Social Tropicalism, Engaged Geographies and the Brazilian "Hub"

The South as a Place for Producing Critical Knowledge (1930s-1950s)

Federico Ferretti
Università di Bologna

Abstract This paper explores the contributions of authors who worked in the first Brazilian universities—the Universidade de São Paulo, founded in 1934, and the Universidade do Distrito Federal, founded in 1935—and became internationally influential, by focusing on their acquaintance with European (and especially French) colleagues who contributed to the "University Missions" in Brazil. These scholars built anti-racist approaches to understanding Brazilian racialised and marginalised communities and developed ideas on tropicality that challenged classical European views of an alleged "inferiority" of tropical people and their lands, based on environmental determinism or scientific racism. These anti-racist views of the tropics, which I call "social tropicalism", acquired international renown thanks to the publications of Brazilian geographer Josué de Castro (1908-1973). Based on new archives and drawing upon recent literature on tropicality and post/decoloniality, I analyse Castro's early networking with other transnational scholars such as French sociologist Roger Bastide (1898-1974) and Brazilian anthropologist Artur Ramos (1903-1949). Discussing these intellectual exchanges allows for an appreciation of the Brazilian social science "hub" organized around these early universities, and the way they contributed to shape critical scholarly thinking and challenged traditional views on the South as a "tributary" of Northern theories.

Keywords: tropicality, anti-racism, Afro-Brazilians, critical geographies, intellectual history

Résumé Cet article analyse les contributions d'auteurs qui ont travaillé dans les premières universités brésiliennes – notamment l'Universidade de São Paulo, fondée en 1934, et l'Universidade do Distrito Federal, fondée en 1935 – et qui ont acquis une influence internationale, en s'intéressant à leurs relations avec des collègues européens (et surtout français) ayant contribué aux « missions universitaires » au Brésil. Ces chercheurs ont élaboré des raisonnements antiracistes pour comprendre les communautés racialisées brésiliennes et développé des idées sur la tropicalité qui remettaient en question les conceptions classiques européennes sur une prétendue « infériorité » des peuples tropicaux et de leurs terres, fondée sur le déterminisme environnemental ou sur le racisme scientifique. Ces visions antiracistes des tropiques, que j'appelle « tropicalisme social », ont acquis une renommée internationale grâce aux publications du géographe brésilien Josué de Castro (1908-1973). Sur la base de nouvelles archives et de la littérature récente sur la tropicalité et la (post-) décolonialité, j'analyse les premiers réseaux de Castro avec d'autres chercheurs transnationaux, tels que le sociologue français Roger Bastide (1898-1974) et l'anthropologue brésilien Artur Ramos (1903-1949). Examiner ces échanges intellectuels permet d'apprécier le « hub » brésilien des sciences sociales organisé autour de ces premières universités et la façon dont celui-ci a contribué à nourrir la pensée critique et à remettre en question des visions traditionnelles du Sud en tant que simple récepteur des théories venant du Nord.

Mots-clés : tropicalité, antiracisme, Afro-Brésiliens, géographies critiques, histoire intellectuelle

This paper addresses original notions of tropicality that were elaborated in the 1930s and 1940s within a transnational circuit of scholars who gravitated around two new Brazilian universities, the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) founded in 1934 and the Universidade do Distrito Federal (to be later included in the Universidade do Brasil) in Rio, founded in 1935. The encounter between socially committed Brazilian scholars, mainly from the Northeast of the country, and French scholars who had similar progressive political ideas, favoured the elaboration of shared notions of tropicality that challenged the traditional racist and determinist visions of tropical humanity which had formerly characterised most of European science. My main argument is that their studies of the traditions, beliefs and material life of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian communities can be considered as an early (although partial) "scientific" questioning of environmental determinism and tropical "exceptionalism", highlighting the importance of cultures and techniques in the various human adaptations to the tropics.

While this was not the earliest questioning of Eurocentrism and colonial thinking in the scientific field, what is original in what I call "social tropicalism" as opposed to racism and environmental determinism, is that it was mostly elaborated in a Southern country (Brazil) by socially and politically committed scholars interested in non-European cultures. This work shows that European academics were not simply "teachers", but also "learners" in their relationships with their Southern counterparts. The most explicit and internationally renowned expression of "social tropicalism" was Josué de Castro's geography of hunger, and especially the understudied writings in which he discussed the relationship between food and tropical "acclimatation". Studying these early contributions allows for better understanding Castro's most famous works, which had an outstanding editorial success, disseminating his social ideas worldwide.

