

A Biographical Essay on Ruth Guimarães: A Black Writer in Brazil in the 1940s

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Abstract

This essay presents insights into the early career of Ruth Guimarães (1920-2014), the Afro-Brazilian writer from the São Paulo area renowned for her depiction of the Brazilian countryside. Coming of age in Brazil – an ex-colonial and post-emancipatory society, deeply (though unconsciously) shaped by both its oppressive past and present inequalities – her take on Brazilian national identity and on blackness is full of ambiguity but with a sharp sense of Africa's impact on its history. Becoming part of a literary avant-garde group (the Baruel Circle) at the end of the 1930s allowed Ruth Guimarães to publish her early writings and enter the realm of Brazil's literary establishment. With her first novel (*Água-funda*) published in 1946, she rose to prominence, but her first publication was the poem *Caboclo* originally appearing in 1939 – already full of hints to the issues of identity, rootedness and belonging, seen through the lens of mixture; the poem is republished here in its entirety for the first time. As none of her many works have been translated to English to date, this essay serves as an introduction of this Black woman writer – and of the worlds of Brazilian literature, journalism and publishing in the late 1930s and 40s, in which she launched her career – to an international audience.

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This essay reflects on the intellectual trajectory of Ruth Guimarães Botelho (1920-2014), the renowned Afro-Brazilian short story writer and novelist, who was a teacher, researcher, translator, journalist and poetess as well. The focus is especially on her early development from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s. Based in São Paulo, journalism and the world of publishing was then predominantly composed of white men, while Ruth Guimarães was one of the few female and black students at the University of São Paulo in the first years of its existence. These years marked also a critical moment in Brazil's history, since the so-called Estado Novo dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas ruled from 1937 to 1945 (see Castro/ Izecksohn/ Kraay 2004, Bakota 1979), and the liberal elites and modern art avant-garde of São Paulo who have had a high time since the 1920s came under siege (see Loyer 2017: 222-223). The aftermath of Oswald de Andrade's notorious "*Manifesto Antropófago*" (Andrade 1928: 3, 7), in which he argued for a "liberating primitivism", praised cultural plurality and "racial mixture" as well as Brazil's syncretic, "man-eating" capacity, could still be felt under the Estado Novo regime (Loyer 2017: 223). And Gilberto Freyre's sociologist cum historical *Casa-Grande e senzala* (1933) had been published only recently, and to wide acclaim. Its influence on the Brazilian image – both at home and abroad, where it became notorious under the label of "lusotropicalism" as well – was long lasting (see Burke/ Pallares-Burke 2008, Bender 1978).

Gilberto Freyre started from the premise – as he had learnt from his anthropology teacher at Columbia University Franz Boas: there was no such thing as a "pure race" – that "racial mixture" was beneficial to human development; he assumed further that Brazil was the most mixed society on the globe – having been a meeting ground for centuries between people from all over the world; Brazil therefore was particularly blessed. To this line of reasoning he added a particular nationalist claim pointing to what he saw as the basically egalitarian character of Brazilian society surpassing all other societies born from a colonial past (see Burke/ Pallares-Burke 2008). Freyre explicitly credited the Portuguese colonisers with "outstanding abilities for adaptability to tropical milieu and peoples" (Arnold 1992: 189, translation by Arno Sonderegger); he saw them as "basically poor and humble" and without "the exploitative motivations of [...] the more industrialized countries of Europe" (Bender 1978: 3); in the early 1950s, this "lusotropical" reasoning was willingly seized by Portugal's leaders to justify the continuing hold on their African colonial territories at a time

when all the other European empires dissolved (see Bender 1978, Boavida 1970). The same argument, however, had been put to use in Brazil from the very start. Its role was to affirm “Brazilian” national unity in face of the sharp social disparities which the “lusotropical” myth helped to neglect, and under the old established leadership, which was justified by the very same ideological token. Though “race” mattered a lot in Brazil at the time, it was nothing that could be frankly spoken about in “respectable society”.

These wider circumstances of the 1930s – highly political and cultural at the very same time – provided the stimulating and charged contemporary background, in which the young black Ruth Guimarães was finding her literary voice. From the 1940s on Ruth Guimarães’ literary gifts truly blossomed, and she started a long-lasting career as a writer contributing to several Brazilian magazines and newspapers in course of her life (see Silva 2010). Ruth Guimarães became a respected intellectual and a prolific writer not only in literary genres but in journalism as well, which guaranteed her decades of work in the established Brazilian press. Through the analysis of her professional trajectory and of her earliest short publications, this paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of the work itself as well as the young Ruth Guimarães’ active development among figures of Brazilian journalism and literary circles.

Ruth Guimarães was born in Cachoeira Paulista, in the interior of the state of São Paulo, Brazil, on June 13th 1920. She became orphaned at an early age, living with her grandparents, and moving back and forth between schools in the countryside, at Guará and Lorena, and in São Paulo (Barbosa 2008: 1-2), before eventually settling at the capital in 1938. There she entered the newly established University of São Paulo and studied Classical Literature. After graduation, she began to contribute to periodicals articles of criticism, reports, chronicles and short stories on a regular basis. Her work as a journalist created a much-needed income for her and her family, in particular, after she got married to José Botelho Netto, and raised nine children (Silva 2010).

Her literary career really set off with the publication of her debut novel *Água-funda* (literally, *Deep Water*) to critical acclaim in 1946. At the time, prompted by a reporter who wanted more information about the novel's compositional process, she made it clear that *Água-funda* was deeply rooted in her collection of rural observations which provided her with, as she phrased it, “a giant toy block, pieces of which came to her, little by little,

through travelling storytellers between 1928 to 1929” (ÁGUA 1946: 30, translation by the authors and Bea Gomes; “*um gigantesco brinquedo de armar, cujas peças vieram, aos poucos, trazidas por gente contadeira de casos, entre 1928 e 1929*”). She used them to develop her narrative on life in the Brazilian countryside. In the novel which was inspired and heavily influenced by the local dialect of the Paraíba Valley, she interwove folklore, fables and legends of rural Brazilian origins and hinted to the rich knowledge stored in the countryside (like herbal medicines for instance), which she considered part of Brazil’s African heritage (Barbosa 2008: 2). Regarded since as one of the first female Afro-Brazilian authors with a nationwide audience (Miranda 2019), her first publications, however, had appeared in press as early as 1939.

She was also a specialist in folklore studies and did some kind of field work in the Paraíba river valley region, the interior countryside stretching between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. She was dedicated to collecting information, most of it from oral sources, on Brazilian folk matters and on spiritual culture in particular. This interest left deep marks on Guimarães’ bibliographic production. Aside from numerous articles, book chapters and anthologies, she wrote several books to this effect. A quick look at some of her books’ titles provides ample evidence of her intense occupation with regional and cultural issues over many years – *Lendas e fábulas do Brasil* (literally, *Legends and Fables of Brazil*, 1972a); *O mundo caboclo de Valdomiro Silveira* (literally, *The Caboclo World of Valdomiro Silveira*, 1974); *Medicina mágica: as simpatias* (literally, *Magic Medicine: the Sympathies*, 1986); *Crônicas valeparaibanais* (literally, *Chronicles of the Paraíba Valley*, 1992); *Contos de cidadezinha* (literally, *Tales of the Little Town*, 1996); *Histórias de onça* (literally, *Jaguar Stories*, 2008a); *Histórias de jabuti* (literally, *Tortoise Stories*, 2008b).

