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Pedro Meira Monteiro

Publication Date

30-10-2017

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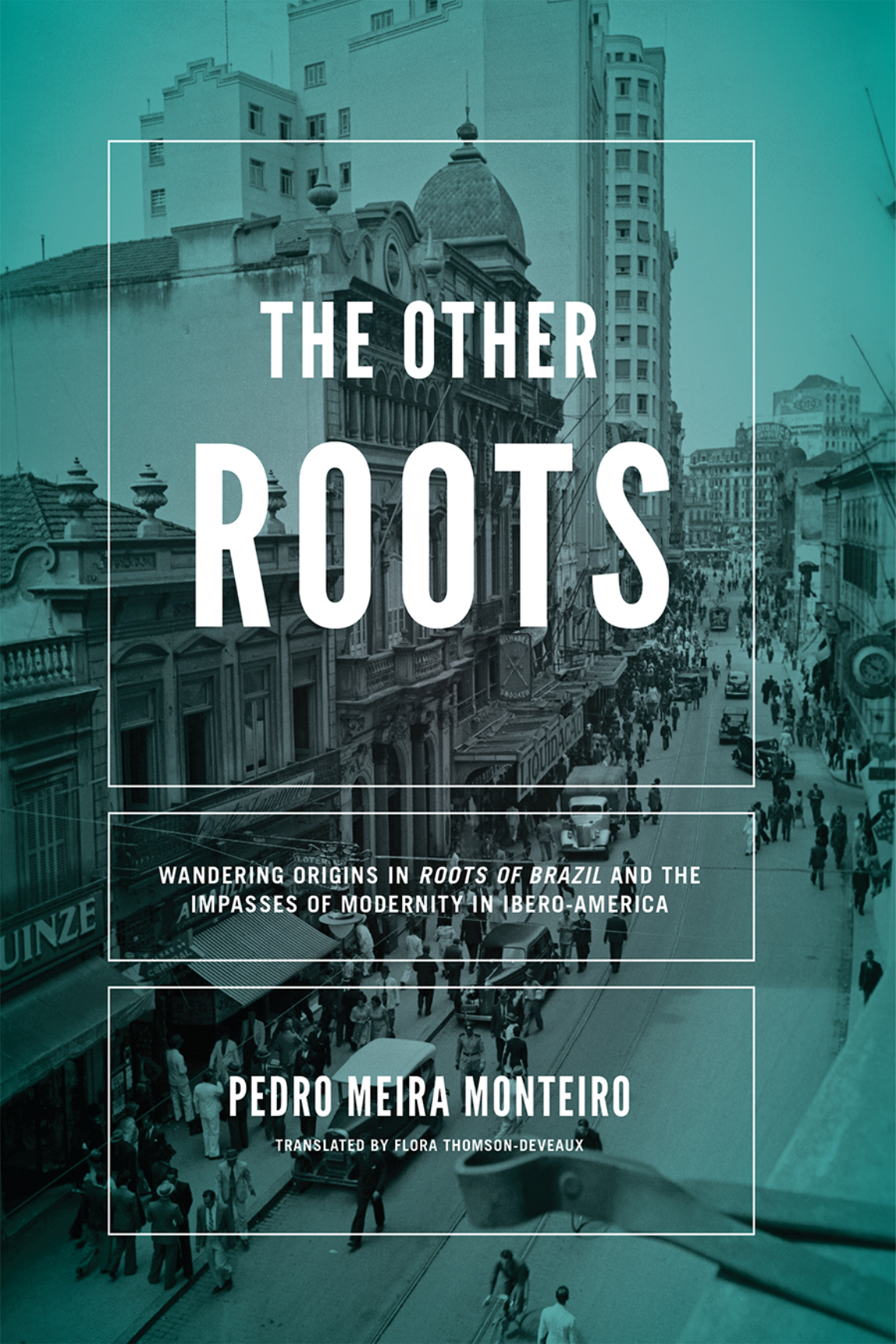
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Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

Monteiro, P. M. (2017). *The Other Roots: Wandering Origins in *_Roots of Brazil_* and the Impasses of Modernity in Ibero-America* (Version 1). University of Notre Dame. <https://doi.org/10.7274/24820380.v1>

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THE OTHER ROOTS

WANDERING ORIGINS IN *ROOTS OF BRAZIL* AND THE
IMPASSES OF MODERNITY IN IBERO-AMERICA

PEDRO MEIRA MONTEIRO

TRANSLATED BY FLORA THOMSON-DEVEAUX

The Other Roots

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PEDRO MEIRA MONTEIRO

Translated by
Flora Thomson-DeVeaux

University of Notre Dame Press

Notre Dame, Indiana

University of Notre Dame Press
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556
undpress.nd.edu
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Published in the United States of America

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Translated by Flora Thomson-DeVeaux from *Signo e desterro: Sérgio Buarque de Holanda e o Brasil* by Pedro Meira Monteiro (with revisions), published by Hucitec, São Paulo (2015), and as an e-book by e-galáxia, São Paulo (2016).
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Monteiro, Pedro Meira author. | Thomson-DeVeaux, Flora translator.

Title: The other roots : wandering origins in roots of Brazil and the impasses of modernity in Ibero-America / Pedro Meira Monteiro ; translated by Flora Thomson-DeVeaux.

Other titles: Signo e desterro. English

Description: Notre Dame, Indiana : University of Notre Dame Press, 2017. | Series: Helen Kellogg Institute series on democracy and development | Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2017024316 (print) | LCCN 2017032328 (ebook) | ISBN 978-0-268-10235-7 (web pdf) | ISBN 978-0-268-10236-4 (ePub) | ISBN 9780268102333 (hardcover : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780268102340 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 0268102341 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Holanda, Sérgio Buarque de, 1902-1982—Criticism and interpretation.

Classification: LCC PQ9697.B88 (ebook) | LCC PQ9697.B88 Z76 2017 (print) | DDC 981—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017024316>

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(Permanence of Paper)*

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For Déa, love of my life

Inside, we are still not American.

—Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Roots of Brazil*, 1936

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Acknowledgments

Many people helped me think through the themes proposed here. The hypotheses presented in this book were elaborated and re-elaborated over the course of the past two decades, during which I shared my arguments and anguishes in private conversations, email exchanges, revisions and discussions of texts, talks, classes, and workshops in various countries. I am deeply grateful to all those I had the pleasure of including in that network. I will not list them here, but I hope that each will recognize him- or herself in these pages, even when my conclusions may diverge from theirs.

I should also note that the journeys that allowed me to split my time between research and academic events, as well as the translation of this book to English, were made possible by funds from Princeton University, those of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and the Program in Latin American Studies, as well as from the University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. A crucial part of the writing came years ago, during a postdoctoral fellowship at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), under the supervision of Joaquim Brasil Fontes.

I would like to thank Scott Mainwaring for suggesting the publication of this book in the Helen Kellogg Institute Series on Democracy and Development of the University of Notre Dame Press. I also thank Stephen Little, acquisitions editor, and most especially Eli Bortz, senior acquisitions editor of the UND Press, for their invaluable help. This book was also, of course, made possible by the talents of Flora Thomson-DeVeaux, who translated my work into English with exceptional diligence and creativity.

Finally, to my colleagues, as well as to my students in and outside Brazil, a special and hearty *muito obrigado!*

Preface to the North American Edition

Writing is a way of creating realities. Often we do not realize that we seem to be in a novel, looking for all the world like characters in a plot written by who knows what author. But can the real subject live with the idea that there is a plot guiding her, beyond her control? How can the autonomous individual bear the weight of a narrative in which he is merely a character? In *The Other Roots* I examine a fundamental work in which history, sociology, anthropology, and literature are joined, flowing together in discreet and illuminating prose. That work is *Roots of Brazil*, by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, a book that, it would be no exaggeration to say, has invented a country. Whether they like it or not, or whether they know it or not, Brazilians are all Buarque de Holanda's characters.

Translated into countless languages over recent decades after its original publication in Brazil in 1936, *Roots of Brazil* was not published in English until 2012. When I wrote the foreword to the English-language edition, I emphasized the fact that this was a long-awaited translation that had finally come at an important juncture, at a moment when Brazil seemed on the verge of occupying an important place in the world as a whole. If that possibility holds water, then the time is ripe to revisit classic narratives around the country—although without supposing that such narratives can comprise a seamless national entity. On the contrary, despite the “roots” in its title, Buarque de Holanda's book suggests the insufficiency of any discourse looking to address the whole of a collectivity and contain it in a single sign. The “roots” here are free-flying, contradictory and paradoxical; it is unclear where they are coming from or where

they are going. The essayistic imagination so characteristic of lettered Latin America in the first decades of the twentieth century allowed for the confection of a provocatively unstable vision, one perennially recalling that Brazilian history—like that of any country, for that matter—cannot cling to a precise origin frozen in a remote past.

While the “roots of Brazil” turn our gaze to the Iberian Peninsula, from whence the Spanish and Portuguese colonizers set off, Buarque de Holanda’s vision cannot be understood without the African and American continents—not to mention the fact that the Portuguese colonial world included Asia as well, a place that would produce many elements of the culture that is sometimes called, in an obsessive nativist fantasy, “Brazilian.”

The Other Roots: Wandering Origins in Roots of Brazil and the Impasses of Modernity in Ibero-America is the translation of a book recently published in Portuguese (*Signo e desterro: Sérgio Buarque de Holanda e a imaginação do Brasil*), in which I analyze Buarque de Holanda’s work in the context of the great “essays of national interpretation,” but where I also investigate the limits of national discourse itself. That said, in Brazil a book like mine is aimed at readers already familiar with *Roots of Brazil*, which is an academic best seller. A reader less well-versed in the debates that the book presents, or less acquainted with the history of Brazil, might not recognize references that would seem quite natural to a Brazilian. In order to address this issue, I have made small changes in this edition, trying to attain a balance between specialization and generalization. Moreover, in the appendix, readers will find a few key passages from *Roots of Brazil* that may help guide them.

* * *

A quick contextualization of the author and his work may be useful, at the very least up to the publication of *Roots of Brazil* in 1936. This may help to clarify Buarque de Holanda’s importance as an essayist, even before he would find acclaim as Brazil’s greatest historian and one of its most important literary critics.

Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1902–1982) was born in São Paulo at a time when the city was establishing itself as a hub of an economy

in transformation, spurred on by both industrialization and the capital flowing from coffee production. The setting here is that of a typical provincial city in the Americas in the process of modernization, where the signs of a past idealized by writers and poets mingled with the signs of a progress whose glories would be sung by other poets and writers (or sometimes the same ones). While at that point the city did not boast an Afro-Brazilian presence as significant as that of Rio de Janeiro or Salvador, São Paulo had been host to some of the abolitionist clashes that led to the eradication of slavery in 1888 and the end of the Empire in the following year. Above all, it was the city that received the most immigrants, especially Europeans, who headed for the agricultural frontier farther inland in the state or stayed right there in the city, stoking the factories and forever changing the social landscape of what had once been a sleepy provincial city.

This is, in short, the setting that would produce the generation of the “modernists”: caught between the vibrant economy, the promises of the future, and the limits imposed by the past. Unlike late-nineteenth-century Hispanic-American modernism, Brazilian modernism emerged around 1920, tied to European vanguards and seduced by the velocity and hypersensitivity induced by metropolises across the world. Figures such as Oswald de Andrade, Anita Malfatti, Menotti del Picchia, Tarsila do Amaral, and Mário de Andrade would assume a new place on the arts scene, sharply pushing back against anything considered *passadista*, or backwards looking. In 1922 the Teatro Municipal in São Paulo would host the Modern Art Week, which became a symbolic milestone of the modernist movement. That same year, a young Sérgio Buarque de Holanda moved to Rio de Janeiro (then the nation’s capital), where he became the representative of the São Paulo modernist magazine *Klaxon* (1922–1923). While in Rio, as a law student and journalist, he joined forces with Prudente de Moraes Neto to found *Estética* magazine (1924–1925), inspired by T.S. Eliot’s *The Criterion*. By 1927, when he relocated to another state for a short stint as a prosecutor, Buarque de Holanda had made a name for himself as one of the most important modernist critics around, and also as one of the most important critics of modernism.

Brazilian modernism—or perhaps we should say São Paulo’s modernism—has a curious side to it: its original, iconoclastic, libertarian drive, determined to bring about a renewal of the artistic field, soon found itself faced with the impasse of construction. In a country that was still feeling out its place in the modern world, it was not enough to simply rattle the foundations of old mentalities; rather, one had to find new foundations upon which to erect the columns of a new social and political edifice. This, of course, is the paradox of all avant-garde movements: when the bonds of imagination are broken, as the surrealists would have it, will there not inevitably come a moment when imagination itself is called upon to conjure up a stable plateau where one can stop, rest, and finally erect something? At the moment when it is fixed on paper or on the canvas, does not language—meant as a liberating force—morph surreptitiously into a prison? But if Brazilian modernism was grappling with the paradox common to all vanguards, what made it singular?

I think that here we may understand how Buarque de Holanda stood at the eye of the hurricane, and how *Roots of Brazil*, published in 1936 and extensively revised in later editions, is a tentative response to the impasse faced by modernism, as well as a reaction to the international political context. During the 1920s and 1930s, as it so happens, the desire for construction that the vanguards tended to repress would grow increasingly stronger, and in the Brazilian case would soon ally itself to nationalistic ideas, which often drifted into utterly authoritarian fantasies around a new order for politics and culture. Imagining how the country ought to be frequently led to a new orthodoxy, opening the way for authoritarianism and leaving little space for spontaneity.

The positive side of this framework for imagining Brazil is that the 1930s would bring a new and greater appreciation of the country’s Afro-Brazilian heritage, and even the experience of postcolonial ethnic mixing, thus exorcising the specters of racist thought that had haunted the first decades of the twentieth century. From this bubbling broth came the valorization of *miscigenação* (or *mestizaje* in the Hispanic-American world), as well as the foundations for the idea of a mestizo national culture, which would soon become

state policy under the administration of President Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945), particularly so in the dictatorial context of the Estado Novo (1937–1945). This, not coincidentally, is the period of the “invention” of the national symbols that pursue Brazilians to this day, whether they like it or not, making them characters in a grand and luminous narrative where they inhabit the country of Carnaval, samba, and soccer. A strange symbol-making machine, this, able to turn spontaneity into formulas, fixing the shapes of that which by definition should never be fixed. Nor was it by chance that in the 1930s, Gilberto Freyre’s production (whose similarities and differences with Buarque de Holanda’s I will discuss in this book) laid the groundwork for the thinking that would later crystallize in an expression that took on special appeal in the postwar period. To this day, “racial democracy” remains a thorn in the side of those addressing racism, the cruel reality of which flies daily in the face of the fable wherein individuals of different colors and classes coexist in perfect harmony in Brazil.

This gigantic jigsaw rooted in the 1930s offers us the puzzle pieces we need to understand culture and politics in Brazil, and it remains crucial today—especially in the discussion around affirmative action, for example, and in the negotiation of social inclusion, when one attempts to address racism and the overwhelming prejudice against the poor (independent of color) in a society with slaveholding origins. But this complex state of affairs, where exclusion and inclusion go hand in hand, is also made possible by the narratives that seek to give history meaning. Like warped mirrors, these narratives project places for individuals, forcing them to position themselves on a discursive plane whenever they seek to bring their own projects and wills to the fore. In short, and once again, social agents are characters in search of an author.

* * *

We know that Buarque de Holanda devised some of the arguments in *Roots of Brazil* during the period he spent in Berlin (1929–1930), in the twilight of the Weimar Republic, as Germany’s democratic

experiment began quaking at the approach of that which would become one of history's greatest nightmares from 1933 onward: the rise of Nazism. As will be seen here, the discussion of authoritarianism in *Roots of Brazil* heralds an impasse that may only be understood in the context of the interwar period.

On one hand, "spontaneity" in the Brazilian historical experience (supposedly more ductile than others) indicated a future that would move away from authoritarianism, specifically from totalitarianism. Employing a concept in *Roots of Brazil* that would become tremendously controversial—the "cordial man"—Buarque de Holanda broadened the possibility of conceiving a world more open to differences, less drawn on by the irresistible pull of civilization's advance and ironclad visions of the future. As a counterpoint for this supposedly more porous Brazilian history, one might take in large part the experience of Puritan North America, less malleable and more obsessed with the uplifting of the community of the Elect. As we shall see, by the way, the United States is an inescapable mirror in the Brazilian imagination, and for Latin America in general.

On the other hand, 1936, the year *Roots of Brazil* was released, was already witness to the clear development of authoritarian tendencies, which would lead those responsible for public policy under the Vargas era to project out a one-size-fits-all "Brazilian culture" over the nation as a whole, standing as a kind of irresistible answer to the turbulent contemporary world that was then set to conjuring the specter of a new world war (as we know in retrospect). Buarque de Holanda vigorously rejected the totalitarian solution that was slowly taking over Europe, but he also rejected the Brazilian authoritarian solution, quickly spotting the fascist streaks in the regime that would become the Brazilian Estado Novo just the next year, in 1937. The problem was complex: unlike European totalitarianism, which succumbed to fantasies around the mythic origins of a single, unique people (think of the ideal Rome of Italian fascism, to say nothing of the Aryan roots imagined by Nazism), Brazil offered up the myth of the bloodless meeting of races, a world without conflicts, where differences would be attenuated and fuse together almost magically. How to resist the song of these sirens?

As the reader will see, Buarque de Holanda is writing between authoritarianisms, spurning both the domestic authoritarian solution, with its hues of tolerance, and the totalitarianism blooming in Europe. However, one point makes the picture even more complicated: his study of the Peninsular origins of Brazil suggests that the political pact in Iberian America resists the principles of liberalism, which assume both an ethic of privacy and dedication to the exhausting daily work at the basis of collective advancement. In this vision, the Iberian Peninsula planted in American soil a different framework for the political pact, one predating “modern” forms of the social contract. The cordial man, in this sense, is the figure who snubs transcendental aims in favor of the here-and-now of his closest relationships. To paint in strokes so broad they verge on cartoonish, it is as if Carnival and soccer were the *polis* itself, with salvation hinging not on the personal work ethic of the individual but on the carnivalesque appearance of a savior, a sovereign Father able to restore lost order: gracious and welcoming, tolerant but firm. *Roots of Brazil* cannot be conceived of without the specter of populism in Latin America, as we will also see here.

In short, Buarque de Holanda was a fierce critic of authoritarianism but also had his reservations as to the liberal pact. None of the solutions at hand satisfied him: neither the foundational mythology of Nazi fascism; nor the local authoritarianism formulated on the idea of a mixed-race nation; nor liberalism, with its calls for impersonality and neutrality. All impasses, in sum, where no option was embraced with conviction. One has only to recall that today, with World War II behind us, we can choose among our options with greater security, precisely because the liberal pact may strike us as the safeguard of a freedom threatened by the emergence of personalist power in the political arena. But during the interwar period, the dilemma was felt more keenly, and political uncertainty, such as in Buarque de Holanda’s case, reveals that the principles opposing liberalism could not be summarily discarded either. While this idea may seem strange, if not alarming, to us today, it is because we are thinking from a present in which this dilemma has already taken on sharper contours, driving us—all those with at least a minimal penchant for democracy—to confidently support the control of all personalist power. The reading

of *Roots of Brazil*, as I hope to suggest in this book, can help us learn to relive the impasses of a time foreign to our own, when today's political certainties had not yet crystallized.

As we shall see, in *Roots of Brazil* this impasse also takes shape in the dramatization of politics. The cordial man, in this case, lives off the proximity of everything he is familiar with to such an extent that any ritualistic form that distances him from those he is capable of recognizing will strike him as ominous. That is to say, political representation—the basis for modern notions of the liberal pact—is fundamentally foreign to the cordial man. After all, the masks that allow the individual to play the part of representative for collective projects and desires are alien to the cordial man, as are the formulas that defend privacy and make bodies untouchable. Once again running the risk of drawing a caricature, imagine the trouble faced by a Brazilian arriving in the United States and suddenly finding herself in a world where hugs and kisses are limited to the most intimate circles. Cordiality is the husk around this Brazilian individual who feels herself close to others, always “living through others,” as we read in *Roots of Brazil*. But that husk can just as easily become a prison, a sort of smiling mask that blocks access to any real intimacy. The extreme version of this concept of the subject is, as we will see, the absence of interiority and the superficiality haunting the cordial man: in the illusion of sincerity and proximity, and the festive body's occupation of space, he is nothing more than a hollow mask, eternal and weightless joy.

