps beginning with prior expectations, apprehensions, hopes, and ambitions. It might encompass chances happenings, the frustrations and rewards, the unsought insights, the stumbled-upon understandings, the never resolved misunderstandings – whatever characterized the sequence of human interchange between you as outsider and those with whom you made your home. It might include answers to the questions your friends and acquaintances were more interested in when you returned: “What was it like? Was it difficult to make friends? Weren't you lonely? Were you ever frightened? What did you do for fun? How did you arrange a place to live?”<sup>x</sup>

The guidelines for producing the memorialistic accounts making up the book were designed to highlight those aspects that would supposedly differentiate the kinds of field work conducted by the women involved. Subjectivity and intimacy would not only mark interpersonal contacts, they would also confer a particular style to the ethnographic text (Golde 1986b [1970]). Rather than forming a personal style, these ingredients would be a *marker* signalling gender in ethnographic activity. Hence, not just the relations established in the *field*, but also the actual construction of memory, should feed into the projects, feelings and anxieties narrated and remembered from a subjective angle, thereby shaping a “writing about self” (Foucault 1992; Derrida 2001). Golde’s proposal undoubtedly had a critical impact on the direction taken by Landes’s account. However, it would be precipitous to imagine that the overlap between the desire to *remember* and the possibility of being *remembered* can be transformed into an account framed by a uniquely feminist approach. Following the path trailed by Margaret Mead, other female anthropologists of her generation invested in fictional texts and autobiographical accounts during the same period (Mead 1972; Powdermaker 1966). Even in *Women in the field*, Landes was not the only contributor to reinterpret Golde’s proposal. In her own reflexive exercise, Margaret Mead re-examined letters sent and received while she was in New Guinea: letters commented on, rearranged and interpreted on the basis of the questions formulated by Golde (Mead 1986 [1970]). Anthropology and autobiography had already reasserted their affinities in terms of gender and literary style in US intellectual and popular culture. Therefore, we need to understand the context of the debates and issues that informed a public expression of anthropology in the 1970s and, among them, the place reserved for gender in the autobiographical writings that deal with the experience of women as *fieldworkers* (Di Leonardo 2000; Handler 1990).

Ruth Landes probably sent her contribution to the book edited by Golde in a short space of time. Around three months after the invitation, Golde replied to Landes with thanks, praise and suggestions for changes to the first version of *A woman anthropologist in Brazil* (Landes 1986 [1970]:119). Golde makes direct interventions in sections of the original version where she identified vague or obscure passages. Landes’s memories, she argues, should make sense to other readers interested in comparing the challenges imposed on women in a predominantly male professional universe. But they should also provide a clearer understanding of how and in what conditions the teaching of anthropology poses obstacles to field research conducted by women:

I have made a number of corrections because you appeared to contradict yourself, first saying that field methods can’t really be taught, and then saying your Columbia group was ‘taught’ by Kroeber, etc. Let me type for you how the passage reads with my suggested emendations in case it’s too sloppy to make it out:

‘Field work serves an idiosyncrasy of perception which makes it impossible to separate *either* [absent in the original] the sensuousness of life from its abstractions *or* [absent in the original] the researcher’s personality from his experiences. The culture a field worker reports is the one he experiences, filtered through his trained observations. Noted writers have said that their craft cannot be taught but it can be perfected. In the same sense, field work can probably

only be perfected. The great founders of ~~the field of~~ anthropology *discipline* [inserted over the original] were not taught specific techniques, nor was our group of students at Columbia who ~~worked under~~ *studied theory + field findings with* Kroeber, Boas, Klineberg, Mead, and Benedict. Rather, we were ~~encouraged~~ *framed* to conjecture, to experiment, to use every ~~resource~~ *tool* we commanded, to ventured.<sup>'xi</sup>

As well as the innumerable suggestions and recommendations for Landes to be more explicit in her allusion to events and people, or even her comments on the same, Golde expresses her concern with the format and style of the text. She insists that, despite the relative freedom held by the individual authors, the work of memory should be redirected and matched to the book's aims. Themes deemed to be complicated for a 'young readership' are avoided. Commenting on a particular paragraph, Golde warns against certain excesses: "this is a very good paragraph. I would, however, take out that sentence on death, because you already mentioned death, and you will speak of it again [...] and for a young group of readers, it may be just a bit too much."<sup>xii</sup>