Ruth Guimarães was influenced in this ethnological interest by Mário de Andrade who had pioneered the study of local cultural traditions in and around São Paulo in order to refine the understanding of what it meant to be a “brasileiro”, a Brazilian (Jaffe 2014: n.p.; see Loyer 2017: 225-232). For about 30 years, she served as a Portuguese language teacher in the public educational system, in colleges and high schools in the capital as well as in the countryside of São Paulo district. All her life she was engaged in a lot of associations and projects (see Silva 2010). In course of her career, she joined the *State Folklore Council*, the *Mário de Andrade Folklore Research Center*, the *São Paulo Society of Writers* and, in 2000, she became *Secretary of Culture* in

the city of Cachoeira Paulista, her native city. She was a member of the *Brazilian Union of Writers* and also of the *Academy of Letters of São Paulo*, where, in 2008 she was elected and took possession of chair number 22, being the first black writer elected into this association. Among her major works are the novels *Água-funda* (1946), *Os filhos do medo* (literally, *Children of Fear*, 1950), *Mulheres célebres* (literally, *Celebrated women*, 1960a), *As mães na lenda e na história* (literally, *Mothers in Legend and History*, 1960b) and scholarly works such as *Líderes religiosos* (literally, *Religious Leaders*, 1961) and *Dicionário da mitologia grega* (literally, *Dictionary of Greek Mythology*, 1972b).

In 2018, the São Paulo book series *Editora 34* republished *Água-funda* according to the modernized rules of the Brazilian language (Guimarães 2018). Antonio Candido, who had dedicated one of his renowned “Notes of literary criticism” in the heat of the launch of the original publication in 1946 (Candido 1946), now contributed a preface. He emphasized that one of the best qualities of this work was its personal tone, and he considered the author as a writer who was confident in her own vocation and who did not allow space for easy fashionisms or public appeal (Candido 2018). Such were the later, and even posthumous, manifestations of the celebration of a successful career. But this particular tone of hers, her specific voice, was indeed present from very early on, as for instance in her appreciation of a book by journalist Milton Pedrosa in 1951: “I confess that at first I started reading the book unwillingly, I read 'against' the book. However, its unconcerned, reckless way of narration, the correctness and the elegance of its language, forced me very quickly to change my attitude.” (Guimarães in Pedrosa 1951: book-jacket, translation by the authors; “*Confesso, antes de mais nada, que comecei a ler 'contra' o livro. No entanto, a sua despreocupada maneira de contar, a correção e a elegância de linguagem, me obrigaram bem depressa a mudar de atitude.*”)

Ruth Guimarães and the Baruel Circle

These early opportunities for publication were initially due to the support of Edgard Cavalheiro (1911-1958), publisher by profession. He was Ruth Guimarães' ally in what became almost daily meetings around the Baruel drugstore in downtown São Paulo (see D'Onofrio 2017: 5). Late in life, Guimarães recalled the help received from Edgard Cavalheiro as follows: "he was founding a journal, a literary magazine, and he was the first to print something written by me when he published my poem." (Guimarães/D'Onofrio 2010: n.p., translation by the authors and Bea Gomes; "*ele estava inventando um jornal, um jornal literário, e ele foi a primeira pessoa que escreveu alguma coisa minha porque ele publicou uma poesia.*")

This poem was called "Caboclo" (Guimarães 1939a: 9). *Caboclo* is a term of *métissage*, used, on the one hand, in Brazilian social contexts, to designate the "mixed" offspring of "Europeans" and "Indios". On the other hand, *caboclos* referred to spirits, both female and male, within the pantheon of the syncretic religion Umbanda, which developed in the cities of southeastern Brazil since the 1920s (see Reuter 2003: 93, 96-102). As such, this term of *métissage* had a direct relation to Africa as well, as Africa was considered the place of origin of several such spirits. It acquired a positive meaning among the practitioners of Umbanda, because, within these Afro-Brazilian religious cults, the "caboclo" is always associated with benevolence promoting healing forces and caring for the well-being of all animated things. This extends to Brazilians with multicultural leanings in general and was in striking contrast to the often derogatory meaning attached to the term in dominant "high" culture and Brazilian society at large, in which "whiteness" and European values were held in high esteem. So there is a racist component but there is an additional religious issue too: for the Christian Churches in Brazil, whether Catholic or Protestant, tend to reject African-based religions; and as almost 80% of Brazilians belong to one of the Christian confessions this certainly has an influence (see Ortiz 1978, Birman 1983, Negrão 1996, Reuter 2000).

Reflecting upon her early career and on the role of Edgard Cavalheiro, Ruth Guimarães stated, "He seemed to take seriously, what I wrote; he did not demur to say that this or that was no good; and he was the first to publish verses of mine, in the old *Roteiro* [...]. *Roteiro* continued to publish my writings, which belonged to Edgard Cavalheiro." (RUTH 1946: n.p., translation by the authors and Bea Gomes; "*Parecia que levava a sério o que eu*

escrevia, não ensaiava para dizer que isso ou aquilo não prestava, e foi o primeiro a publicar versos meus, no antigo Roteiro [...] Roteiro continuou a publicar coisas minhas que estavam com o Edgard Cavalheiro.”)

Remembering the meetings at Baruel, Ruth Guimarães describes fondly the bonds of friendship between Edgard Cavalheiro (1911-1958) and the novelist Amadeu de Queiróz (1873-1955), son of a Portuguese father, who was then the chief pharmacist of Baruel: “And that was Baruel, the drugstore of old Amadeu. Old Amadeu and Edgard Cavalheiro were very close friends. There was a hustle and bustle, a completely disorganized disorder. People came and went, and sometimes we had only five minutes to stay. I would stand and lean against the counter... and, every once in a while, a chair would appear.” (Guimarães/ D’Onofrio 2010: n.p., translation by the authors; *“E era lá a Baruel do velho Amadeu. Do velho Amadeu e do Edgard Cavalheiro, os dois eram muito amigos. E era uma desordem completamente desorganizada. E entrava e saía gente e às vezes a gente tinha cinco minutos para ficar. Ficava em pé e encostado no balcão... De vez em quando aparecia uma cadeira.”)*

In another interview, she referred to those meetings around the veteran writer Amadeu de Queiróz and his impact on her life and work, “The Baruel Circle was a true literary school. What old Amadeu demanded from the young was, essentially, to experience life. Without lived experience and knowledge of life, no masterpiece created.” (Queiróz 1963: 11, translation by the authors; *“A Roda da Baruel era uma verdadeira escola de literatura. Velho Amadeu exigia dos moços, em primeiro lugar, a vivência. Sem o conhecimento vivido, nada feito como obra de arte.”)*