* * *

Between the publication of the Brazilian version of this book in early 2015 and the finalizing of the manuscript in English, early in 2017, plenty of water roiled over the dam of politics in Brazil. The impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 was the result of a sweeping conservative maneuver, but it could also be chalked up to the political inability of both the president herself and the Workers' Party, with which she'd won election in 2010 and reelection in 2014. The parliamentary coup d'état that resulted in Rousseff's

impeachment availed itself of a veneer of “legality” that barely served to disguise the illegitimacy of the means it employed, which ran the gamut from turning justice into a spectacle to the scandalously selective choice of its initial targets. In the end, those who survived the shipwreck of the administration were its most conservative members, symbolized by the vice president, Michel Temer, who currently occupies the presidency and is facing down a political and economic crisis without precedent in Brazilian history.

In 1980, as Brazil began to shift out of yet another dictatorship, an ailing, elderly Sérgio Buarque de Holanda became a founding member of the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT), which would become one of the most interesting experiments in the Left in Latin America and across the world. While the author of *Roots of Brazil*, who died in 1982, would never see the ascension of the Workers’ Party with the election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to the presidency in 2002, his reflections continue to shed light on the history of the nation, now heir to the contradictions of what may be called the “Lula era” (2003–2010).

Though it is true that since Lula’s election, a massive swath of the Brazilian population was pulled away from the poverty line and into the world of consumption, it is no less true that the key social policies of his administration did nothing to shake the power of financial capital and apparently failed to even scratch the endemic corruption plaguing the state and society. Those with even a minimal familiarity with Brazil are aware that the lines between “informality” and the space regulated by law are always flexible, and that the ability to strike deals when the law fails (or when it is simply absent) is one of the most relevant traits of the Brazilian political and cultural tradition. In *Roots of Brazil*, as I will discuss in this book, Brazilian citizens’ failure to internalize the law is a theme developed at some length.

While Buarque de Holanda’s book, over a variety of editions, speaks to contexts that are quite different from the current one, it may lead us to questions that are crucial for understanding the dilemmas of contemporary politics in Brazil. To what extent have law and order been internalized by the country’s citizens? What internal reins, meant to regulate and control action, have individuals developed or

failed to develop in societies of Iberian origin? What are the consequences on a national level of the prevalence of an ethics of personal relationships that makes individuals feel protected by their clans from the logic of the state, which they often see as distant and incomprehensible? What notions of collectivity and public space can arise in a country where general law is external and quite often alien to the political subject?

Roots of Brazil, as will be made evident in *The Other Roots*, points to countless paradoxes. One of them, which is key to understanding contemporary Brazil, suggests that distance from and the daily flouting of law make individuals kowtow, suddenly subservient, when that law is embodied by a savior of the nation. In this context, the execution of law turns into personal wrath: a vengeful judge may embody justice itself and send out arrest warrants willy-nilly, applauded by a collectivity baying for an exemplary punishment. At the same time, prevailing anxiety at the prospect of seeing law enforced—that messianically awaited—for law that individuals are incapable of respecting in everyday life—gives rise to a scapegoat to be immolated on the altar of the media, bringing peace and tranquility to all.

This is not a matter of defending the honesty of this or that individual (it would fall to justice to do so, duly sheltered from media spectacle), but rather of simply noting that the scant internalization of law and order by the subject, and the subsequent clan logic and political godparenting, lead not infrequently to the expectation that law be enforced in the blink of an eye, as if a Judgment Day were the ultimate, sole solution for the impasses of politics.

The problem is that judgment must fall upon flesh-and-blood figures. Within the dynamic of social class currently at play in Brazil, it is precisely he who has done the most to eradicate poverty who is running the risk of immolation. The ongoing persecution of former president Lula by the media and the judiciary attests, in short, to a mechanism examined in depth in *Roots of Brazil*. One must recall that one of the central thrusts of Buarque de Holanda's book—as we will see here—is the macabre persistence of oligarchy within the Republic, hampering and stifling radical agendas.

The irony of recent Brazilian political history is precisely this: he who may have contributed the most to breaking the oligarchical cycle is falling victim to the poison that that very oligarchy helped (not alone, it should be said) to perfect, in its dodging and weaving around the ever-flexible limits of the law. The extent to which former president Lula allowed himself to be molded by that flexibility, obeying a clannish logic that avoids head-on confrontation and attempts to shield all political agents, is a question for which only the unfolding of history will eventually be able to provide an answer. Until then, while public and private interests remain undifferentiated and while the law remains something external to the citizen—something that he or she awaits with obstinate anxiety—*Roots of Brazil* will remain current, even at age eighty.

Princeton, NJ, January 2017

Introduction

It has already been noted how difficult it is to say where books begin. There are two points, however, without which this book would not exist, at least not in its current form.

The first goes back twenty-five years when, in a seminar on sociological theory in Brazil, I heard Octavio Ianni (1926–2004) lament the absence of a detailed study of the presence of Max Weber in *Roots of Brazil* (1936), the classic essay by historian and literary critic Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1902–1982). His point was intriguing, since Ianni himself came from that lineage of intellectuals from the Universidade de São Paulo who had cast a suspicious gaze over the essayistic work produced in the 1930s, of which *Roots of Brazil* is one of the most notable examples. But whether from the fascination exerted by the “essay as form,” in Adorno’s phrasing, or his interest in Weberian criticism, the fact is that Ianni saw it as urgent to return to Buarque de Holanda at that moment, deepen the understanding of his work, and place it back in the contemporary debate in social sciences in Brazil and Latin America.

It is true that *Roots of Brazil* had hardly been languishing up until then. Ever since 1936, when it was first published as the inaugural volume of the Documentos brasileiros [Brazilian Documents]¹ collection directed by Gilberto Freyre for the publishing house José Olympio, the essay has inspired ardent reactions. But it is not less true that, between the 1960s and the 1980s in Brazil, Buarque de Holanda’s debut book was the target of harsh critiques that tagged

it as “ideological,” a label that seems to suffer from a kind of curse. How ideology can be a motive for suspicion is something that evades my aims and interests here. But we would do well to recall that these accusations, even when not made material in critical texts, hung in the air. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda was suspect.

The reaction to this suspicion led to my own interest in *Roots of Brazil* and steered me to write my first book, published almost twenty years ago, in which I sought to feel out the Weberian counterpoint in the composition of the analytical categories drawn up by Buarque de Holanda.² Today I believe that in that book, the discussion of those “sociological” categories left unanswered questions around the metaphorical field opened up by the organic imaginary that helped to shape *Roots of Brazil*, especially when we insert it into the framework of Latin American (or Latin Americanist) thought about “America.” Perhaps precisely the use of its metaphors (the “adventurer,” the “cordial man,” the Iberian “roots,” etc.) had sparked the suspicions of scholars such as those from the Universidade de São Paulo and thus—while I did not fully realize it at the time—stood at the origin of my own reflection. I may call the book that the reader now holds a continuation of my first book, although its development and its objects are different, more “literary”—not to conjure up an unyielding divide between fields and perspectives, as if social sciences and history stood on one side and literature on another.³

The reference to literary studies brings us to the second point where this book’s origin becomes clear, one inconceivable without many years of experience outside Brazil. It was through contact with the North American university system, especially in terms of Latin American Studies, oscillating between literature and intellectual history, that many of the texts that comprise the following chapters would be initially developed.

This is not, however, the simple defense of a perspective “from the outside,” as if scholars of Brazil should necessarily seek out the airing-out of ideas provided by experience abroad. Rather, I wish to recognize the importance of a field of study whose legitimacy is constantly sub judice. The fact is that, once transported to North American academia, the study of Brazilian literature becomes something

else entirely. For one thing, the theoretical debate changes, because there is no more “Brazilian” literature without Latin America—a space more symbolic than it is geographic, in which Brazil is included to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the theoretical or political interests at work. On the other hand, our objects of study fall into a field whose very constitution is intensely problematic. I won’t recount the history of Latin American studies in the United States, which would lead to a discussion of the emergence of area studies during the Cold War and the constitution of a complex gaze cast on the country’s neighbors to the south, one shot through with strangenesses. This very gaze produces a new form of “orientalism”—in a somewhat flexible usage of Edward Said’s illustrious category, not by chance another product of the same intellectual environment, outside Latin American studies, but still within a comparative perspective.⁴

“We” are an “other” when we mingle with “them”: the trap set by these pronouns reveals the complexity of a relationship that not only has personal consequences, but also resonates profoundly on an epistemological level. The constitution of the object shifts. In the binomen Brazilian literature, both “literature” and “Brazilian” are destabilized as immediately comprehensible categories when one is outside Brazil. This is not to say that, when one is in Brazil, studies on Brazilian literature constitute a field that does not question itself or does not formulate questions about the very possibility of its existence. What I am suggesting is a difference of degree. In the North American academic environment, assigned to the field of Latin American studies or slotted into a department of foreign languages and literatures, the subject of knowledge is faced with the need to justify her object on an almost daily basis (to herself and to the academic institution), the object thus becoming the focus of an arduous intellectual task. What is “literature”? Is it the same in Brazilian academia (and in which part of Brazil, incidentally?) and on the North American scene, one generally quite marked by cultural studies? But what is “Brazilian” here? Is it the same in Brazil, where “Latin American” is frequently tied to “Hispanic American,” and in the United States, where Brazil is aligned with a series of expectations that place it as the tail end

of (Hispanic-American) traditions with which we in Brazilian academia are barely familiar? And who are we, or what is this “we”?

One way or another, the “we” and the “them” are subject to a zone of instability, which is the contradictory space from which one may form a discourse on one’s objects, whether understood in terms of identity-based and theoretical categories or from administrative perspectives, and where it may often be difficult to make out the political narrative below the classification of fields and themes. Not to forget, of course, that these battles are fought with a powerful weapon: languages. But who are “we”? Brazilians, or Latin Americans? Or both? And who are “they”? North Americans or Hispanic Americans? Or just North Americans? Or are we all “Americans,” and are “they” Europeans? But which Europe? Northern Europe or continental Europe, and on which side of the Pyrenees?

Categories cannot rest in an environment such as this. They become different, defamiliarized, in the language and even in the constitution of a legitimizable and respectable environment for study. In short, “Brazil” is another “Brazil” when enunciated from outside. Let us abandon the quotation marks, however (Sérgio Buarque de Holanda jokingly called them “little horns,” as we shall see), and let the ink run and explain my work.