Such comments allow us to infer that already in the first version, Landes was focusing her attention on the problems faced during her field research in Brazil, in particular on an *imbroglio* involving two figures who from then on appear frequently in texts on Landes — Melville Herskovits and Arthur Ramos. The professional future of Landes — her involvement in the project ran by the Carnegie Corporation and led by Gunnar Myrdal in the 1930s — was, she implies, compromised by comments from both men attacking her personal and professional credibility (Landes 1986 [1970]). As well as personal comments on her morality, including indirect references to her romance with Édison Carneiro during the period in which she was pursuing her research in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, both discredited her research and her professional seriousness, arguing that the interpretations of 'matriarchy' and 'homosexuality' in Afro-Bahian cults contained in the report she produced for the Carnegie Corporation were inappropriate. Since Ramos and Herskovits acted as advisors to the Carnegie Corporation, Landes's collaboration in the Myrdal report was disputed and dispensed with (Landes 1986 [1970]; Cole 2003). Golde perceives the centrality of this *affair* in the first version and proposes: "if you describe some of the things Ramos said, then you can go directly to the last sentence of the page. You tantalize but don't give the reader the information He needs to understand what happened, and this whole episode is so crucial, as well as being terribly fascinating, that I think you should spend more time making it clearer."<sup>xiii</sup>

As the manuscript of this text is not found among Landes's papers, it is impossible to measure the extent of the allusions to this *affair* in the first version. Even so, we can note how it becomes the epicentre of Landes's account, acquiring a public dimension directly linked to her professional career. After the publication of *A woman anthropologist in Brazil* (Landes 1986 [1970]) and *Uma falseta de Arthur Ramos*, by Édison Carneiro (1964), in which the latter criticizes Arthur Ramos's reactions to the Carnegie manuscript, partially reproduced in *A aculturação negra no Brasil* (Ramos 1942), the book *The City of Women* would contain a subliminal text — Landes as a victim of a sexist and competitive intellectual environment. This *affair* was also later cited in other texts on Landes, or proffered as an example of the explosive combination of sex, eroticism and intellectual power in the ethnographic experience (Park & Park 1988; Newton 1993; Healey 1996, 2000; Corrêa 2000, 2003; Cole 1994, 1995a).

Around sixteen years later, it was retold in such a way as to subsume both Landes's work and her professional life in an entry on her published in a biographical dictionary (Park & Park 1988). Despite showing a concern over the possible legal implications of its publication, Landes helps the authors, furnishing them with additional information:

I imagine you should so advise the editors; and shall I do so now? I await your word. Imagine this delightful pertinence: Peggy Golde phoned a few days ago to say that Univ. of Calif. Press (sic) Berkeley, is re-issuing *Women in the Field* in paperback. So that sorry Brazilian tale will still limp on [...] I will be happy to have Herskovits recorded. People have wondered. It was M[argaret] Mead who wanted Golde to get the story. With profoundest appreciation, catching my breath.<sup>xiv</sup>

The letters between Golde and Landes allow us to infer the paths of interpretation along which the past and professional/personal experience should be remembered. Landes supplied the first word on the themes which would make her biography relevant, turning her into a reader and interpreter of her writings transformed into *documents*. The dialogue with Golde would itself be carefully remembered, becoming the object of a re-reading made by Landes herself some twenty years after the invitation of 1967. Landes probably included similar comments in her letters until a few years before her death, when her handwriting became difficult to decipher. Judging by the themes and people mentioned in these comments, these may have been produced during the process of preparing her documents for the NAA, precisely during the period in which Landes dived into a one-way journey into her own past.

In the annex containing the proposal for *Women in the field*, Landes made innumerable annotations in which she responded to Golde's comments. She underlines words, adds interjections and queries, inserts small balloons in which she superimposes texts that function as a second caption to her own voice and that of her correspondent. In Golde's reference to field research as a lonely activity, Landes comments: "loneliness has struck all solitary field workers."<sup>xv</sup> Faced by the opposite alternative – the possibility of field work having been a source of some pleasure and fun – Landes replies laconically "none."<sup>xvi</sup> Other clues lead me to suggest that Landes produced these *captions* as though she was a reader of her own papers at some point long after producing the *document*. The manuscript of *Women in the field* – possibly in its final version – was sent to Édison Carneiro in 1968. In the final letter from him found in the RLP, Édison not only comments on the text, he also approves of its numerous allusions to his relation with Landes and Arthur Ramos: "I think it's good, especially in terms of the reactions to adaptation, on which, I think, you should have insisted more. Perhaps because of the recent intimacy with your work, though, I thought that you repeated yourself a bit. However, the work is valid and provides a good definition of the situation of a woman who comes, for the first time, to what one of our writers called 'this South American mental shit.'<sup>xvii</sup> Midway through the letter, Landes commented: "Édison d[ied]. 1969 [of] heart attack, unconscious 2 weeks info Anita Neuman aged 60."<sup>xviii</sup> Landes was mistaken concerning the year and cause of death of Édison which she herself had passed onto George Park and Alice Park in August 1985. Édison Carneiro died in 1972 of a stroke.<sup>xix</sup>