The Baruel Circle served her intellectual development well. She recounted the support for her professional career experienced while attending the Baruel drugstore, in several interviews and testimonies (see Guimarães/ D’Onofrio 2010, Guimarães/ D’Onofrio 2013). One afternoon, as she remembers, still very young, she knocked on the door of a certain house on Lopes Chaves street, in the capital of São Paulo, wielding a notebook of handwritten poems, all of her own. She wanted the critically acclaimed, “brown-skinned” writer Mário de Andrade (1893-1945) to look at her literary production and to advise her, since she intended to become a writer. Mário de Andrade answered the door and explained that he was very busy, but he suggested the girl should go to the drugstore located on the corner of Direita Street and Square of Sé, at the very center of São Paulo. The

pharmacist over there was a friend of his and a lover of the literary arts. He would certainly have use for her poems. That way, according to Ruth Guimarães, “I met Amadeu de Queiroz through Mário de Andrade. I was occupied with my research on the Devil and the resonance that his deeds had in oral tradition, when Mario one day told me: Why not seek out that pharmacist from Baruel, Amadeu de Queiróz? He knows fabulous things. He is great.” (Guimarães 1957: 20, translation by the authors and Bea Gomes; “*Conheci Amadeu de Queiroz indiferentemente por intermédio de Mário de Andrade. Andava eu preocupada com o Demônio e a ressonância das suas proezas na tradição oral, quando Mário um dia me disse: - Por que você não procura aquele farmacêutico da Baruel, o Amadeu de Queiróz? Sabe coisas fabulosas. Ele é grande.*”) And so it was. Becoming friends with Amadeu de Queiróz, a few weeks later Ruth Guimarães made her literary debut thanks to the acquaintance and support she got from the Baruel Circle. Her first poem, “Caboclo”, appeared in the newspaper *Roteiro: Quinzenário de Cultura* on May 5th 1939 (Guimarães 1939a: 9).

A few years later, in 1946, she came out with her first novel, *Água-funda* (literally, *Deep Water*), published by Livraria do Globo, one of Brazil’s largest publishing houses of the time, facilitated again by Edgard Cavalheiro, her Baruel ally and friend, who was the manager of Globo publisher in São Paulo. A few years later, Ruth Guimarães would edit an anthology of short stories written by Amadeu de Queiróz and write the preface. This anthology was published by Cultrix publishing house in São Paulo (Queiróz 1963). Cultrix again was founded, among others, by Edgard Cavalheiro with whom Ruth Guimarães by then had a formidable working alliance. But their personal relations were close too. Cavalheiro became the godfather of one of her children (Guimarães/ D’Onofrio 2010: n.p.).

The journalist and editorial entrepreneur Nelson Palma Travassos (1903-1984), writing about the São Paulo office of Livraria do Globo around the time when Guimarães’ first novel was published, traced the trajectory of Edgard Cavalheiro and disclosed his relative importance to her career,

“Initially he joined Globo in order to connect the intellectuals from São Paulo and the publishing house [...]. With his activities, Edgard Cavalheiro brought many of them to Globo, in particular the modern Paulistas such as Sérgio Milliet, Oswald de Andrade, Mário de Andrade, as well as others like Ruth Guimarães and Amadeu de Queiroz [...].

Eventually, the intellectual and material support for the acceptance of their works in the state of São Paulo increased so much that Globo thought of transferring its editorial section to the capital of this state. However, the war came, and the idea relinquished." (Travassos 1954: 4, translation by the authors)

["Inicialmente entrou ele para a Globo na qualidade de elemento de ligação entre os intelectuais paulistas e a editora [...] Nessa atividade levou Edgard Cavalheiro para a Globo muitos originais de paulistas, e principalmente de paulistas modernos, como Sérgio Milliet, Oswald de Andrade, Mário de Andrade, e outros, como Ruth Guimarães, Amadeu de Queiroz [...] Enfim, o apoio intelectual e material para aceitação das suas obras no Estado de São Paulo foi tal que a Globo pensou em transferir para a Capital deste Estado a sua seção editorial. Mas veio a guerra, e a idéia foi abandonada."]

Important to her early career was another man as well, the aforementioned Amadeu de Queiróz (1873-1955). Born in Pouso Alegre, state of Minas Gerais, in 1873, he belonged to an altogether older generation than most attendants at the Baruel meeting ground. With books already published to his credit, Amadeu de Queiróz was an integrating figure of the Baruel Circle and a mentor to the young writers. Being about 25 years older than most attendees at those meetings (and almost 50 years older than Ruth Guimarães herself), in the testimonies of the members of the Baruel Circle he was frequently assigned a professorial role. He might have felt flattered but, at least in his public statements, Amadeu denied this image, professing humility and avoiding possible responsibilities for training these people, as well as qualifying the appreciation of many who have passed through it. In more intimate writings, however, Amadeu de Queiróz, revealed another side:

"I felt distressed seeing so many people with such talent, full of ideas and energy – youths who could become the greats of a formidable literature – helpless and hopelessly lost, for lack of instruction, literary means and lack of a mentor who – out of love and dedication to literature and admiration for talent – would patiently guide them on the right path. None of them finds support, encouragement and guidance from the old established writers; they flee from them to flee from indifference or disdain. Because I am not like them, I have helped many

people by guiding, teaching, and criticizing those who, for their talent, deserved appreciation. Everything I did was done with such good will and satisfaction that I ended up a critic and reviewer of novels and essays by debutants who came to me asking for my opinion and advice. I often talked at length about all this with Mário de Andrade – another like me willing to help newcomers – and we invariably concluded that this was our duty.” (Queiróz 1951: 57-58, translation by the authors and Bea Gomes)

[“Eu me desanimava vendo tanta gente assim de talento, cheia de ideias e de movimento, moços que poderiam vir a ser os grandes de uma literatura imensa, desamparados, perdidos irremediavelmente, por falta de instrução, de meio literário, de mentor que, por amor às letras, e admiração pelo talento, pacientemente os guiasse pelo caminho certo. Nenhum deles encontra amparo, estímulo e orientação por parte dos escritores velhos, fogem deles para fugirem da indiferença ou do desdém. Por que não sou como eles ajudei muita gente orientando, ensinando, criticando os que, pelo seu talento mereciam apreço. E tudo eu cumpria com tão boa vontade e tamanha satisfação que acabei crítico e revisor de romances e outros trabalhos de fôlego, de estreantes que me procuravam pedindo-me a opinião e os conselhos. Muitas vezes conversei longamente sobre tudo isso com Mário de Andrade - outro como eu com relação à boa vontade de ajudar os novos - e concluíamos invariavelmente que esse era o nosso dever.”]

Obviously, Amadeu de Queiróz was proud of his mentoring role, explicitly acting upon a paternal sense of duty towards the young but slightly reminiscent of the “white man`s burden” so dear to colonisers` civilizing mission discourse as well. His zest and embracement of everything new, was certainly deeply entwined with a lust for the exotic, his fascination with Ruth Guimarães grounded not least, so it seems, in exotism.

Ruth Guimarães: Birth of a Poet and Novelist

Amadeu de Queiróz recounted an episode on Ruth Guimarães that elucidates questions about the trajectory of the author of *Água-funda* (literally, *Deep Water*), her debut as a novelist,

“The case of Ruth Guimarães' debut, which did not happen as it was reported in the press and literary circles, is worth mentioning.