The work is split into two stages: first, a reaction to the suspicions around Buarque de Holanda in Brazil; second, my own suspicions around the Brazilian specificity of *Roots of Brazil*, this time in the framework of a debate where Brazil alone cannot suffice.

I hope that the “wandering origins” in the book’s title may slowly become clearer. Perhaps they refer to the only question possible in the face of a legacy: the one posed when there is a shift in relation to the space of origin, when that space has become strange—the moment in which our roots ultimately provoke astonishment and doubt.

* * *

The primary aim of this book is to help understand how a book—*Roots of Brazil*—may determine the imagination of a country. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda’s work—beyond his debut book, of course,

although marked by it—shapes the way in which Brazil is thought of, conceived alternately as radically different from and surprisingly similar to other countries. It may help to revisit and question this imaginary Brazil, not simply because many Brazilians identify with precisely this vision of the country, but also because the question as to the explanatory power of a book called *Roots of Brazil* may lead to a better understanding of a period like ours, in which discussions around supraindividual principles related to identity oscillate between the systematic negation of a national discourse and the constant resurgence of collective hopes and fears. Between the “farewell” to national frontiers, which informs much of contemporary thought, and the dogged power of discourse around the nation, there lies a reflection on the power of identification wielded by the national sign, the word *Brazil*—a word like any other, after all.

I do not seek here to place myself at either extreme, affirming or negating the principle, or even a national “instinct,” as Machado de Assis would put it. I simply wish to look into the survival of Buarque de Holanda’s book, offering up some reasons as to why it continues to speak to us and provoke us, at a time when the grand national narratives have entered into crisis, although they continually threaten to return. *Roots of Brazil* is not infrequently evoked by Brazilians as one of the most important models for interpreting “our reality.” At other times, Buarque de Holanda’s work may serve to kindle interpretations of “Brazilian culture,” without an explicit reference to the author or, at times, without the thinker in question even realizing that *Roots of Brazil* is providing the tools to put together a self-image that, like all self-images, is a precarious one. In a somewhat provocative tone, one might say that *Roots of Brazil* and its concept of the cordial man (which will be discussed here) already belong to Brazil’s collective unconscious. But in strictly psychoanalytic terms, it can never hurt to recall that, when it emerges, the unconscious bursts through and interrogates the coherent self-image that the subject vainly tries to hold up. In short, Brazil is always more (or less) than that which Brazilians say about it and about themselves.

The heritage of a book like *Roots of Brazil* is vast. Like any heritage, it also poses a problematic legacy, mobilizing the heirs and

creating peculiar situations in which the “original” is called upon to say more than it actually said. The latencies at its origin allow for the creation of histories from a starting point whose location, or even its existence, may be called into question. Apropos of such entanglements, I might recall the relationship that I propose in this book between Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and North American historian Richard Morse, or even Brazilian critic and musician José Miguel Wisnik. In both cases, the aim is not to explore necessarily explicit connections but to investigate to what extent the identity principle behind Morse’s and Wisnik’s analyses is a more or less conscious response to problems raised in *Roots of Brazil*. After all, don’t Morse’s “Ibero-American” principle and the “place outside ideas” that Wisnik proposes, different as they are, both wend back to the *Iberian deviation* presupposed in *Roots of Brazil*? As we shall see in the following chapters, both reflections reaffirm, albeit with differing degrees of intensity, the imaginary frontiers of “another” Europe (the Iberian Peninsula), the source of “another” America (Ibero-America). But this opens up a new and fascinating problem: what to do with the triangulation between Europe, America, and Africa, the basis for the imagination and the supposed novelty of the American continent? These considerations may easily take in other works, of course, beyond *Roots of Brazil*. For that matter, as I hope to suggest, *Roots of Brazil* cannot be understood without the proximity of Gilberto Freyre, another Brazilian essayist (and anthropologist himself) who rose to prominence in the 1930s, and whose influence on the understanding of Brazil remains enormous as well.

There are still other remainders, other kinds of legacies. I might recall the Buarquian framework present in João Moreira Salles’s documentary on President Lula, or even the way in which the discussion around history and its “end” appears, transformed by fiction, in Chico Buarque’s contemporary novels. Not to forget, of course, that the discussion about “cordiality” always rears its head whenever the debate on affirmative action policies slides into a revisiting and imagining of the differences apparently shearing America into North and South—the basis for the prevailing notion that issues of race are

substantially different in the United States, with its one-drop rule, and Brazil, apparently more malleable in its understanding of colors. This imaginary divide between North and South America is discussed at greater length in the second part of this book, with center stage taken up by the confrontation between Brazil and the United States, or between Latin America and the United States of America. An America whose very existence, or whose symbolic unity, may and should be put into question.

I hope, in the end, that my reflections may allow the reader to follow how some of the most persistent self-images of Brazil have been processed over the last seven or eight decades, allowing both Brazilians and foreigners to still recognize themselves in those images. This recognition is inevitable, and perhaps even necessary. But it is curious that, as a book investigating Brazil, *Roots of Brazil* should allow this principle of identity to reveal both its strength and its weakness—its power, but also its impotence. This is the case because ultimately, as we will see, *Roots of Brazil* shakes the foundations of any thought constructed on the placid difference between “us” and “them.”

* * *

The first part of this book (“Familial Politics”) is divided into three chapters. In the first, “Marking the Starting Point: Readings of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda,” I discuss how the analyses of literary critic Antonio Candido constructed an image of the author of *Roots of Brazil* that has hung over the understanding of his work ever since and which I seek to critique. On one hand, Candido’s imagination helps us in shaping an understanding of the broader period that produced Buarque de Holanda’s debut book; on the other, the return to the closely entangled bonds of social studies and literary criticism, especially starting in the 1940s, lets us see how a totalizing approach to culture slowly falls apart, revealing its own limits in the establishment of a national framework for understanding Brazilian literature. Within Buarque de Holanda’s work as a literary critic, there emerge the fissures in the foundations of an idea of “Brazilian culture.” These texts confront the problematic

nature of any and all origins and envision a growing feeling of unbelonging, perhaps tied congenitally to the national condition. Finally, I seek to schematically define how Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's work has been understood, from at least the preface that Antonio Candido wrote for *Roots of Brazil* in the 1960s to the more recent publication of practically all of Buarque de Holanda's literary criticism in *O espírito e a letra* [The Spirit and the Letter].⁵

In the second chapter, "A Familial Tragedy (in Hegel's Shadow)," I begin with the epigraph from the first edition of *Roots of Brazil* (1936), which announced the discussion of the cordial man, suggesting that the metaphor of the *heart* ("cordial" comes from the Latin *cor*, *cordis*—that is, heart, or *coração*) is central to understanding the conflict that, in rising between the public and private spheres, expresses the individual dimension of the suffering wrought by the loss of meaning in the metropolis, be it the São Paulo of the 1930s or the Chicago of the early twentieth century, as will be seen. In either case, individuals, tossed into the whirlwind of the city, discover that they are incapable of recomposing the universe of relationships that once brought them the comfort of the just and unquestionable values present in the logic of the family. In this chapter, I shall briefly run down some of the sociological founts from which Buarque de Holanda is drinking—Pareto, Thomas, and Znaniecki—and analyze the tragic form he lends to the conflict between public and private, through a singular reading of Sophocles's *Antigone*. I should note that *Roots of Brazil's* take on the Greek tragedy is markedly Hegelian, with a clash between two clearly opposed ethics: the "natural" scope of the family and the "universal" ethic of the polis. In submitting Sophocles to a Hegelian reading, I propose that *Roots of Brazil* loses the play's most precious and paradoxical assets: the irresolution of that conflict between family and polis and the muddying of its message, both adding to a certain fascination with the familial roots that persist in the city's breast. In this chapter, I also hope to clarify how I diverge from the interpretations of Antonio Candido, returning to his studies on the interior of the state of São Paulo in order to recall how the clash between the familial and the urban is a Buarquian theme within Candido's own critical imagination.

In the third chapter, “Rural Roots of the Brazilian Family: Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Gilberto Freyre,” I propose a parallel reading of *Roots of Brazil*, by Buarque de Holanda, and *Sobrados e mucambos* [The Mansions and the Shanties],⁶ by Freyre, both published in 1936 and extensively revised in their second editions. I suggest that the two authors’ having come together as youths, in the Bohemia of 1920s Rio de Janeiro, hides important differences between them that come into clearer focus in the wake of Buarque de Holanda’s criticisms of the second edition of *Sobrados e mucambos* in 1951. Chief among them is his discomfort at the empathetic approach to the country’s patriarchal past, which Freyre took as a repository of positive values. I should observe, however, that the critique of the metaphysical side of Freyre’s analysis, which tended to sugarcoat Brazil’s colonial period, comes from Sérgio Buarque de Holanda the historian, the author of *Monções* [Monsoons] (1945), and not from the younger and more eclectic author of *Roots of Brazil*. In the discussion of a starting point for understanding the formation of Brazilian culture, there resurfaces the tension between “Iberianism” and “Americanism.”⁷ As for the imbalance wrought by urbanization, in Buarque de Holanda *conflict* is the mark of an insoluble impasse, while in Freyre *compromise* reemerges on the political scene in the vision of a “cordial mulatto,” supposedly a product of the nineteenth century in Brazil. In attenuating the political impasse subsumed by the concept of the cordial man, Freyre lends Buarque de Holanda’s concept a moral character, projecting the Brazilian as broadly “good” and, in this, falling into step with the analyses of Cassiano Ricardo, one of the most important intellectuals of the so-called Estado Novo in Brazil (1937–1945), the period of Getúlio Vargas’s dictatorial stint in the presidency. The promise of the cordial mulatto evidences the seduction that Freyre’s theses can inspire to this day, amidst heated discussions in Brazil around affirmative action and the perennially thorny topics of miscegenation and racism.⁸

The second part (“The Nonexistent American”) opens with the fourth chapter, “Wandering Origins: The Impertinence of Belonging,” in which displacement sets the tone, showing how it is only

through movement that the subject can speak of a space of belonging. In terms of language, this space will be the postulation of an imaginary geography, of a place that has been abandoned and threatens to fall apart, fostering the projection of difference: a point in which identity discourses take off, founded on a simultaneously urgent and impossible search for one's origins. I suggest that the investigation of Brazil's "roots" is also a question about the power of language: what does Brazil as a linguistic sign reveal, dissemble, and conceal? A fragment from Saussure on the indeterminacy of the symbol will help us to comprehend the undecidability at the core of the production of meaning, revealing that the search for roots is also the stuff of signification. The national label is shown to be insufficient and witnesses the sliding away of identification as the subject realizes that belonging is impossible, and that one's "I" is necessarily constituted in an "other" after the abandonment of the origin and, thus, after the clearing of the field of language. Rimbaud's provocative syntagma ("*Je est un autre*," "the I is an Other") will ultimately open up into a brief analysis of the allegorization of belonging in a short story by Minas Gerais-born writer João Guimarães Rosa, "The Third Bank of the River." Through this analysis, we can ask—what is the national symbol that slides between the banks of meaning? And why does the subject move alternately to and away from this sign of origin, as if from a compromising vision?