This re-reading of her own writings as though captions to images, documents or material proofs which exposed intellectual relations and dealings with colleagues and

informants, sometimes ceased to be ‘translation’ (of feelings, ironies and subtleties subliminally alluded to in the letters) and transformed into ‘narration.’ In a letter sent to a Brazilian anthropologist in which Landes replied to questions concerning informants and central figures of *The City of Women*, she added information such as the date on which the letter was written and the topic: “R[uth] L[andes] wrote 3 July 1988 asking about t Martiniano boy + da[ughter] (?) Menininha.”<sup>xx</sup> These kind of indices do not necessarily comprise an idiosyncratic style of organizing personal papers. Similar annotations, albeit far from comparable in terms of recurrence, have been found in other collections. What calls attention in this concern to translate and produce a parallel, additional narrative to future readings of her papers, is the concentration on specific themes and subjects.

### **In search of lost time**

To whom did Ruth Landes write the notes and comments added to her past writings? Her preoccupation seems to me clear in selecting certain details, people and events – and the *documents* that attest to them – capable of directing potential readings of her own biography. In a letter sent in 1941 in which she alludes to her relationship with a physics lecturer during the period in which she gave classes at Fisk University between 1937 and 1938 – which at the time was the subject of slanderous gossip among some of the faculty’s lecturers and, later on, the object of attention in Landes’s autobiographical texts – appears a series of observations and suggestions that express a deliberate concern in selecting the content and the materials that seemed to her more interesting/opportune to be kept in the archive. “I tore up the letters that followed this, as I did all those in Brazil. Why? Because I thought I had no place for them. They were loving, passionate, full of promise for the future, full of details – and I knew there would be ‘always’ be another [...]”<sup>xxi</sup> The details of the *post-factum* comments that frame letters and pieces of paper, written in an increasingly wavy handwriting, signal the selective nature of the activity to which Landes devoted the final years of her life. It is impossible to determine precisely when Landes produced these comments. Nonetheless, by cross-referencing letters sent to some of her correspondents and received from them, we can infer that, given the control and the overview that the author herself seems to have of the collection as a whole, this intervention came late on. The comments lack a prospective outlook of the type of relation established between the correspondents and the events with which these letters were concerned. The dialogue maintained with Edison Carneiro between 1939 and 1968 comprises an interesting example in terms of our understanding of the vicissitudes involved in the process of producing a metatext guiding the reader through the archive and the production of future biographies.

Selectivity and relevance guide the desire to document a relation exhaustively cited in autobiographical texts. Seen from the Landes archive, the letters sent by Carneiro suggest no more than a dialogue. Landes did not keep a single copy of any of her letters. This fact, in principle, matches what happened with her older correspondence. A practice common among other intellectuals of her generation who had stable institutional links was to store copies and/or drafts of letters in professional files and archives. The collection of ‘sent letters’ in the RLP is negligible compared to the letters received over more than sixty years of professional life. Landes did not keep

all the letters she sent and received, nor did she foresee the possibility of perpetuating herself in an archive kept by a respected institution of her country until the invitation from NAA was formalized.<sup>xxii</sup> Carneiro's letters, however, seem to have been previously stored in a *place* other than the RLP.

Despite the absence of letters from Landes to Carneiro in the RLP, references such as the requests for books and reading lists, news on friends, enemies and informants left behind in Brazil and her nostalgia suggest an intense dialogue between Ruth and Édison in 1939 and 1940. For sure, part of the correspondence is strongly personal and amorous, but not exclusively so. Despite the silence produced by the absence of letters from Landes, Édison's letters document the conditions and the ethnographic context in which both were immersed. They are not distinguishable in style or nature from other notes written during field work, indeed they are blend into them. These papers document and legitimate the ethnographic experience and, at the same time, the ambiguities of the relationship maintained during the field research. Although Landes placed no restriction on their access and use, I think the most interesting aspect of her re-reading is accompanying the reworking of her comments on Édison — a figure from *The City of Women* and *A woman anthropologist in Brazil* — and the meta-dialogue with these documents produced by the latter comments.

Landes's first remarks appear in what seems to have been the first contact with the anthropologist following her departure from the country in 1939: a letter from Carneiro sent on June 8<sup>th</sup> that same year. It involves a reference that appears in other documents — Landes's difficulties with Portuguese. Carneiro deals with the subject directly: "I received your letter from Port of Spain. Dear, you must learn Portuguese again... With me, of course. In any case, I like the hard work you had to write me in Portuguese, especially because of the lack of accents on your typewriter." in other letters, Édison also recognizes his own problems with English.<sup>xxiii</sup> Landes appeared aware of the limitations that the inability with the language imposed on her. In this case, her laconic comments have a demonstrative effect. In the middle of the letter, she simply observed in handwritten pencil: "my dreadful Portuguese."<sup>xxiv</sup> The meaning of this simple annotation is lost if we fail to compare it to subsequent comments, present in some letters and in her autobiographical texts, on her difficulties in Portuguese. In September of the same year, Édison went on to make recommendations concerning the results of Landes's research in Bahia: "be careful when writing the book. As a scientist you're honest, but as a writer... D. Heloísa reminds you that if you intend to return to Brazil, you're best not saying anything disagreeable. For example, that you came across snakes and jaguars in the streets of Rio de Janeiro [...]." Landes *replied* to a future reader of this section of the latter: "he loved my book."<sup>xxv</sup>