I met Mário de Andrade at a concert and, in passing, he told me without further comments: »I sent a brand new writer to meet you; have patience with her«. A few days later the brand new writer came by, a girl with glasses, shy, speaking little: no urgency to expose what she wanted, as she presented herself as Ruth Guimarães Botelho. Till that moment I haven't known her either by sight or name, I didn't know of her existence. She told me that she had sought out Mário de Andrade to ask his opinion on her folkloric work, and that he had told her he was very busy at the time, but she should look out for me, as I, in matters of folklore, was just as much as he was (yes indeed!). We did not talk anymore because the girl was shortspoken, withdrawn; and receiving the originals, we set a deadline for another meeting." (Queiróz 1951: 58, translation by the authors and Bea Gomes)

[“Vem a propósito contar-se o caso da estreia de Ruth Guimarães, que não se deu como foi relatado pela imprensa e como corre nos meios literários.

Encontrei-me num concerto com Mário de Andrade e, de passagem, ele me disse sem mais comentários: »- Mandei-lhe uma escritora novíssima - tenha paciência com ela«. Alguns dias depois fui procurado pela novíssima, moça de óculos, retraída, falando pouco: o indispensável para expor o que pretendia - era Ruth Guimarães Botelho - como se apresentou. Até aquele momento não a conhecia nem de vista, nem de nome, não sabia da sua existência. Contou-me ela que havia procurado Mário de Andrade para lhe pedir a opinião sobre seu trabalho folclórico e que ele lhe havia dito que andava muito atarefado na ocasião, mas me procurasse, que eu, em matéria de folclore, era tanto como ele (pois sim!). Não conversamos mais porque a moça era de pouca prosa, e recebendo os originais, marcamos prazo para outro encontro.”]

The judgement that he gave here in retro-respect, was illuminating.

“The work she wrote was a beginner's work; it had considerable merit but it did not please me very much – for reasons that are not relevant here. When we met later and I gave her my opinion, she understood that; she did not only understand but was also a little saddened. Therefore, I asked her, out of simple curiosity, if she had any other written work, and she responded firmly and simply: »I have a novel«. Now, I have always been curious about these things and I like to look for what others avoid finding. I asked her for the originals to read, and the

next day she came back with them. In my usual habit, I began to read, and when I reached page four I went back to reread it with all my attention, and so I went on – forwards and backwards – until I reached the end of the novel within a few hours. I did not find in it anything to censor, suppress, add – the writer had written a finished novel, and saying this I have said everything. I did not like the title: it was called either »Mother of Water« or »Mother of Gold«, I do not remember well. Full of enthusiasm, for having found a real talent, I went to Edgard Cavalheiro, an experienced critic, concise and unbuttoned, and at the same time the representative of the publishing house Livraria do Globo from Porto Alegre. I told him about the girl and the novel, I fired my enthusiasm at him, he also fired a look of astonishment at me because, so much ardour on my part, it was amazing! He kept the originals I entrusted to him, then he read the novel and, at his request, other people read it too, including Jorge Amado, who was walking around here and who went straight to the middle of the book [...], and everyone, at last, without exception, liked the book. The writer was called, received the well-deserved compliments from several writers, signed a contract with Globo and the novel was published under the title *Água-funda*; the rest is known to all. I did not discover or amend, I did not correct or sponsor the writer Ruth Guimarães, I met her – a twenty-year-old girl and already a novelist.” (Queiróz 1951: 59-60, translation by the authors and Bea Gomes)

[“O trabalho que escreveu era de quem começa, tinha apreciável merecimento mas não me agradou muito - por motivos que agora não vêm ao caso - e isso ela percebeu quando nos encontramos mais tarde e lhe dei a minha opinião; não só percebeu como entristeceu também um pouco. Então lhe perguntei, por simples curiosidade, se não tinha algum outro trabalho escrito, e ela me respondeu com firmeza e simplicidade: »- Tenho um romance«. Ora, eu que sempre fui curioso dessas coisas e gosto de procurar o que os outros evitam achar, pedi os originais para ler e, no dia seguinte, ela voltou com eles. Com a minha habitual disposição encetei a leitura e, ao chegar à página quatro voltei atrás para reler com toda a atenção, e assim fui indo - avançando e retrocedendo - até o fim do romance, alcançado em poucas horas. Não encontrei nele o que censurar, suprimir, acrescentar - a escritora havia escrito um romance, e dizendo isto tenho dito. São não gostei do título: chamava-se »Mãe d'Água«, ou »Mãe do ouro«, não me lembro bem. Cheio de entusiasmo por ter dado com um verdadeiro

talento, procurei o Edgard Cavalheiro, crítico de longa prática, conciso e desabotoado, ao mesmo tempo representante da Livraria do Globo, de Porto Alegre. Conteí-lhe o caso da moça e do romance, disparei-lhe em cheio o meu entusiasmo, ele também me disparou um olhar de espanto porque, tanto ardor assim, da minha parte era de se espantar! Guardou os originais que lhe confiei, depois leu o romance e, a seu pedido, outras pessoas leram, inclusive o Jorge Amado, que andava por aqui e que foi até o meio [...] e todos, por fim, sem discrepância gostaram do livro. A escritora foi chamada, recebeu os merecidos cumprimentos de vários escritores, assinou um contrato com a Globo e o romance foi publicado com o título de Água-funda. O resto é sabido. Não descobri nem emendei, não corrigi nem apadrinhei a escritora Ruth Guimarães, encontrei-a moça de vinte anos e já romancista.”]

Amadeu de Queiróz, Ruth Guimarães and Edgard Cavalheiro established a friendship as well as strong professional links. The latter also directed Ruth Guimarães' works to the Cultrix publishing house. With Cultrix she should have a great many collaborations. All in all, more than 50 published books stand to her credit in various roles, either as writer, translator, reviewer or anthologist. Becoming an employee of Cultrix and Livraria do Globo publishers, she worked relentlessly as a journalist, editor and reporter for several years to come; and she developed into a prolific translator. For Cultrix in particular, she translated works by Fiodor Dostoevsky, Alphonse Daudet, Honoré de Balzac and Lúcio Apuleius.

The Baruel Circle had been crucial in Ruth Guimarães' development in the early days. The art critic Mário da Silva Brito, who was born in 1916, was one of the group members and recalled those times in a chronicle, in 1970, entitled *The Baruel Drugstore*. As it gives a vivid portrait of the circle and what it meant to those being part of it, and pictures well the fondness with which it is recollected even decades later by its acolytes, we quote it at length,