In the fifth chapter, "Seeking America: The Impasses of Liberalism (1)," I look to examine the handful of metaphors in *Roots of Brazil* that herald a deep investigation, inherent in examining the roots of a civilization of Iberian origin. The suggestion of a mental universe set apart from that of Europe beyond the Pyrenees allows for us to imagine two "Americas," like separate branches of the colonizing advance. As a symbolic frontier, the Pyrenees, dividing the Iberian Peninsula from the "rest" of Europe, are seen to reappear in the New World, establishing the line that separates South from North, like two sides of a single European mirror reflected on American soil. I also address the issue of *authority* and *revelation*, setting the mentality of the Protestant Reformation against

a Counter-Reformationist view of the role played by tradition in directing the collectivity and thus demonstrating that the religious debate is intimately tied to the foundation of the political pact. I also propose a brief comparison with Richard Morse, suggesting that his *Prospero's Mirror*,⁹ published in the 1980s, is a sort of exaggerated reading of Buarque de Holanda's *Roots of Brazil*. It is almost as if the North American historian had succumbed in that moment to the enchantment seeping through from the other side of the mirror, which his Brazilian colleague had inadvertently helped to uncover; in short, Morse's disenchantment with the North American world feeds into the analysis that locates the promise of a new civilization in the "Other" to the South. In contrast with this optimism, *Roots of Brazil* lays out the impasses of the formation of citizenship in a society that, through its emphasis on the disaggregating force of the person, managed to avoid the formation of intimacy, the modern conception of which is heavily indebted (in Buarque de Holanda's case) to the formulations of Max Weber. Richard Morse, then, might have found the extreme end of a veiled civilizational promise in *Roots of Brazil*, which may be understood, as we shall see, when one superimposes the 1936 essay on Buarque de Holanda's modernist critiques from the previous decade. This chapter may also be read as an invitation to evaluate *Roots of Brazil* within Latin American essayism as a whole, leaving the complex issue of the Brazilian modernists' imagination of "America" hanging in the air.¹⁰

In the sixth chapter, "*El hombre cordial*" and Specular Poetics: The Impasses of Liberalism (2)," I discuss in greater detail the Latin American phantasm of the *arielista* imagination and its influence on Buarque de Holanda. I recall that, in taking the metaphor of the mirror to its limits, Richard Morse exalted the Iberian choice, taking his inspiration from the same Shakespearean motifs that allowed the Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó to publish his famous work *Ariel* (1900), which in addition to serving as a great landmark in the Hispanic-American literature of the turn of the twentieth century, would also spark the interest and admiration of

a young Buarque de Holanda in the early 1920s in Brazil.¹¹ In this sense, *Prospero's Mirror*, by Morse, is yet another step in the long-standing Latin Americanist passion shared by authors as different as Rubén Darío in Nicaragua; Rodó himself in Uruguay; José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru; and writers such as Manoel Bonfim, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, and Gilberto Freyre in Brazil. In essays, these thinkers conceive of “another” America, felt or imagined in the sense of a difference, with the United States as its inescapable referent. This difference, moreover, suggests a separate quality altogether, and thus we might say that *Roots of Brazil* is still an heir to the nineteenth century in its frequent flirtations with the Romantic ideas of a “national character” and of unshakable differences between peoples. At the same time, Buarque de Holanda’s book allows for a move toward the project of “another modernity,” one able to subvert that original mirroring, supposing that the future of civilization is indeed a secret kept by the South (whose social and political experience would repel liberalism’s most basic principles) and proposing a model for society in which individuals do not close themselves off in their own individuality and privacy. Here we see the construction of dreams of alternative epistemologies and a broad perspectivism, which for its part ballasts the “South-South” dialogues (or the so-called Global South) that have taken on such prominence in the international academic sphere. This is not merely a battle against the big brother to the north, but full-blown war against an entire paradigm of civilization. Taken to its most extreme consequences by Richard Morse in *Prospero's Mirror*, this war allows us to rediscover the array of promises latent in *Roots of Brazil*, a work that, while rejecting essentialisms, still postulates a difference that is an unresolved problem in and of itself. I also sketch a possible genealogy of “cordiality,” indicating the first usages of the expression in Hispanic America, starting with Rubén Darío, Mexican writer José Vasconcelos, and Brazilian writer Rui Ribeiro Couto in his dialogue with Alfonso Reyes, also of Mexico. This angle raises another question, which I do not develop here and which would imply another research project: in its reference to the “ebb and flow” of the social

organism, *Roots of Brazil* points toward an imaginary formed out of the reaction to the “decadence” observed in Europe. Vico and Spengler are hidden, but perhaps powerful, voices in the constitution of an American space in Sérgio Buarque de Holanda’s imagination.¹²

The third part (“Words and Time”) opens with the seventh chapter, “Cordiality and Power: The President and Politics between Film and Essay.” Here, a few threads spun out by the previous chapters meet and intertwine in order to shed light on the permanence (and propriety) of Buarquian themes in contemporary artistic reflections about Brazil. A brief history of *Roots of Brazil* and the various visions of cordiality precedes a reflection on João Moreira Salles’s documentary *Intermissions*, focusing on the action behind the scenes in the campaign that would lift Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva into the presidency of Brazil in 2002, in a cinematographic framing that has cordiality as a clear measure for understanding politics. The attention paid to the private sphere—which the concept of cordiality opens up—helps in understanding the importance of intimate gestures in the formation of a public personality. In the tension between privilege (literally, private law) and collective rights, Lula’s central, agonistic issue is exposed. The documentary thus joins sociology and literature in searching for the intimate moments of the subject, giving new life to the debate on the tension between public and private, in its suggestion that the political leader’s greatest crisis, as underscored in *Roots of Brazil*, lies in his abandoning the comfort of collective solutions. That comfort would be the hallmark of the individual still chained to the pleasant image that intimates and courtiers alike project around him, holding him hostage to a familial phantasm that only truly representative politics would be able to overcome. This is the new president’s predicament, as seen through the lens of Salles’s documentary.

In the eighth chapter, “Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Words, or Evoking Wittgenstein,” I discuss Buarque de Holanda’s tart criticism of historian Carlos Guilherme Mota in the early 1970s, directed at his “superstition” around the “pure word.” This critique unfolds within a broader discussion about language, with the return to a number of

debates from the period of Brazilian modernism in the 1920s, woven into a reflection on the historian's craft and his or her condition as a writer. Inspired by Wittgenstein, Buarque de Holanda discusses the complexity of language, situational and transitory as it is, through a focus on syntax, vigorously rejecting the notion of an "unequivocal" word. In his reaction to Mota, I suppose that Buarque de Holanda was exacting a sort of revenge: in his response to his colleague's criticism, he was also reacting to the distrust that his oeuvre, *Roots of Brazil* in particular, could still provoke in the 1970s, under the sway of social psychologist Dante Moreira Leite's earlier interpretation of the "ideological" and therefore reprehensible nature of the grand essays of national interpretation.¹³ The label "ideological," let us recall, was never disassociated, in the case of the suspicions hanging over Buarque de Holanda, from the eclecticism of his language. I thus seek to clarify that the constitution of language, which had so concerned Buarque de Holanda the literary critic in the 1920s, would continue to bother Buarque de Holanda the historian through his old age, by which time he finally felt able to unashamedly say everything he thought in a combination of sarcasm and melancholy, without taking the distrust or scorn of his rivals to heart.

The ninth chapter, "In a Thread of Time: Chico, Sérgio, and Benjamin," may strike the reader at first glance as a complementary essay. Nevertheless, I believe that it is a key part of my arguments in this book. In briefly analyzing *Benjamin*, the novel by Francisco Buarque de Holanda, I suggest that his central problem has to do with the impotence of writing when faced with that which his father, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, had identified as the "breaking point with life." The rupture in the epic register, as I argue, separates Chico Buarque (as the musician and novelist is known both in Brazil and elsewhere) from the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez, suggesting that the death at the start of the narrative in Chico's *Benjamin* (1995) simply announces the nonsense of the present, while in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), by García Márquez, death and curses swirl around the family as it makes and unmakes itself mythically in a sort of joyous circular alchemy. However, in Chico Buarque, a curse shuts the titular character into the brief

delirium that is his failed life, which as the reader discovers, is nothing more than the narrative of *Benjamin* the book. Intertwined temporal relations connect Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's considerations to the narrative created by his son. The excessive "visual focus" that the Brazilian historian saw in Leopold von Ranke would eventually emerge in the shaping of the *instant*, in which Benjamin's story unfolds; the protagonist, living amidst the ruins of the last Brazilian dictatorship (1964–1985), sees the future simply vanish. Instead of reconstituting itself in a mythical time, the past stakes itself on the field of the postdictatorial narrative, announcing the absurd absence of any end and pulling the reader into a crisis that is simultaneously political and literary.

The epilogue, "Roots of the Twenty-First Century: Wisnik and the Horizons of the Essay," is simultaneously a destination and a jumping-off point. Beyond simply inserting *Veneno remédio: O futebol e o Brasil* [Poison/Cure: Soccer and Brazil] (2008), by Brazilian critic and musician José Miguel Wisnik, into the lineage of the great hermeneutical essays that includes *Roots of Brazil*, I examine how, in updating and lending a new scale to the central issues of Brazilian essayism of the 1930s, Wisnik takes up Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's ambivalence in *Roots of Brazil*, conceiving of it as a middle ground between the running optimism of Gilberto Freyre's oeuvre and the bleak affirmation of the scars of development from the colony onward, as seen in the work of historian Caio Prado Júnior, author of the 1942 classic *The Colonial Background of Modern Brazil*. As we shall see, in examining the nonrectilinear form that, in 1970, filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini saw in the way South Americans played soccer "in poetry," *Veneno remédio* opens up an array of issues that call into question the positive hues taken on by peripheral experience in the *dialética da malandragem* (dialectic of malandroism) conceived by critic Antonio Candido around the same period. From soccer to literature, the eternal, winking "malandros" of the Brazilian tradition,¹⁴ living between the law and the contravention of it, are reread by essayists and serve as a counterpoint to the stern internalization of the Law in the Protestant tradition. This, in turn, brings us back to the initial intuitions in *Roots of Brazil*, transforming them into

a framework for understanding the impasses of development and modernization of a country with Iberian origins and a slaveholding past, from our vantage point in the twenty-first century.