Personal references and even her relationship with Carneiro — cited in many of the letters between 1939 and 1940 — receive no comments from Landes. The same occurs with the remarks made by Carneiro on intellectuals and other people known to them both. Her style of commentary suggests a desire to help future readers, providing the documents with a kind of translation: additional information on topics and people that future researchers of her archive might not know about — perhaps from imagining that certain histories had been mutilated due to gaps in the sources, or even that the future reader/user of her papers would lack indications allowing him or her to investigate other possibilities for comprehending her professional career and biography.

The information contained in documents produced by the anthropologist or in dialogues with other authors and figures had other purposes. Landes had consulted her

own papers during the production of various versions of an autobiographical text possibly started during the same period in which she collaborated with *Women in the field*. We are faced, therefore, with parallel modalities of intervening in what would comprise the definitive form of her collection. Below I shall explore two other expressions of this intense relationship between the activity of memory focused on the confection of autobiographical writings and the production of a personal archive. Firstly, the practices of ordering and composing documents, including the search for particular *evidence* which would make the archive complete. Secondly the collation, control and hierarchization of events and histories with the aim of producing a future biography based on her own archive.

### **My time is yesterday**

“The women cannot be THE SOLE focus of my Fisk memoir. My original draft, done 20 years or more ago and carried about, concentrated on male faculty – there were NO Women”<sup>xxvi</sup>

Landes’s memorialistic journey can be at least partially reconstructed if we retrospectively trace the last letters left in her collection until around a year before her death. Based on these letters and information available in the inventory produced by the NAA, it can be perceived that her “infinity of papers and ‘objects’ was prepared to be donated to the Smithsonian. During this period, Landes also helped George Park and Alice Park (invited by Landes to act as her literary executors) in the writing of a biographic entry (1988).<sup>xxvii</sup> To produce this text, George Park counted on the assistance of Landes to shed light on unknown or confused parts of her own biography. The short correspondence between them contains bits of information that help us to understand the form in which the relations between biography/autobiography and the archive were constructed.

As I mentioned earlier, there are clear indications that at the end of the 1960s, before the invitation made by Peggy Golde, Landes had started to write an autobiography: fragments and drafts to which she referred as the ‘Fisk memoir.’ The marks of this process are innumerable, although it is impossible to determine the order and sequence of the various drafts encountered. Boasting a range of different titles — *A chronicle of bloods*, *Battle grounds of Tennessee*, *Color cancer*, *Black Athena*, *An American education on southern ground* — these texts are inhabited by figures that are sometimes renamed. Certain scenes and situations, exhausted in the repeated revisions, overflow the limits of the fictional text, invading subsequent letters, biographies and articles. In the last years of her life, Landes justified the request for help in typing what would be the final version in an undated and unfinished text:

Handicapped visually for writing and typing, declared ‘legally blind’ (reported also to Revenue Canada), I ask assistance for transcription of the manuscript on which I have been working for some years [...] Having done several drafts of my manuscript, all requiring elaboration and revision, I know that the latest draft I plan will be lengthy, including Notes and Bibliography; it may run to many hundreds of typed pages of manuscript.<sup>xxviii</sup>

All the black professors I knew at Fisk, including the black university president, C.S. Johnson, are no longer living. Professor R.E. Park retired to Fisk from Chicago Univ., died about 1940. My account will develop (from my diaries) the personalities, recognized widely for their accomplishments (...) As I have done scholarly research among Blacks in Brazil (1938-39) and in Britain (1950-51) and worked in Washington, D.C. and in Texas on Negro affairs when employed by the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice (1941-45), these experiences too will enter my perspective. My results appear in my articles, in a book on Brazil and in part of another book; also in a memorandum I prepared in 1939 for the Carnegie Corporation of NYC, listed Gunar Myrdal, American Dilemma.