“It was many years ago, but let me say it hasn't been that long [...]: Edgard Cavalheiro, always in a hurry because he was working at the State Bank but in full euphoria of writing the biography of Fagundes Varela [(1841-1875), the famous Brazilian Romantic poet]; the novelist Antônio Constantino, noisy and scandalous; the journalist Fernando Góes, juggler of intelligence, with a fearsome dialect, and creator of

beautiful tales never written; the poet Jamil Almansur Haddad, with an eye on the awards of the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*; Leão Machado, a newcomer from the countryside with specialized works on the bureaucratic organization of the São Paulo administration and several novels in the drawer; Maurício de Moraes, a newcomer, happy with the publication of *Quando as estrelas descenderem* [*When the Stars Descend*]; Hildebrando de Lima, an educator preparing entries for the *Pequeno Dicionário Brasileiro de Língua Portuguesa* [*Small Brazilian Portuguese Language Dictionary*] who, together with Joaquim Maciel Filho and Rossine Camargo Guarnieri, discussed Marxism and analysed everything from the angle of historical materialism; the reporter Maurício Loureiro Gama, who announced the novel *Vida, paixão e morte do funcionário público* [*Life, Passion and Death of the Public Servant*]; the writer Mário Donato, who wrote verses, journalism and propaganda texts [...]; João de Araújo Nabuco, who promised a biography of Líbero Badaró; the mysterious Mauro de Alencar, always magazines tucked under his arm; the very quiet Edmundo Rossi, who wrote a novel on Chesterton, besides some sad and revolting poems; the novelist Ruth Guimarães, with a folkloric study of the Devil; Oswald de Andrade, who wanted to found the Baruel Academy and make it a kind of Brazilian Goncourt that would overshadow the São Paulo Academy of Letters. And more: Paulo César da Silva, Nelson Palma Travassos, James Amado, Nelson Werneck Sodré, Sérgio Milliet and Mário de Andrade, who appeared rarely, but sent letters to old Amadeu, one of the last to consult him about the »well technique«, needing information for a tale he was writing. Among so many people who frequented the drugstore, each group with its inflexible schedule, there were also some venerable figures that the young people irreverently nicknamed the »annoying ones of the Historical Institute«.

We formed an enthusiastic community, preparing for the future, planning, dreaming, sharing projects and illusions.

However, time passed by and, as they say in conservative language, »we took a course in life«, which means – o painful verification! – that we have become ghosts of our dreams. Each one went his own way, the drugstore disappeared from the map, Amadeu went to the Cemetery, several others followed him, the group dissolved. However, fortunately, in each one of us, there remained a ponderable portion of those days

before.

What saved many of us, wrapped up in our destiny, was really our Baruel side.” (Brito 1970: 82-84, translation by the authors and Bea Gomes)

[“Foi há muitos anos, mas deixe-me dizer que não faz tanto tempo assim [...] Pela Drogaria, passavam – uns com regularidade diária, outros de quando em quando, – o Edgard Cavalheiro, sempre com pressa porque dava expediente no Banco do Estado, mas em plena euforia de estar biografando Fagundes Varela; o romancista Antônio Constantino, barulhento e escandaloso; o jornalista Fernando Góes, serelepe da inteligência, um dialético temível e autor de lindos contos jamais escritos; o poeta Jamil Almansur Haddad, de olho nos prêmios da Academia Brasileira de Letras; Leão Machado, recém-vindo do interior com trabalhos especializados sobre a organização burocrática da administração paulista e vários romances na gaveta; o estreante Maurício de Moraes, feliz com a publicação de Quando as estrelas descerem; o didata Hildebrando de Lima, preparando verbetes para o Pequeno Dicionário Brasileiro de Língua Portuguesa que, com Joaquim Maciel Filho e Rossine Camargo Guarnieri, discorria sobre o marxismo e tudo analisava sob o ângulo do materialismo histórico; o repórter Maurício Loureiro Gama, que anunciava o romance Vida, paixão e morte do funcionário público; o escritor Mário Donato, que fazia versos, jornalismo e textos de propaganda na Eclética ao lado de Orígenes Lessa, pouco assíduo este às tertúlias; João de Araújo Nabuco, que prometia uma biografia de Líbero Badaró; o misterioso Mauro de Alencar sobraçando estranhas revistas; o caladão Edmundo Rossi, que escrevia um romance à Chesterton, afora uns poemas tristíssimos e revoltados; a romancista Ruth Guimarães, às voltas com um estudo folclórico sobre o Diabo; Oswald de Andrade, que queria fundar a Academia Baruel e fazer dela uma espécie de Goncourt bandeirante que ofuscasse a Academia Paulista de Letras; e mais Paulo César da Silva, Nelson Palma Travassos, James Amado, Nelson Werneck Sodré, Sérgio Milliet e Mário de Andrade, que aparecia raramente, mas mandava cartas ao velho Amadeu, uma das últimas consultando-o sobre a »técnica de poço«, de que precisava de informações para um conto que escrevia. Compareciam também, entre tanta gente que frequentava a farmácia, cada grupo com seu inflexível horário, algumas veneráveis figuras que os jovens irreverentemente alcunhavam os »canastrões do Instituto Histórico«...

Formávamos uma comunidade entusiasta, preparando-se para o futuro, planejando, sonhando, compartilhando projetos e ilusões.

Porém, o tempo foi passando e, como se diz em linguagem conservadora, »tomamos rumo na vida«, o que significa – ó dolorosa verificação! – que nos fizemos fantasmas dos nossos sonhos. Cada um foi para o seu lado, a Drogaria sumiu do mapa, Amadeu foi para o Cemitério, seguiram-no vários outros, o grupo dissolveu-se. Mas, felizmente, ficou, em cada um de nós, uma parcela ponderável daqueles dias de antanho.

O que salvou muitos de nós, no envolver do nosso destino, foi mesmo o nosso lado Baruel.”]

Ruth Guimarães and *Atualidades Literárias*

One journalistic and editorial venture that brought Ruth Guimarães even closer to some of the literary persons mentioned earlier, was the São Paulo cultural magazine titled *Atualidades Literárias* (literally, *Literary News*). Its history began in the final years of the Estado Novo dictatorship and came to fruition in its aftermath. The journal was created as part of a Brazilian “Book-of-the-Month” project, started in June 1944 with the purpose of indicating to the readership the launch of higher quality works of literature, according to the judgment of a body of notables, the “Council of Critics of the Society”, which was responsible for literary evaluations. This council was composed of some of the remnants of the meetings in Baruel, along other notabilities. Among the first group who took part in that venture, were Monteiro Lobato (1882-1948), Jorge Amado (1912-2001), José Lins do Rego (1901-1957), Rachel de Queiróz (1910-2003) as well as Rui Bloem (1905-1962), Galeão Coutinho (1897-1951), Edgard Cavalheiro (1911-1958) and Mário da Silva Brito (1916-2002) (O QUE É 1945: 59). Despite the efforts put into work, the advertising campaigns and coverage in the specialized press, the “Book-of-the-Month” activity does not seem to have had great impact (Reverbel 1947: 18), neither in the local contexts of publishing and culture nor in the long term. It is known, however, that it at least led to some agitation in the translation market at first, promoting the launching of several international titles for translation, thanks to affinities with editorial people (D’Onofrio 2012: 21-23).

Atualidades Literárias was the periodical edited by the “Book-of-the-Month Society”. Planned to be released along with the creation of the Society in 1944, the launch was forbidden by the censorship bodies. The first issue would appear only two years later, after the Novo Estado had finally collapsed, as the text of the opening editorial of the magazine explained

(COMEÇO 1946: 3). At first, Captain Amílcar Dutra de Menezes, then director of the Department of Press and Propaganda of the obtuse Getúlio Vargas government, had prevented the circulation of the magazine. Later, another member of the Brazilian Army, an officer surnamed Arvoredó, classified the company responsible for *Atualidades Literárias* as “a fascist organization” and herewith caused a further delay. The first issue eventually appeared in July 1946 (see GRIFO 1946: 2).