* * *

Finally, let me recall an idea that will appear with some insistence here: *Roots of Brazil* does not illuminate the self-image of a motley people open to differences; on the contrary, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's book may reveal the impossibility of collective definition, or at least the limits of our fantasies around any sort of singularity. It is precisely that singularity that this book will attempt to suspend, even if just for a moment.

PART I

Familial Politics

Marking the Starting Point

Readings of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda

Since the preface to the fifth Brazilian edition of *Roots of Brazil* in 1969, where Antonio Candido (b. 1918) reinforced the importance of Max Weber in understanding the book, the discussion of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's German influences has remained a central one.¹ We would do well to recall, however, that the German theorists to which Candido refers are not limited to the heirs of the modern hermeneutics, with Max Weber, the author of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, as an illustrious representative. Candido argues that, in bowing to the softening of Buarque de Holanda's "dialectical" inspiration, the Weberian streak in *Roots of Brazil* has lost much of its original rigidity. It would take until the early 1990s, however, for a sharp-eyed reader of Antonio Candido to elevate that dialectic to the level of sentiment, casting it as a constitutive part of the Brazilian intellectual experience.² And only in the decade to follow would Candido's work be understood in terms of the influence of the German tradition of Romance studies, and Auerbach in particular—an author who would leave deep marks on Buarque de Holanda's imagination.³

If there is a "sentiment of dialectic" in Buarque de Holanda as well, the issue will demand a painstaking investigation, one that over-spills the scope of this book. For now, I will simply register the idea that after the 1970s, *Roots of Brazil* is virtually inseparable from Candido's reading. Hence the *boutade* from Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos (declaring that the Sérgio Buarque de Holanda "of the book

Roots of Brazil is an invention of Antonio Candido's"⁴) is somewhat illuminating: the preface's questions have left an indelible mark on the text, with all subsequent readers working under the sign of that interpretation. This becomes even more ironic when one is aware that Candido himself, in another important preface, would declare provocatively that "the common denominator amongst most prefaces is their lack of necessity."⁵

The reading sketched out in that preface is often reproduced in academic environments in Brazil and abroad, sometimes in the form of the hypothesis of ideal types built in pairs—broadening the old dichotomy in Latin American thought, stretching back to Euclides da Cunha and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento.⁶ The observation that *Roots of Brazil* apparently lacks the rigidity of the framework that unyieldingly pits civilization against barbarity opened up a modernist territory in the critical imagination. From this view, European heritage and all its associated values would receive the impact of something beyond local color—the very possibility of reimagining the order of that heritage. It is as if from the entrails of an "other" (being none other than "we" Brazilians, in the perspective constructed by the modernists in the 1920s and transformed into an allegory by the tropicalists in the 1960s), there emerged a new reading and the formidable rediscovery of the modern. Here we have the new forms of modernity in the tropics: the "million-dollar contribution of all our mistakes," in Oswald de Andrade's avant-garde phrasing from the 1920s, or the "advantages of backwardness," in the formulation that was so key for the Brazilian sociological imagination.⁷

In terms of Buarque de Holanda and his imagination of Brazil, this was a matter of turning a skeptical gaze on the imported formulas of a liberalism that continued to justify itself ideologically and which by 1936 was evoking dreams of an economic thrust that might finally cast out the specter of social dissolution from the political horizon. This phantasm was not merely the communism that had been prowling around Europe since the previous century, but also, and more importantly, the specter of the debacle that had shaken New York in 1929, and which in Brazil, with the crisis in coffee prices on the international market, had revealed the deep fissures in

a venerable, prodigious political and economic structure. The 1930s brought a widespread renegotiation within the Brazilian elites, forcing the coffee heavyweights offstage or at least into new roles, they having been the first patrons of the young vanguard and those who would also help to shape the modern Brazilian university, sprung of the illusion of a still-mighty São Paulo.⁸ In the heat of the period, national and international politics were discussed with a focus on the debate over the virtues and vices of capitalism, an advanced capitalism that Buarque de Holanda had seen and studied in his German years. In the twilight of the Weimar Republic, from 1929 to 1930, the late Weber's name still shone as an insuperable reference for the new generations of academic intellectuals around the young Brazilian journalist in Berlin. This is the background to the conception of *Roots of Brazil*—a half-German book, as we tend to put it.⁹

Antonio Candido's preface both validated and suggested a reading that, after the late 1960s, would highlight method in *Roots of Brazil* (ideal types ordered in dialectical pairs), while it also underscored the magnitude of the political problem: with the nation's Iberian roots revealed, how to seek out practical solutions for Brazil? In other words, which resonate some of the preoccupations that would keep so many generations of Latin American economists and sociologists busy, one might ask: how to imagine and propose the development of a country of Iberian origin?¹⁰

In his preface, Antonio Candido sketched out a veritable map of interpretative possibilities. Hence posterior studies from researchers of a number of generations, who although they may at times seem to distance themselves from or simply steer around his concerns, ultimately provide responses to questions that appear, albeit in embryonic form, in that preface. The preface does not stand alone in this regard, however. The critical reception of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's work cannot be understood outside the framework of an editorial effort where Antonio Candido's name must be cited, although not exclusively. In the late 1980s, Maria Amélia Alvim Buarque de Holanda, Sérgio's widow, discovered a trove of unpublished material that Candido would evaluate, edit, and publish under the title *Capítulos de literatura colonial* [Chapters of Colonial Literature].¹¹

The “Introduction” to this posthumously published book painstakingly details the story of the recently discovered manuscript: this was Buarque de Holanda’s contribution to a failed project from Álvaro Lins, who had planned to publish a *História da literatura brasileira* [History of Brazilian Literature] (through Rio publishing house José Olympio) in fifteen volumes, with Gilberto Freyre and a number of other intellectuals as collaborators. Buarque de Holanda himself would take on the seventh volume, dedicated to colonial literature. The story of the book’s conception and the planning of the collection—which would produce just two volumes, one on oral literature by Luís da Câmara Cascudo and another on prose fiction from 1870 to 1920 by Lúcia Miguel Pereira—is symptomatic, providing us with a rare map of the intellectual field that demonstrates the indissociability of literature and social studies in the critical imagination of the time.

The collection, perhaps overly eclectic to our contemporary eyes, was first proposed (as Candido tells us) in the early 1940s, which brings up two important issues in our understanding of Buarque de Holanda’s thought.¹² First of all, the studies for the volume on colonial literature, which would be written for the most part in the following decade, reveal that the project came to stand as an important and perhaps even an essential part of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda’s research, which by then had grown beyond the investigation of the westward push from the highlands of São Paulo—this vein had already produced the 1945 book *Monções* and would later lead to *Caminhos e fronteiras* [Paths and Frontiers] in 1957, while it also took in the Italian Renaissance, Luso-Brazilian *arcadismo*, and the Iberian baroque. This would lead Candido to speak of an “Italian phase” in Buarque de Holanda’s work from 1952 to 1954, namely the years he spent teaching at the University of Rome, an experience that bolstered the conception and composition of the thesis behind his 1958 masterwork *Visão do paraíso* [Vision of Paradise], as well as a “German phase,” covering his time in Berlin from 1929 to 1930.¹³ Second, beyond the story of Buarque de Holanda’s research, we can imagine what it might mean to compile a “history of Brazilian literature” in the 1940s and 1950s with such a wide array of collaborators. This was a highly specialized

field (a specialization that Buarque de Holanda himself, a fixture in newspapers' literary sections, could speak to with great competence and refinement), but one that also demanded a critical imagination with a vast scope. We contemporary readers frequently reject this vastness, given our stockpile of qualms around grand theories. But these syntheses, generally viewed with distrust, when not scorn, and which would be nearly inconceivable today, anchored an intellectual horizon that could resist academic departmentalization and the fragmentation of knowledge, engaging with the public sphere in ways that we are hard-pressed to understand today. The notion of the *public*, or at least the reading public, was entirely different, as it presupposed an audience thirsty for interdisciplinary work—this, much before our current quest for interdisciplinary studies, which can be understood as a reaction to the compartmentalization of knowledge that has shaped contemporary disciplines and fields.

The scene described by Candido in his "Introduction" to Buarque de Holanda's posthumous book is itself an intervention that refers to and rues the specialization of the field of literary studies but also recalls a taste for synthesis that, we may imagine, serves as a profound link between the two authors: the one who left the manuscripts and the one editing them. In this sense, we can better understand the brilliant phrasing of the title: "I proposed *Capítulos de literatura colonial*," Antonio Candido writes, "with the famous book by Capistrano de Abreu [*Capítulos de história colonial* (Chapters of Colonial History)] in mind, but particularly recalling a less systematic work, by Alfonso Reyes: *Capítulos de Literatura Española* [Chapters of Spanish Literature]."¹⁴

The reference to Capistrano de Abreu (1853–1908) suggests the fertile presence of historical studies within literary reflections, exposing the very intersection that produces Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's reflections.¹⁵ Evoking Alfonso Reyes (1889–1959), on the other hand, is an indication of a more complex relationship, one that Candido may well have had in mind. Not only did the Mexican writer play a role in the invention of the cordial man, as we shall see, but we must also recall that the "non-systematic" nature of this "too-disperse work," the *Capítulos de Literatura Española*, mingles in Reyes's oeuvre with a profound sense of the organic nature of the *latinoamericano*.