Prof. Park, like myself a[n] Northern White American, persuaded his protégé, C.S. Johnson, and the Rosenwald Fund (of Chicago) to engage me briefly for Fisk for a double purpose: for me to see actual segregation for colour, just after a Tennessee Court had outlawed teaching Darwin's Evolutionary theory (the so called 'Monkey Trial'); and for me to experience interactions between Negro (the proper term then) individuals and myself, a young highly educated outsider never before in the Deep South. This book which I am now drafting is a debt I owe that scholar, over 50 years my senior, who shaped a generation of Negro scholar's and was never deterred by conventional restrictions of "race and gender."<sup>xxix</sup>

Landes sought to use an autobiographical narrative with touches of fiction in order to focus on sensitive themes such as inter-racial relations and sexuality on a campus occupied largely by women. The difference in the number of male and female students at Fisk was particularly mentioned in various letters to other intellectuals studying at the institution or who had written about it. This is the case of her friend and companion during the period in which she lived in Nashville, Eli S. Mark — lecturer in psychology and assistant to Charles Spurgeon Johnson — and the historians John Franklin Hope Jr., Joe Richardson and David Southern. Landes exchanged letters with each of them in which she questioned the reasons for this disparity and, at the same time, shared personal revelations. Reading these letters reveals an obstinate search to understand her time at Fisk. Personalities and a constant reinterpretation of the past are transformed into a singular 'memoir style' (Boon 1986:240). Why had her time at Fisk provoked such resentment among a body of staff supposedly committed to policies and research that aimed to overcome *Jim Crow* (the segregationist policies adopted by various states in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)? Why were young black women sent to colleges more frequently than black boys? Why were comments on inter-racial unions and sexual relations taboo inside and outside campus? Landes would raise similar questions in an investigative project, producing a unique synergy between her experience and what she presumed to mark the condition of young black female students at Fisk. A recurring question, present in autobiographical texts and in her letters, was understanding why her presence on the campus had been the target of so much discomfort and embarrassment. In a copy of the second letter sent to Joe Richardson, Landes explains the reasons that led her to investigate the subject in her autobiographical account:

I have long accumulated notes about my 1937-38 experiences, and about 20 years ago wrote them up in a lightly fictional form (for supposed protective anonymity) and showed it to a publisher, who said go and develop it. The reason then, as it would still be, is the “surrounding world” (a strange, gingerly phrase that CSJ [Charles Spurgeon Johnson] uses in his NEGRO COLLEGE GRADUATE) does know/understand how the Negro thinks – we live so separately. A novel form allows that freedom, and it is still ‘behavior’ – not concepts – that I wish to present. (As in all my books and shorts pieces). But in the late 1965 I moved to McMaster and got lost in other widely different understandings. I resumed thinking of “my” Fisk less than a year ago. All the people I knew there and those otherwise associated are now dead (I don’t know about Mrs. CSJ and the surviving children) so I don’t need a literary disguise, though somehow I must find a synonym for “I” as I don’t plan an autobiography [...] For perspective, I’ve been steeping myself for months in splending literature – history, economics, social science, & novels especially by and about Southern women. The Southern woman’s acute sense of the parallels between the slave and the slave-owning woman. The sweeping abolitionist sentiment in the South! The effects are superbly given in MARY CHESNUT’S CIVIL WAR DIARY and in Edmund Wilson’s PATRIOT GORE. I want to track continuity between 1860s and 1937 of FDR<sup>xxx</sup>.

Landes swapped personal impressions and information with Richardson on the institution’s history and the socioeconomic profile of its students and academic staff. He had published two books on university education and segregation in the post Civil War period (1980; 1986). These letters are rich in information on the generalized avoidance by Fisk directors of stimulating inter-racial encounters on the campus and nearby. The most frequent explanations are the attempt to protect the university and its students from the action of extremist groups and, in parallel, to protect themselves from attacks and accusations against “coloured women.” But Landes rejects the explanations concerning the supposed specificity of this behaviour, which to her appear similar to ideas that circulated in the environments frequented by Nashville’s white elite. What does not seem clear in the explanations provided by Landes in these letters were the relations between her subjective view and her experience as a woman, northerner, white and Jew and the view of young black female students at Fisk in the 1930s. Her interpretations concerning the predominance of women were not always shared. Hope Jr., who graduated from Fisk in the 1930s, believed that families sent their daughters to university to preserve them from the kitchens and prostitution. Based on statistical data and fictional works, Landes came across other indications: the solitude and isolation of those women who tried to meet black men with compatible levels of education.<sup>xxxii</sup> In one of the versions of the ‘Fisk Manuscript,’ the combination of information derived from her readings on the South and the dialogue found in the letters are subsumed into a self-centred narrative.

During my first days on campus, I had noticed the greater number of women students over men students. In all the following years that Fisk published its figures of students there appeared yearly three times as many girls as men. Yet the fees were high and the Black Belt was about the poorest region

economically in the nation. Atlanta University, also 'private' and fees paying, shows the excess of girls but to a lesser extent. Howard University shows a small excess and is 'public,' relying on federal support.