Atualidades Literárias circulated for about two years, became the property of the Brazilian Chamber of Books and had among its collaborators, besides the owners, Ênio Silveira (1925-1996), José Geraldo Vieira (1897-1977), Nelson Werneck Sodré (1911-1999), Orígenes Lessa (1903-1986), Sérgio Milliet (1898-1966), and some more Baruel people such as Fernando Góes (1915-1979) and Ruth Guimarães. After the dictatorial political regime had stifled the free circulation of ideas, *Atualidades Literárias* gained space for its publication. In their opening text of the journal's princeps edition, the editors expressed optimism with their initiative:

“Atualidades Literárias promises nothing; in order to accomplish a lot. The public and the people are tired of programs and plans only inked on paper, without any follow-ups. We therefore guarantee, though we have countless pretensions, we won't profess them in manifest form. Declarations are easy, empty promises come at no price; but we value the promise. There is just one thing we do affirm – that we will always, again and again, earn the trust of our readers; and, to this end, from issue to issue, we will try to make our magazine more current and more interesting.” (COMEÇO 1946: 3, translation by the authors and Bea Gomes)

[“Atualidades Literárias não promete nada. Para poder realizar muito. O público e o povo estão fartos de programas e planos que ficam apenas nos tinteiros. Por isso, garantimos, temos inúmeras pretensões, mas não as alinhamos em manifesto. Porque se prometer é fácil, objetivar promessas é custoso. Apenas uma coisa podemos afirmar - a de que porfiaremos por merecer, sempre e sempre, a confiança dos nossos leitores e, para tanto, de número a número, buscaremos tornar mais atual e interessante a nossa revista.”]

It is arguable whether the plan was well conducted or not, but from the demonstrations reproduced in the media at the time, referring to the debut

number of *Atualidades Literárias*, it seems the new magazine made quite an impression. The *Diário da Noite* published a note containing the following excerpt,

“This first issue contains interesting material and varied articles, chronicles, notes and essays, besides bibliographical information that are excellent and comprehensive. There is nothing that compares to this new magazine, made by newcomers, coming out this month of July. The trouble with newcomers' magazines is that they usually don't last long. What happened to *Roteiro*? What was the fate of *Clima*? [...] They are born, they make a fury, they make their way, they say things that regular newspapers and circumspect magazines do not have the urge to say, and they die. Here's another curious and felicitous literary magazine: »*Atualidades Literárias*«. Let it continue, let it keep its breath and let it live long, that is the sincere and stimulating vote we have formulated [...]. São Paulo had nothing. It now has a free and friendly plebeian tribune. May the platform not be closed and may the magazine fulfill its noble purposes in the intellectual environment of our land.” (ATUALIDADES 1946a: 2, translation by the authors and Bea Gomes)

[“*Reúne, neste primeiro número, material interessante e variados artigos, crônicas, notas e ensaios, além de informações bibliográficas que são excelentes e completas. Nada existe no gênero que se compare a esta revista nova, de gente nova, que bota suas manguinhas de fora neste mês de julho. O mal das revistas de moços é que duram pouco. Que fim levou Roteiro? Qual o destino de Clima? [...] Nascerem, fazem furor, abrem caminho, dizem coisas que os jornais e as revistas circumspectas não têm o topete de dizer, e morrem. Aí está mais uma revista literária curiosa e bem feitinha: »Atualidades Literárias«. Que continue, que mantenha o fôlego e que viva bastante, eis o voto sincero e estimulador que formulamos [...] São Paulo tinha nada. Passou a ter agora uma tribuna livre e simpática. Que a tribuna não se feche e cumpra os seus nobres propósitos no meio intelectual de nossa terra.”]*

Another newspaper that issued a commendable note, equally unsigned, a week after the excerpted note reproduced above, was the *Jornal de Notícias*:

“The first issue of the excellent publication *Atualidades Literárias* has just appeared, released by »Livro do Mês« [Book-of-the-Month] Ltda.

Aiming to provide thousands of readers with monthly information about the Brazilian book market in particular, and the activities of foreign publishers in general, the new publication, judging by the first issue, fulfils its purpose admirably.

The contributions are carefully selected, the graphic design reveals good taste and discretion; so that the educated classes of our country now already have a medium for popularizing the *belles lettres*: a vehicle for cultural diffusion, at the top of the literary and scientific wave surging today from north to south." (ATUALIDADES 1946b: 3, translation by the authors)

["Acaba de aparecer o primeiro número da excelente publicação Atualidades Literárias, lançada pela »Livro do Mês« Ltda. Destinando-se a fornecer mensalmente, a milhares de leitores, informações a respeito do movimento bibliográfico brasileiro em particular, e do movimento dos editores estrangeiros em geral, a nova publicação, a julgar pelo primeiro número, preenche admiravelmente a sua finalidade.

A colaboração é criteriosamente selecionada, a feitura gráfica revela bom gosto e discriminação, de sorte que as classes cultas do nosso país contam desde já com um instrumento a mais de vulgarização das belas letras, veículo de difusão cultural à altura do surto literário e científico que hoje se observa de norte a sul."]

In fact, *Atualidades Literárias* was now helped by the dissemination of contributions by famous authors such as Mário de Andrade who, however, at the moment when *Atualidades* finally appeared, was already deceased, and other up-and-coming writers like Lídia Besouchet (1908-1997), Alphonsus de Guimaraens Filho (1918-2008), Hovanir Alcântara Silveira (1910-1997), Jerônimo Monteiro (1908-1970), José Mauro de Vasconcelos (1920-1984), among others. The broad range of contributors to the journal makes clear how deeply entrenched the magazine's editorial staff was in the cultural and literary milieu of the time – the wide extent of humane relations rooted, not last, in the frequent meetings around the counter of a certain drugstore in downtown São Paulo a few years ago.

Ruth Guimarães and *Roteiro: Quinzenário de Cultura*

The cultural newspaper and organ of the Baruel Circle, *Roteiro: Quinzenário de Cultura* (literally, *Screenplay: Culture Weekly*), was circulated for barely two years, starting in May 1939 and continuing until approximately 1941 (no

evidence was found that could confirm an exact date). How many articles were published could not be assertively determined, since the localized collection of this fortnightly is restricted, comprising a total of 15 editions. But Ruth Guimarães published in this original *Roteiro* (for there appeared a second magazine under that name several years later) at least three times in 1939.

The third in a row of contributions by Ruth Guimarães was a short story written to be published specifically in *Roteiro*, as indicated by the expression “(for *Roteiro*)” shortly after the author’s name (Guimarães 1939c: 10). The title of the tale is “*In the barracks...*”, and there she presents an ironic dialogue between a sergeant and the recruits of his battalion, cast in the environment of a military barrack. This was the last of her articles published in *Roteiro: Quinzenário de Cultura*, and it was printed in the section entitled “Page of Women”, containing about half a dozen articles and occupying an entire page. In the initial editions, Margarida Izar (1914-1974), Alice Guarnieri (1915-?) and Olga Biar (1919-?) served as editors. The first of the aforementioned women, Margarida Izar, is nowadays considered the first female reporter in Brazil (Ribeiro 1998: 40)

The second of Guimarães’ articles, also marked “for *Roteiro*”, contains her criticism of the work of 19th century Brazilian writer Machado de Assis (1839-1908). The article points to what she considered “the descriptive shyness, concerning the natural beauties of the city of Rio de Janeiro” in the work of that consecrated writer born in Rio (Guimarães 1939b: 4).