The same year that Buarque de Holanda published his *Roots of Brazil*, three years before the appearance of the first volume of *Capítulos de Literatura Española* in Mexico, and after six years spent as Mexican ambassador in Rio de Janeiro (then the nation's capital), Alfonso Reyes presented his "Note on American Intelligence" in Buenos Aires. Here, the organic imaginary stands out emphatically:

To speak of American civilization would be, in this case, inappropriate: that would take us to archeological regions outside of the topic at hand. To speak of American culture would be something of an error: that would make us think of a branch from a European tree transplanted in American soil. We may, however, speak of American intelligence, the American vision of life and action in life. This will allow us to define, albeit provisionally, the tone of America.¹⁶

This American "tone" or hue may be less a clearly established quantity than a speculative finding, the precarious nature of which comes through in Reyes's prose, in his "provisional definition," which is all that any interpreter of "America" can aspire to. Not only do both succumb to the allure of organic metaphors, but in both cases the train of thought also runs into the same doubt as to America as an entity. In the cutting terms of *Roots of Brazil*, "Inside, we are still not American."¹⁷

A reading of Antonio Candido's introduction to *Capítulos de literatura colonial* allows us, in short, to understand that we are standing before a vast map on which the broad lines of the imagining of the new American space can be sketched, this place at once *ciudad letrada* and *carte de Tendre* for the ranks of Brazilian intellectuals—or Latin American intellectuals, from a wider angle.¹⁸

The late 1980s would bring yet another attempt to reconstruct the critical memory of Buarque de Holanda—to wit, the book edited by Francisco de Assis Barbosa, *Raízes de Sérgio Buarque de Holanda* [Roots of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda]. A partial collection of the articles published prior to *Roots of Brazil* (up until 1935, that is), it includes two studies, true prefaces, by Barbosa ("Sérgio antes de

Berlim” [Sérgio before Berlin]) and, once again, Candido (“Sérgio em Berlim e depois” [Sérgio in Berlin and Afterwards]).¹⁹ The former provides a firsthand testimony of the early years of the restless, immature critic—Buarque de Holanda’s “apprenticeship,” as Barbosa puts it—based on the recollections of friends and colleagues, revealing from the start that this world cannot be understood outside one’s circle of personal and emotional ties, ones which join the prefacers and the prefaced in ways that are often quite complex. Barbosa’s study and editorial work are thus one of the first serious attempts at a critical mapping of what might be called a prehistory of *Roots of Brazil*. Or, to recall George Avelino Filho’s astute turn of phrase, a search for the “roots of *Roots of Brazil*.”²⁰

This interest in the early history of *Roots of Brazil* lets us imagine an investigation in which the very making of thought takes center stage, where the scholar seeks both that which is revealed and that which the thought-in-progress hides from view. In the case of such procedures, Walter Benjamin’s metaphor of a move “against the grain” is always welcome.²¹ To put it in terms that may be more familiar to our contemporary sensibility, we might evoke the need for a genealogical effort in analyzing thought, recalling that the coherence of a discourse is ultimately constructed after it, and that its meaning is always, inescapably, up for debate. The search for that which lurks beneath the more visible, refined part of discourse is something of an archaeological task, which prefaces both can and should undertake.²² This genealogical mission, however, with its furious drive to discover the power dynamics implicit in the interpretations of a body of thought, is not itself a neutral procedure. This may be the meaning of Baudrillard’s well-known diatribe: Foucault is the “last of the dinosaurs” because his investigation is still indebted to the very conceptual constellation that he seeks to destroy.²³

I wish to address just a part of the controversy: the reminder that the dismantling of a thought in the attempt to comprehend it may still retain the elements that the critical imagination seeks to break down and which resist despite all attempts to subdue them. Within my investigation, an uncomfortable question abides: Doesn’t the very attention paid to the organic aspects of imagination in Sérgio

Buarque de Holanda reinforce the imaginary that we ultimately wish to free ourselves from? What to do with the contemporary critiques of “foundations” when faced with a book in which “roots” are an inevitable signifier? Or should we twist the sense of the word and, à la Deleuze, seek out the “rhizomes” where experience yokes the man to the landscape? But are these “roots” simply the sign of an anxiety around unmooring and drifting, as if expressing an unspoken desire to return to the ward of authority, when the Law stood supreme and explanations found definite endings?²⁴

Let us return, however, to the terrain where *Roots of Brazil* situates itself, so as to formulate other questions that will pursue us throughout this book: Isn't the organic imaginary developed in Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's essay precisely part of the secret of Antonio Candido's critical undertaking? Aren't Buarque de Holanda's coherence and his progressive political attitude already part of a desire to detect exemplary personalities—to wit, the “radicals” that Candido studies and admires?²⁵

If we examine the preface to *Roots of Brazil*, but also Antonio Candido's other prefaces (to *Capítulos de literatura colonial* and the “German” part of *Raízes de Sérgio Buarque de Holanda*), we can glimpse the gradual construction of a field of interpretation around Buarque de Holanda that takes *Roots of Brazil* as its jumping-off point and argues for (or constructs) a profound political and conceptual coherence on the part of the author.²⁶ The question that pursues me is the following: isn't this “radical” Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, which we are used to seeing, a character that emerges from Antonio Candido's interpretations? An author who looked right and left on the political spectrum, only to move resolutely straight ahead with the writing of *Roots of Brazil*? Let us see.

After identifying Buarque de Holanda as the stylist who, à la Spitzer or Simmel, could extrapolate from an empirical fact with an illuminating touch, Candido recalls that, while in the Germany of the Weimar Republic, the future author of *Roots of Brazil* was exposed to the still-recent legacy of Weber, which itself retained something of that “mental attitude” able to meld utter scientific rigor to an incredible literary audacity. But Candido recalls that an attraction to types and

a use of broad, culture-defining characteristics could also lead, and had indeed led, to a dangerous fantasy: there bubbled the literary and scientific stew that would produce Nazism, with its “‘cultural morphology,’ the dualism of ‘blood and earth,’ race-differentiating psychology, and the appeal to ‘obscure forces.’”²⁷ Buarque de Holanda, nevertheless, is seen to have reacted correctly to the negative aspects of this cultural environment, the breeding ground for the nightmare of the Third Reich:

But the rectitude of his spirit, his young but solid formation, and the correct orientation of his political instincts led him to something surprising: from this cultural broth, which could go from conservative to reactionary, from mystical to apocalyptical, he extracted the elements of a personal formula for a progressive interpretation of his country, forging an exemplary combination of a demystifying interpretation of the past and a democratic sense of the present. The “empathy,” a trust in a certain mysticism of “types”—all this was purged of any vestiges of irrationality and ground up in his peculiar fashion, and [then] flowed into an open, extremely critical and radical interpretation.²⁸

The great Enlightenment battle rears its head in this scene of reading: the young critic shedding the uncomfortable burden of irrationality.²⁹ Even so, it would be rash to seek out in Buarque de Holanda the opposite of what Candido sees in him. And my own intentions are very far indeed from aligning the author of *Roots of Brazil* to any conservative thread of Brazilian social thought. My aim, which I hope to make clear over the course of this book, is to revisit, or perhaps simply imagine, the tension that hums acutely in the writer’s consciousness as the writing is conceived and brought about.

At the moment when *Roots of Brazil* is being produced (and I hope to make it clear over the following chapters why I often turn to the book’s first edition, from 1936), the prediction of a democratic route for Brazil is not guided by a fearless vision of some Western democratic future, nor by any sympathy for the socialist model, which Buarque de Holanda would, incidentally, make an unsuccessful attempt to see in

place.³⁰ On the contrary, here we see the intimate and turbulent space of his consciousness, which is also the place where the writing is conceived, shot through with profound and brutal doubts. What I read in *Roots of Brazil*, as I seek to suggest, is more the torment with which the critic approaches politics than the clarity with which he addresses its challenges and dilemmas. I am drawn to the waverings and the sinuous questions that must have torn at the writer rather than the answers and the coherence of a perfectly correct political posture.

The political realm is not, for the author of *Roots of Brazil*, a field of unequivocal options able to unlock the paradise of some final solution for the collectivity (and Candido is with him on this count). Rather, for Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, politics is the realm in which the individual is reduced to debating impotently, faced with alternatives whose promises seem inevitably insufficient, if not utterly terrifying. In our secularized modernity, we often forget the religious roots of torment. In Buarque de Holanda's case, one cannot say that the trope of "demons" is a metaphor like any other. He knew what he was talking about when, at the end of *Roots of Brazil*, he suggested that a "perfidious and pretentious" demon appears to cover our eyes whenever we seek the political order that will save us in the end.³¹

It is against the eschatological and finalist horizon of the authoritarian imagination that Sérgio Buarque de Holanda will rise up. But the alternative horizon that he envisions is not a rational solution nor a well-organized alternative to the dilemmas of the collectivity. Rather, it is wracked by doubt, and ultimately by the affliction of knowing oneself to be abandoned by precisely the figure who ought to bear the solution. After all, behind the authoritarian solution on the political scene, Latin America was incubating the long-term phenomenon and the specter of populism. It is above all in this sense that *Roots of Brazil* is a creature of the 1930s.

* * *

For Buarque de Holanda, the clarity of reason, whether more or less tinged with liberal colors, cannot be enough. To make things worse, from a somehow Nietzschean angle, hopes of a final, peaceable

redemption have faded away on the horizon. His world is *modern*, in the fullest sense of the word: no salvation, no moral certainty. This is an intricate, complex world where the individual is forsaken somewhere between solitude and solidarity.

It will come as no surprise when, from a few years after the publication of *Roots of Brazil* to at least the 1950s, Buarque de Holanda himself turns to a blind obsession with the nature of the modern novel. From his 1941 "Notas sobre o romance" [Notes on the Novel], published in the *Diário de Notícias* in Rio de Janeiro, to the reflections on the fiction prose in his beautiful "Em volta do círculo mágico" [Around the Magic Circle], for example, published in the same newspaper in 1950, what stands out is his investigation into the elements in the very form of the novel that destabilize any pretension of aesthetic perfection. These elements create conflict-ridden situations that, especially in the American case, lend the characters their tragic aspect and the anguish that comes from their knowing themselves to be in "permanent exile," as in the expression that Buarque de Holanda borrows from Henry James.³²

The problem of "roots" is also central in the discussion of literature. To keep on "living" and "coexisting," in a space that emerges far from the European center, meant facing and expressing distance in relation to an aesthetic ideal, ultimately pushing the writer to an "essentially prosaic and relatively impure type of art." Buarque de Holanda is thinking of Gogol's and Dostoevsky's Russia, where "the irruption of ideas and lifestyles which are alien to ancestral patterns and tend to dilute them" opened the way for the "dramatic conflicts where the art of fiction seems to find its ideal sustenance."³³ The peripheral condition, Russia being an exemplary case, had an American dimension to it, however:

In our America, the profound transformations that these almost alluvial societies underwent around the same period also doubtless presented a problematic or tragic aspect. While the protagonists of the drama found ready-made models, gestures copied at a distance (in space and somewhat in time, as well) refused to take on the natural and inevitable tone here that they must have

had in their places of origin. In other words, we were a peripheral world: the true center lay in Paris or London. One of our statesmen, who served the Empire and the Republic, expressed this in words for the ages: in us, he declared, the sentiment is Brazilian, the imagination European.³⁴

The invocation of the statesman Joaquim Nabuco (1849–1910), and the reference to the “ineluctable continental destiny” that had haunted politicians and writers alike, leads the critic over to the other part of America (still America nonetheless)—the United States, and its relationship with England. Henry James’s caricature of the “American” is thus brought in to bear witness to a discomfort ripe for fiction, while it is also, and above all, fodder for social reflection. In Buarque de Holanda’s imagination, at the time of the writing, two possibilities seemed to remain open: either Brazilians could give themselves over to the “simple valorization” of national and regional motifs, writing in a “liana-wreathed” style, or—as in the rare case of Machado de Assis (1839–1908)—these merely “superficial decorations” might give way to an investigation capable of revealing “the conditions of [one’s] time in [one’s] country.”