For years I wondered about the disparity in the gender numbers but never received a response satisfactory to me. Eli's girl-friend explained it by the near-vicinity of Meharry Medical School, chiefly for men, whose numbers amounted to a possible marriage market. (A Study of Negro Women's earnings, and those of their husbands, and the partnership support of the marital households made it clear that Negro college women married without expectations of husband support to producing children. E. Franklin Frazier's study of the 'new' negro elite, received controversially, depicted wives as dominating their husbands, whatever the latter's income, from professions or other skills, including unskilled labor). A negro historian proposed that some mothers (presumably family heads) destined their daughters for teaching careers, as protection from white men, a tradition comparable to the familiar one of Catholic families sending a son to be trained for the priesthood<sup>xxxii</sup>.

Although Landes appears to have been one of the first users of her letters and papers, the utilization of these documents provided her autobiographical writings – in particular her 'Fisk Manuscript' – with a narrative style that ensured her credibility, at least in the eyes of potential editors. Particularly in the middle of the 1980s, the initial drafts of these texts were reworked making systematic use of census and educational data, memoirs by southern feminists, studies on the post Civil War, post abolition and segregation, as well as their impacts in the 1950s with the rise of the civil rights movement. Landes then began a re-reading of her writings in which the young women students of the black university campuses gained prominence. This transformation, although it may have been provoked by the constant refusal of editors to publish the versions more strongly centred on her own experience, redirects her concerns and anxieties towards another terrain. Landes was well aware that rather than her personal experiences, it was the environment and daily life of *Jim Crow* which made her text and attractive narrative. Landes calls attention to the historical richness of the facts and settings in which she lived and acted as a *witness*, but recognizes the limitations of a *personalized* treatment.

The story is told from the outside, I being the chief White [northerner] outsider character (then aged 27, but there were important involvements with Blacks in this curious American concentration camp). The Black middle-class (socio-culturally the 'Upper-class' in education & income) is ultra secretive about itself (not like middle-class Jews who of course are white, though denied [so] by Blacks) so I cannot risk approaching a Black University press & Ebony [magazine] is out of the question.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

As a result of the profusion of versions – undated, extremely similar and page numbered in a non-linear form using alphanumeric codes that are sometimes repeated – it is impossible to trace the sequence of autobiographical texts preserved under the

rubric 'Fisk Manuscript' in any clear form. We do not even know whether the ordering and naming were adopted according to instructions from the author. The boxes include texts containing numerous corrections in pen and pencil and excerpts of the same kind. However, their maintenance in the archive offers us key elements for understanding themes, inflections and indices that mean the research with the Ruth Landes papers is mediated by her desire to perpetuate herself.

### **Back to the future**

I just came across it because I'm ploughing through my life's professional papers for the Smithsonian Archives (and am discovering fascinating remains of past decades that I was too busy to complete). Ruth Landes, 1985.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Landes signed the release of her papers to the NNA in November 1984. In accordance with the institution's instructions, this involved revising her will to include explicit information on the donation, and rights over the ownership, publication and use of her papers. In a letter to her lawyers, she reproduces sections of the legal deliberations and adds a short summary of her books, manuscript texts and articles. She had written different books on the Ojibwa and Potawatomi — whose field notebooks had been handed over to the NAA by the University of Columbia in non-authorized form. As she did not own the copyrights to her first writings, she focused on the information contained in her diaries. After an unsuccessful attempt to sensitize the archivist of the University of Columbia, Landes wrote to the director of the Department of Anthropology:

This letter concerns the Department's handling of my early papers left there. Smithsonian's General Counsel wrote me last year, Nov. 20 date, that varied field materials of mine were "several years ago...transferred to the (Smithsonian) Archives from Columbia University." To me this was mysterious, as I was never notified nor party of any agreement. I asked my NYC attorney to speak with Smithsonian and so learned, from Dr. James Glenn of the National Anthropological Archives, that my materials were in a bundle of papers belonging to the late Wm. Duncan Strong [...] you can understand that I need to know what items of mine have been 'transferred' unauthorized [...] Even if I were deceased at the time of 'transfer,' would there not have been a legal restriction on that move ? [...] I am assembling my career-long masses of materials for eventual transfer to the Smithsonian as an 'unrestricted gift' (their phrase). It is possible that the one who bundled my papers and Strong's did so because they cover Algonquian terrain. The question of authorization remains.<sup>xxxv</sup>