The first text written by Ruth Guimarães and published in the pages of *Roteiro* was also her first publication in life (Guimarães 1939a: 9). As previously noted and shortly discussed, it was her poem “Caboclo”, a composition that praises the figure and way of life of the country man; a poem for which she choose a figurative term of *métissage* to name the poem’s protagonist, who metaphorically represents, we assume, the essential “multicultural Brazilian character” she longed for. Because the poem has not been localized for decades – not even the veteran author had a copy of her literary debut (Guimarães/ D’Onofrio 2010, Guimarães/ D’Onofrio 2013) –, and apparently never having been republished, the text will be transcribed and translated in its entirety here; the poem’s translation is Silvio D’Onofrio’s.

Caboclo

Olha em torno, Caboclo, e vê que nada falta para seres feliz.

No chão de terra socada
um pé de mato e uma esteira,
à sombra da gameleira do quintal.
A choupana onde a viola pendurada
sugere descantes líricos,
- porque tu és também sentimental
- só tem uma janela
como a casinha amarela do João-de-barro.

É pequena para os ambiciosos da cidade.

Mas tu cabes tão bem dentro dela,
com tua Felicidade!

Tu és tal qual um passarinho solto
que vive não sabe como, voa, não sabe
porque.

Mas canta porque está alegre;
porque cantar é uma necessidade da
sua garganta;
que canta contra a vontade;
que canta mesmo não tendo nem
mágoas para espantar.

Caboclo feliz!

Não tens problemas.

Nem mesmo o X de uns olhos claros de
mulher.

Teu romance é simples como é simples
tua vida:
queres uma cabocla bonita que te quer.

Caboclo

Look around, Caboclo, and see that
nothing is missing to be happy.
On the ground pounded floor
a foot of bush and a mat,
in the shadow of the fig tree in the yard.
The hut where the guitar hangs
suggests lyrical descants,
- Because you're sentimental too
- there's only one window
like the yellow house of Rufous
Hornero.

It is small for the ambitious of the city.

But you fit so well inside it,
with your happiness!

You are such a free little bird.
Who lives does not know how, flies,
does not know why.
But sings because it is glad;
because singing is a necessity of your
throat;
who sings against the will;
who sings even though he has no grief
to scare away.

Happy Caboclo!

You have no problems.

Not even the X of a woman's clear eyes.

Your romance is as simple as your life is
simple:
You want a beautiful cabocla who

Que usa vestido de chita, uma flor nos cabelos,
e anda bamboleando os quadris,
com um não sei que de feliz no sorriso feliz.

E tem um riso claro que aflui dentre os dentes brancos,
como dentro os barrancos aflui a música das corredeiras.
E tem cheiro de planta pisada esmagada,
planta boa que perfuma o pé que a maltratou.
E movimentos sinuosos de veio d'água coleante;
e suavidades de rola enamorada;
ingenuidades,
sutilezas,
maciezas de seda...
... e até gosto:
gosto de fruta verde, ité, ácida, azeda,
mas cheirosa e gostosa como que.

Tu também sonhas, caboclo:
“... capim melado ondulando nos cerros...
Uma vaquinha mansa...
Uma esperança na fartura da colheita...”

Depois o rancho melhorado e a cabocla ao teu lado.
... e a vida inteira tão boa, tão linda, tão igual,
como a vida dos pássaros, das flores...

wants you.

Wearing a cheetah dress, a flower in her hair,
and waddling her hips,
with a I don't know how happy smile.

And there is a clear smile that flows from the white teeth,
as in the ravines flows the music of the water rapids.
And it smells of treaded plant crushed,
a good plant that perfumes the foot that mistreated it.
And sinuous motions of a water stream;
and softness of rowing birds in love;
ingenuity,
subtleties,
silk softeners...
... and I even taste:
Taste of green fruit, acid, sour,
but smelling and yummy like that.

You also dream, caboclo:
“... honeyed grass rippling in the hills...
A little tame cow...
A hope in the harvest plenty...”

Then the ranch improved and the cabocla at your side.
... and the whole life so good, so beautiful, so equal, / like the life of birds, flowers...

Dos rios que rolam...
De rolas que arrulham...

Two rivers that roll...
Of rowing birds that coo...

Mas no dia em que chega o desengano,
resignado, filósofo do mato.
Tu deitas na esteira, olhas longe e
resmungas:
"Podia ser pior".

But on the day the disillusion arrives,
resigned, philosopher of the bush.
You lie on the mat, you look away and
groan:
"Could be worse".

Consola-te, Caboclo, que esta vida é
assim mesmo.
E a gente está sempre querendo
qualquer cousa melhor.

Console yourself, Caboclo, that this life
is just the same.
And we always want
Anything better.

Roubaram-te o teu sonho que
adoravas?
Carrega-te de flores
como os ipês dourados das campinas:
aceita a lição de ouro dessas flores
pequenas!
A vida não é má.
És o culpado se te desiludes
pois a sonhaste melhor do que ela é.

Did someone steal your dream that you
worshipped? / Load yourself with
flowers
like the golden epy of the meadows:
accept the golden lesson of these little
flowers!
Life is not bad.
You are to blame if you disappoint
because you dreamed it better than it is.

Olha o teu rancho de sapé,
a passarada no arvoredo,
cantando a eterna canção das frondes e
dos ninhos.
Nada está diferente porque sofres.
É tudo a mesma cousa.
Foi apenas a tua alma que mudou.
Somente os ipês floridos se desfolham
como o teu sonho já se desfolhou.

Look at your thatched ranch,
the birds in the grove,
singing the eternal song of the fronds
and the nests.
Nothing is different because you suffer.
It's all the same.
It was just your soul that changed.
Only the flowered epyas peel
as your dream has already defoliated.

Conclusion: Ruth Guimarães on her Life as a Black Brazilian Writer

In 2007 Ruth Guimarães was one of the invited guests on a panel discussion at an Afro-Brazilian Museum event in the capital of São Paulo. At one point in her presentation, she testified about her own formation, ideals and also about her book debut, exposing a little more of her personal and social motivations and perceptions along the way. It is here, then, where she came to speak about matters of belonging and identity. Not exactly in a Pan-African perspective, but sensitive to the crucial role in which transcontinental links have shaped Brazilian society over several centuries, she spoke, in great clarity, of “race” and “blacks”, “Brazil” and “Africa”, of “life” and, hinting at her debut novel, of life’s “deep waters”,

“My educational background is totally anonymous, immersed in Brazilian literature [...]. All of us Brazilians study literature in a disorganized way [...], nothing systematized, with sense and programming. When we come to the end, if you can say so, we have a kind of mixed formation; just as we are a mestizo people, all mixed in every way, our literature is also all made up of pieces of texts, somehow arranged here and there. There is nothing that makes us full, whole. My literature is that too. I tell the story of the country, of the people from the country, the *caipira* [hillbilly]. I am also a *caipira*, modesty aside. I did not care much whether there was a tendency, or an inclination to tell the story of the black people; since I am also mixed, my book is mixed.” (Silva 2008: n.p., translation by the authors and Bea Gomes)

“Minha formação é totalmente anônima, mergulhada na literatura brasileira [...] todos nós brasileiros estudamos literatura de uma maneira desorganizada [...] nada sistematizado, com um sentido e programação. Quando nós chegamos ao fim, se é que a gente pode dizer ao fim, temos uma espécie de formação mista; assim como somos um povo mestiço, todo cheio de misturas de todo jeito, a nossa literatura também é toda feita de pedaços de textos, de arrumações aqui e ali. Não há nada que nos torne inteiriços, inteiros. Minha literatura é isso também. Eu conto a história da roça, de gente da roça, do caipira. Eu também sou caipira, modéstia à parte. Eu não me importei muito se havia uma tendência, ou se havia uma inclinação para contar a história do preto; como eu também sou misturada, o meu livro é misturado.”]