I will abstain here from the complex discussion around Machado de Assis. I should clarify that the critic was referring to what was then a recently released book by Lúcia Miguel Pereira, itself a part of that collection organized by Álvaro Lins, which conceived of the Machado de Assis of recent critical investigations as a “special case.”³⁵ Expatriation—the state of feeling oneself in tension with a center that is at once close and intangible—refers to a problem of a fictional order, which has a historical and sociological side to it as well. “Roots” are an extremely powerful *topos* in Buarquian prose (from both the critic and the historian, insofar as the differences between them are meaningful), where the reading always leaves a tang of irresolution, of an attempt at something, of successive advances and retreats, where the horizon of a “Brazilian literature” is never fully revealed.

We might ultimately ask if there isn’t something in Sérgio Buarque de Holanda beyond what Antonio Candido’s profound criticism allows us to see. As I have sought to suggest thus far, Candido

seeks out a political coherence in his friend that one cannot honestly deny but to which I would add an element of doubt—to wit, the inconstancy inherent in any and all matter constructed over time, as is of course the case of thought. In short, Buarque de Holanda's "radicalism" may not completely explain *Roots of Brazil*, in which, to use a melancholy metaphor, the black ink of suspicion around liberal theses has been laid on darkly and resists any attempt to erase it.

This is not merely an attempt to lend greater substance to the interpretation of the political proposal behind *Roots of Brazil*. Rather, I am attempting to see whether the book's very conception of Brazil rejects essentialisms (as recent critical production may suggest, incidentally). Of course Candido himself never proposed a static or essentialist image of Buarque de Holanda's work, nor would he. However, it seems to me that in terms of a discourse on what is national—that is, the fundamentally "Brazilian" aspects of those roots—Buarque de Holanda has fewer certainties than doubts; fewer proposals than apprehensions; less hope than a sinuous, at times simply discreet, melancholy.³⁶ Or, to move beyond mere impressions, there is a deep sense of *unbelonging* in *Roots of Brazil*, a feeling of incompleteness that stands as an ineluctable condition, or the opposite of an essence: "no Brazil exists," in the poetic formulation recently reclaimed by João Cezar de Castro Rocha, always with an eye to Sérgio Buarque de Holanda.³⁷

Interestingly, Antonio Candido recognizes "Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's eminence as a literary critic, one of the greatest in Brazil's history." Candido's own towering place on the literary criticism scene in Brazil is well-known, and his frequent praises of his friend—an effort to restore the literary critic in Buarque de Holanda—are very significant.³⁸ In the end, a question about the differences and similarities between the two will always hang in the air. During the same decade that found Buarque de Holanda abandoning the literary criticism he had been publishing in newspapers, Candido sought to understand the manifestations that comprised Brazilian literature at its very dawn. It would be unfair and insufficient to reduce Candido's critical contribution to his monumental and perennially productive *Formação da literatura brasileira* [Formation of Brazilian Literature] (1959), but it is quite thought provoking—at least for me—to

consider that just as Candido was finishing up his research for one of the most important books in the Brazilian critical tradition, Buarque de Holanda was forsaking yet another project; in fact, he never completed a book about Brazilian literature during his lifetime. This lack of conclusion may hold the secret to an oeuvre whose commitment to Brazil may not hold up against doubts around the country's constitution, or as to the very existence of an essentially comprehensible and explicable national entity. But if Brazil as an element poses such difficulties in determining its time and place, then how to imagine its roots? Where do they come from, or what do they point to?

Perhaps Sérgio Buarque de Holanda was right back in 1950. The answer is still, eternally, in the hands of Joaquim Nabuco: Brazilian sentiment and European imagination. To loosely borrow Roberto Schwarz's turn of phrase (while suggesting that the genealogy of the expression stretches quite far back in the history of Brazilian thought), we might say that this is precisely where the country's roots lie: in a strange orbit, always slightly "misplaced."³⁹

* * *

Within Latin American intellectual history as a whole, Candido remains crucial in the formation of a field of research around Brazilian modernism. In this context, Buarque de Holanda stands out precisely because the intersection between social studies and literature, as I argued above, stands at the center of his work. Interpretations of Buarque de Holanda's oeuvre, despite our attempts to flee from abrupt temporal breaks, point to a watershed in the 1996 publication of *O espírito e a letra* [The Spirit and the Letter], the two volumes of literary criticism edited by Antonio Arnoni Prado.⁴⁰ As Walnice Nogueira Galvão observed, the critical reception of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda as a literary critic has just begun.⁴¹ We are indebted to Arnoni Prado for his research and critical annotations, which have paved the way for a more nuanced and complete vision of the intellectual trajectory of the author of *Roots of Brazil*. In terms of criticism, readers already had access to *Cobra de vidro* [Glass Snake] (1944) and *Tentativas de mitologia* [Attempts at Mythology] (1979), as well

as the posthumous works *Raízes de Sérgio Buarque de Holanda* and *Capítulos de literatura colonial*. But the publication of the full corpus of his literary criticism has lent the oeuvre a new dimension.

Problems align and begin to illuminate one another when the historian's reflections are read alongside those of the literary critic. In particular, I believe that the issue of order and law, as well as the letter as the negation of life, are constants throughout his work as a whole, whether in his attempt to understand new poetics—from the vanguards of the early twentieth century to the experiments of the 1950s, without forgetting the rhetorical singularity of colonial literature in Portuguese America—or in his critique of political attempts to silence people's spontaneity. In historiographical terms, for example, his analysis of the stifling of innovative trends and of the ingrained conservatism of Brazil's political and intellectual elites all but ties together the two sides to his production; it suggests that his critique of the authoritarian interwar mentality in *Roots of Brazil* is paralleled in the investigation of the antidemocratic tradition that would be resuscitated in Brazil's various dictatorships, rooted in the imperial elites' fear of any profound social change. This is exactly the picture presented in Buarque de Holanda's 1972 *Do Império à República* [From the Empire to the Republic], a book on the dictatorial leanings of the late Brazilian Empire (1822–1889), conceived and published under Brazil's last military dictatorship (1964–1985), as has already been noted.⁴²

We are dealing with different territories here, but there is still room to investigate whether there are strong ties, on an analytical level, between political conservatism and a certain aesthetic conservatism. The latter, after all, implies both shackling oneself to rigid creative norms and also, on a deeper level, the definitive taming of intelligence—and hence a love of ready-made formulas. However, as Arnoni Prado notes, Buarque de Holanda made use of “all sorts of sources to reject the idea that in poetry, invention is inferior to convention, for example, and to recognize that each period recreates works in keeping with their own, familiar frameworks of taste.”⁴³ To wit, while “convention” and “creation” may line up, the conventional can also be explained only through a deep historical sense of

differences. Recall, for example, how Buarque de Holanda's analysis of the Portuguese colonial poets of the eighteenth-century school of *arcadismo* moved to substitute the notions of free inspiration and spontaneity with those of study and effort. This led a contemporary critic to praise him for precisely his analytic sensitivity to the specificity of the Luso-Brazilian colonial literary period, which lacked Romantic ideas of a unique, irreplaceable personality, not to mention nationalistic ideals themselves—notions that would thus be foreign to a contextualized (read: historicized) analysis of literature.⁴⁴ Comprehending the text would necessarily call for an empathic exercise in understanding the mentality of another time. Here, literary criticism and historical analysis join hands, and the equilibrium between “norm” and “invention” becomes prime analytic material.

The same attention to “studies” and “effort” as poetic principles, as well as a certain equilibrium between novelty and norm, would lead Buarque de Holanda to a critical vision of the so-called 1945 Generation (a group itself posterior to the first winds of Brazilian modernism). The issue of “construction” and the complexity of literature as historically formed material would also lead him to Auerbach's *Mimesis*, as we have already seen, all the while with an eye to the importance of New Criticism, whose works Buarque de Holanda accompanied with particular care and interest.⁴⁵

* * *

To reduce *O espírito e a letra* to an array of formulas and observations would be, however, an exercise in folly. Let me simply note that, in terms of the critical reception of his work, the publication of studies on Buarque de Holanda's literary criticism did indeed, as Galvão and Candido hoped, open up an entirely new terrain for the analysis of his thought.⁴⁶ In terms of the critical restoration of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, however, we should also recall the importance of the commemorative works produced by disciples and colleagues, especially after his death in 1982.⁴⁷ Within the scope of these publications, but also going beyond them, we find Maria Odila Leite da Silva Dias; we might say that she, like Antonio Candido, leaves an indelible mark

on the comprehension of Buarque de Holanda's oeuvre in returning to an examination of its stylistic aspects and placing it in the context of the national and international historiographical debate—which is in great part what his writings are dialoguing with.⁴⁸

In the following chapters, I will engage with both the classic critical literature on Buarque de Holanda and the texts that emerge in its wake, or against it, with special attention to the understanding of *Roots of Brazil* as a turning point in his works. If more recent studies are any indication, this “turning point” stretches on for years and perhaps even decades, until the historian and critic finally decided—particularly after the third revised Brazilian edition of *Roots of Brazil*, in 1956—to let the text alone, leaving us, his readers, faced with aporias best expressed and sustained by the idea of exile, which will resonate throughout the book.⁴⁹