In May 1985, Landes was in the middle of the process of preparing her papers. Tormented, she turned to old friends, archivists, curators and those legally responsible for personal and institutional archives in search of material fragments of her own professional history. In particular, the staff responsible for collections belonging to institutions in which she had worked and studied were quizzed about the location of her

papers and the right to use and keep them in her own archive. As James A. Boon observes (1986), there is an intimate relationship between field work and the activity of memory, and it is no coincidence that Landes's attempts to describe, recall and allude to her field experience are marked by the re-creation of personalities and interlocutors. In a letter to Leo Waisberg, she explains why she resolved to bring some figures back from the past. Maggie Wilson, a key informant in her field work among the Ojibwa between 1932 and 1936, is included in the repertoire of personalities dear to the scenes that needed to be recomposed and remembered. "In this heavy atmosphere of recollections [...] I know include the poor Maggie Wilson."<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The concern over what would be irremediably lost with her death seems to have prompted her to express emphatically her feelings in relation to notes and field diaries. As Jean E. Jackson underlined, this preoccupation and feeling of imminent loss of something that occupies a central position among the objects the person wishes to preserve was common among the anthropologists that she interviewed (1990:10). The fate of the papers in Landes's ownership and those she anxiously wished to recover had already been determined. Landes was aware of their worth and invested directly, counting on legal help, in various attempts to retrieve them.

I have had my NYC lawyer talk with the archivist to discover the nature of my own papers but no reply has reached us. I have asked again and seem to receive bureaucratic silence (...) I date from the era of Boas, Benedict, Klinenberg etc. and my first field works were among the Ontario Indians (...) I have spent months looking for my early notebooks; as I do not find them (and they are valuable for their area).<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The same happened with the text at the heart of the *imbroglio* that took place in Brazil — *The ethos of the negro in the New World: a research memorandum*.<sup>xxxviii</sup> In May 1988, Landes wrote for the first time to the president of the Carnegie Corporation asking for the return of her report. In November 1990, she also demanded from the curator of the Schomburg Center for Black Culture — the institution responsible for the Carnegie archive — that they return what she perhaps considered the most important fragment from her past.<sup>xxxix</sup> Around three months after trying unsuccessfully to be repatriated, Ruth Landes died as a stranger in a society which refused to understand her, Canadian society. The *New York Times* recorded the event in its obituary section. The first lines of the small biography highlighted precisely what made Landes subject to re-readings and appropriations on the North American intellectual scene from the 1970s onwards: "Dr. Landes, an anthropologist who received criticism for her studies of Brazilian blacks, Indians of North Dakota and Hispano-Americans from the US southwest, died on 11<sup>th</sup> February in her house in Hamilton, Ontario. She was 82 years old."<sup>xl</sup>

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How should we *read* the Ruth Landes archive and reflect on the truth regimes that guide it? What does its organization — chronology and indexing — tell us about certain kinds of biographical narrative? Though not all the writings on Landes have been based on material from her archive, some of them seem excessively tied to what I have called

*marks* and *clues* signalled in the papers making up the RLP (Landes 1986 [1970]; Cole 1994, 1995a, 2003; Healey 1995, 2000). I believe that the particular configuration and disposition of her professional and personal writings offers us innumerable opportunities to reflect on the use of archives, especially where the aim is to produce intellectual and anthropological histories. In this article, by highlighting part of the late correspondence of Landes and her intervention in autobiographical documents and letters, I have looked to analyze a singular process of ordering and providing meaning to the anthropologist's *professional life* — interspersed with personal injunctions, like any other. I am sure that it is always provisional and vulnerable to the uses that we, users of archives, make of such documents. Hence, its interpretation is always contingent. Even under the later intervention of the NAA archivists, it interested me to observe the RLP decomposing what Zonabend & Jamim called 'archivistics' — the selection and prominence given to events, personalities and documents — produced by Landes. It interested me to observe how they remain as a kind of *layer* — a differentiated set of interventions produced over an imperfect tense, destined to recollection and the re-encounter with the past in an impossible settling of accounts — over which other layers will certainly be laid. It is necessary not to forget that the letters highlight a more spontaneous — albeit sometimes contradictory, but perhaps more profound — dimension of thought (Handler 1983:215). This is why they can offer us a privileged insight into the limits of writing the history and histories of ethnographic experience, especially those with biographical aims.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Letter from Ruth Landes to Eli S. Mark, 8//11/86, Box 3. From the Ruth Landes Papers, courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter RLP/NAA/SI).

<sup>ii</sup> Ruth Schlossberg Landes (1908-1991) obtained her Ph.D. from Columbia University with a study on the Ojibwa (1935). In 1937-1938, she taught at Fisk University and in the following year undertook in Brazil. Between 1941 and 1949, she held various posts at institutions in the United States and, in 1951, with a grant from the Fulbright Commission, conducted research on Caribbean immigrants in London. From the

1960s onwards, she undertook research trips to study bilingualism and biculturalism in the Basque Country, South Africa, Switzerland and Canada. Between 1965 and 1991, she was a lecturer at the Department of Anthropology, McMaster University (Canada).