This is in some ways reminiscent of the *branqueamento* (literally, *whitening*) ideal so common in Brazil in the first half of the 20th century and beyond, imagining Brazil in terms of a nation of “*mestizos*” who had developed a particularly syncretic *Brazilian culture*, and a “*democracia racial*” (Hofbauer 2006, Hofbauer 2008: 84-88). The issues of mixture and *métissage*, intricately interwoven entanglements all over the place, and troubling deep inside to every singular, but always specifically encultured individual person’s identity, never to be fixed (“all made up of pieces... There is nothing that makes us full, whole”), are all here. In the end, obviously, these issues stem from Brazil’s wider and long-term social history of a settler and slaver colonial kind, with a vast majority of black descendants being firmly dominated by a white minority, and they result from the particular cultural atmosphere, which has developed in that corner of the world over the course of time.

Still, hers was a particular voice and, talking in an atmosphere of departure and high hopes as the new century was unfolding, Ruth Guimarães took a specific stance on the matter of “Blackness” and “Brazilian identity”,

“As I am Brazilian, my book too is in this sense of me being Brazilian a little bit about there, a little bit about here, a little there, a little here [...]. We need to know the black root, about where we came from. Black history is yet to be written, black literature is yet to be written, poetry is yet to be written. Me, being old now, I decided to do research; and for that I am telling and writing stories, trying to create a collection of Brazilian fables and tales; not only by doing research on and among blacks, but among the people, our entire people. Occasionally, when we do such studies, we separate [and make clear-cut distinctions]: this, from here to there, is from Blacks; this, from there to here, is from everybody else. Many people have already done such studies, and they discovered something very beautiful, very gratifying for us: that all those qualities of the Brazilian people – that alike, cheerful, accepting, struggling people that goes through everything that is ruinous in this world; that good, excellent quality, that makes us a unique people in the world – we owe to the Blacks.” (Silva 2008: n.p., translation by the authors and Bea Gomes)

[“*Como eu sou brasileira, nesse sentido de brasileiro todo um pouco para lá, um pouco para cá, o meu livro também é assim, um pouco para lá, um pouco para cá*”

[...] Nós precisamos saber da raiz negra de onde viemos. A história negra está por fazer, a literatura negra está por fazer, a poesia está por fazer. Eu, depois de velha, resolvi pesquisar e, para isso, eu estou contando e escrevendo histórias, tentando fazer um fabulário brasileiro, não só com pesquisa entre negros, mas entre o povo, todo o nosso povo e, ocasionalmente, quando se faz o estudo aí a gente separa: isso daqui para lá é dos pretos, isto de lá para cá é de todo mundo. Muita gente já fez esses estudos e até descobriram uma coisa muito bonita, muito gratificante para a gente: que todas aquelas qualidades do povo brasileiro, aquele povo igual, alegre, que aceita, que aguenta os trancos, que passa por tudo quanto é ruindade neste mundo, essa qualidade boa, excelente, que faz de nós um povo único no mundo, nós devemos aos negros.”]

In order to argue her point of a multicultural Brazil, she even adopted an old cliché of Pan-African and Black folklore – one that this emancipatory stream of thought shares with the even older, and unambiguously racist, European image of Africans: Africans seen as kind of “natural slaves” and “people born to serve” (see Sonderegger 2009: 57, 62, 74-77 and Frühwirth in this volume). Appropriating the cliché for her ends, probably without noticing its bitter irony, she said,

“It is the Blacks, who are like that. They have endured and continue to endure [...]. I am not a patient creature, but I am a joyful creature, thanks to my black ancestors. Now, as an old woman, I am doing research, looking for the black people's trail in our folk literature and in our joy of telling stories. *Água-funda* [*Deep Water*] is a funny book, a book of everyday life, it's a book of happenings, full of events.” (Silva 2008: n.p., translation by the authors and Bea Gomes)

[“Os negros é que são assim, aguentaram e continuam aguentando [...] Não sou uma criatura paciente, mas sou uma criatura alegre, graças aos meus ascendentes negros. E agora, depois de muito velha, estou fazendo pesquisa e procurando o rastro do negro na nossa literatura de povo e na nossa alegria de contar histórias. “*Água Funda*” é um livro engraçado, livro da vida de todos os dias, é um livro de acontecimentos.”]

Here it gets quite obvious indeed how much Ruth Guimarães shared in the sentiments and feelings of ambivalence, with regard to matters of origin, heritage and belonging, which are so frequently expressed in diasporan

Pan-Africanism in general (see Sonderegger 2016: 18-25 and Sonderegger in this volume).

Moreover, she has in common with Pan-African intellectual activists all over the world, the emancipatory stance she took very vividly when reflecting on her “doing research and looking for the trail of the blacks in our folk literature”. Still young-at-heart and full of energy and optimism, Ruth Guimarães ended her recollections on an uplifting note,

“Each life entails an *Água-funda*; each one of us writes a diary and recounts those everyday things, and generates a *Deep Water*. Because the truth of the book, the joy, what is good about the book, its literary quality, is that it is an everyday book. Such things happen in the life of each person. We look for what is in the *Água-funda*; nothing, not even water. Of course, I learned Portuguese in the first place [...] I'm a teacher, I'm for competence; if someone is going to write a book, read the good authors, study the good authors, watch the good films, talk to people who know how to speak, and who live their lives well and truly. Live your life completely. Emotionally the person needs to be able to do so.” (Silva 2008: n.p., translation by the authors and Bea Gomes)

[“Qualquer vida dá uma *Água funda*, qualquer um de nós escreve um diário e conta aquelas coisas de todos os dias e vai sair uma *Água funda*. Porque a verdade do livro, a alegria, o que o livro tem de bom, de literário, é que ele é um livro de todos os dias, que acontece na vida de cada um. A gente procura o que tem na *Água Funda*; nada, nem água. Claro, eu aprendi português em primeiro lugar [...] eu sou professora, sou pela competência; se alguém vai escrever um livro, que leia os bons autores, que estude os bons autores, que assista aos bons filmes, que converse com gente que sabe falar, que viva a sua vida bastante e bem. Viva a vida completamente. Emocionalmente a pessoa tem que estar apta.”]

Ultimately, Ruth Guimarães, aged 93, rest to peace in Cachoeira Paulista on May 21st 2014. Recently, her professional career, but also her life, is attracting more and more interest in Brazil, given the growing amount of studies as well as reissues of several of her works.

As 2020 marks the centenary of Ruth Guimarães' birth, it is apt time to reconsider her legacy as an Afro-Brazilian writer. To bring Ruth Guimarães to the attention of those interested in global Pan-African issues, and to

introduce her as a Black writer worth reading, was the main purpose of this essay.

There is still a lot to discover.

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