<sup>iii</sup> RL/E.C. Fox, 28/1/66 and 9/2/66. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3.

<sup>iv</sup> *The City of Women* (1967), republished in 2002 by UFRJ.

<sup>v</sup> An incomplete version was submitted to St. Martin's Press in 1965. RL/J. Bach, 12/5/85. RLP/NAA/SI.

<sup>vi</sup> It is worth noting the prominence given to questions such as *subjectivity* and *positioning* in studies produced by archivists (Kaplan 2002; Cook & Schwartz 1999).

<sup>vii</sup> See *Guide to Preserving Anthropological Records* (<http://www.si.edu/naa>).

<sup>viii</sup> A portion of Landes's personal documents were donated by her family to the Research Institute for the Study of Man (RISM) after her death (Cole 2003).

<sup>ix</sup> Although Golde published sections of the letter, these citations are derived from the manuscript contained in the RLP.

<sup>x</sup> P. Golde, 8/8/67. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3.

<sup>xi</sup> Text and words in *italic* and ~~scored~~ are results of the intervention of Landes to the text/letter by Peggy Golde. Golde, P. 6/11/67 - RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiv</sup> RL/George Park, 31/8/85. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3. Original emphasis.

<sup>xv</sup> RL, no date, Box 3. Annotations by Landes to the letter-invite to take part in the volume *Women in the Field*, unsigned.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>xvii</sup> E. Carneiro, 28/1/68. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 4. Original in Portuguese.

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xix</sup> RL/G. Park, 31/8/85. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3.

<sup>xx</sup> RL/J. Braga, 10/12/86. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3.

<sup>xxi</sup> RL/E. S. Ilmes, 10/10/1941, RLP/NAA/SI, Box 5.

<sup>xxii</sup> Some of these letters were maintained among the correspondence of Edison Carneiro donated by his family to the Museu do Folclore Edison Carneiro in Rio de Janeiro. Unfortunately, there is no room to comment on them in this article.

<sup>xxiii</sup> For example, "you yourself will recognize that my English is improving with each letter." E. Carneiro, 14/7/39. RLP/NAA, Box 4. Section originally in Portuguese. Some of the letters sent by E. C. during this period are in English. Some notes and observations are written in Portuguese.

<sup>xxiv</sup> E. Carneiro, 23/6/39. RLP/NAA, Box 4.

<sup>xxv</sup> E. Carneiro, 18/9/39. RLP/NAA, Box 4.

<sup>xxvi</sup> RL/J. F. Hope Jr., 20/9/87. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3.

<sup>xxvii</sup> RL/George Park, 31/8/85. RLP/NAA, Box 3.

- <sup>xxviii</sup> During the last years of her life, Landes tried to return to the United States and referred to her wish as a desire for ‘repatriation.’ RL, undated and untitled. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3.
- <sup>xxix</sup> RL, undated and untitled. RLP/NAA, Box 3.
- <sup>xxx</sup> N.T. [FDR] Franklin Delano Roosevelt. RL/J. Richardson, 23/6/86. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 4.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> RL/J. Richardson, 23/6/86. RLP/NAA, Box 4.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> ‘Fisk Manuscript,’ *Chapter 2*, p.54-55. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 15.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> RL/Julian Bach, op. cit.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> RL/Julian Bach, 12/5/85.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> RL/Alexander Allan, 3/5/85. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> RL/L. Weinsberg, 15/4/1985, p.1. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3 (see Cole 1995a).
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> RL/Helen Strong, 16/4/1985. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Unpublished text, contained in the archive of the Carnegie Corporation, held by the Schomburg Center for Black Culture, New York Public Library.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> The manuscript was entitled “The ethos of the negro in the New World.” RL/D. Hamburg, 16/5/1988. RLP/Box 3; RL/D. Lachatañeré, 7/1990. RLP/NAA/SI, Box 3.
- <sup>xl</sup> “Ruth Landes is dead: anthropologist was 82.” *The New York Times*, 24/2/1991, section 1, part 1, column 4, p.38.

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**Abstract**

In this article, ethnographic archives and their doubles, *personal archives*, are analyzed as cultural constructions whose comprehension is essential to understanding the ways in which professional narratives are produced and how their *invention* results from an intense dialogue involving imagination and intellectual authority. Taking the Ruth Landes Papers held by the National Anthropological Archives (Smithsonian Institution) as its object of analysis, the text examines the various logics informing the institution of thematic limits to the archives, their criteria for legitimacy and inclusion, the transformation of their author's work instruments into 'artefacts', 'documents' and 'sources'; their conceptions of 'documentary value,' their internal economy and their uses in the continual (if shifting) reification of the authority of their 'authors' as key figures within anthropology's different histories.

**Key words:** Ethnography, History, Archives, Memory, Ruth Landes

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