In this paper, I extend and connect various strands of scholarship on postcolonialism and tropicality, on Luso-tropicalism, and on the current rediscovery of Latin American critical geographies in international (and especially Anglophone) literatures.[1] Tropicality is a widely debated notion in postcolonial geographies. In the last two decades, a key support for these debates has been the *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, given the direct involvement of most of its past and current editors with postcolonialism. Geographers committed to postcolonial and decolonial scholarship have thoroughly analysed the role that the experience of the tropics played in European science. Since Antiquity, the "torrid zone" was seen as a threatening area where "normal" people could not live and about which dreadful legends circulated.[2] Later, the tropics were presented as countries of wealth and abundance, paralleling colonial narratives

1 Davies, 2019a; Ferretti, 2021a; Ferretti, Pedrosa, 2018; Melgaço, 2017. All quotes from texts in French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese have been translated by the author.

2 Safier, 2014.

about "empty lands" whose resources awaited the settlers,[3] irrespective of natives who were considered too "lazy"[4] or unskilled to avail themselves of that wealth.[5]

Due to the alleged action of climate and environment (geographical determinism), or the alleged racial inferiority of tropical people (scientific racism), the 'backwardness' of tropical humanity was a key argument for those justifying imperialism and colonial expansion. In the 1960s-1970s, early denouncers of these colonialist and Eurocentric uses of geography were critical geographers such as Jim Blaut, a North American, and Keith Buchanan, a Briton. The latter blamed the "superficial observers [who] have been inclined to explain away this backwardness as the result of a tropical environment or the alleged lethargy of the tropical peoples".[6] Yet, according to James D. Sidaway and Marcus Power, these critical voices could not impede that which occurred after the formal decolonization of the "Third World", when deterministic notions of a "natural" backwardness of tropical lands in need of "help", shifted from traditional coloniality to mainstream neo-colonial notions of "development".[7] "Southern" scholarship inspired by critical and poststructuralist approaches criticised the very idea of development as a neo-colonial device imposed by external cultures[8] and argued for rediscovering indigeneity and plural notions of decoloniality.[9] Geographers interested in "critical development" have called for pluralistic convergences between different critical approaches, presenting the works of Brazilian geographers such as Josué de Castro and Milton Santos as key inspirations for these alliances.[10]

Addressing the tension between the "hellish and heavenly" visions of the tropics which characterised European modernity, Felix Driver and Brenda Yeoh observe that most of these visions shared an idea of tropical exceptionality, that is "the identification of the Northern temperate regions as the normal, and the tropics as altogether other—climatically, geographically and morally".[11] Yet, this ambivalence can be unpacked following what Driver calls the notion of tropical "disturbance",[12] that is, the unsettling of Western travellers' established beliefs, that the tropical experience could entail in several cases. One the earliest examples was the work of Alexander von Humboldt, who changed some of his former views on geography after his 1799-1804 journey to the "equinoctial lands" of the "New World", where he became a defender of Amerindian

3 Driver, Martins, 2005.
4 Alatas, 1977.
5 Arnold, 2000.
6 Buchanan, 1967, quoted in Power, Sidaway, 2004, 585.
7 Power, Sidaway, 2004; Power, 2020.
8 Kothari *et al.*, 2019.
9 Mignolo, Escobar, 2010.
10 Melgaço, 2017; Ferretti, Pedrosa, 2018; Simon, 2007.
11 Driver, Yeoh, 2000, 1.
12 Driver, 2004, 14.

peoples.[13] At the height of imperialism, other unorthodox scholars, such as the anarchist geographers, challenged mainstream views on the alleged racial inferiority of tropical "indigenous" peoples, and tried to foster independent exploration.[14] As Dan Clayton notes, in the second half of the 20th century, it was the turn of guerrillas—such as the Cuban revolutionaries and the Vietcong—to populate Western left-wing public opinion with new tropical phantasies, associated with hopes in the Third World revolution. Eventually, the tropics became militant, that is a "combative, belligerent and revolutionary"[15] space.

Recent scholarship on tropicalist geography during the decolonisation highlights this complexity, noting that "tropical geography involved both acquiescence to and criticism of empire".[16] This was the case with French geographer Pierre Gourou (1900-1999), a specialist of southeast Asia whose work was harshly criticised by anticolonial authors such as Aimé Césaire. Yet Gavin Bowd and Dan Clayton have recently highlighted the complexity of the various "technics of tropicality"[17] that were marshalled by Gourou, whom they define as "an ambivalent tropicalist [as] his avowal and disavowal of tropical difference rested on paradoxical indigenist sensibilities".[18] This chimes with French scholarship on the work of "tropicalist" geographers in Africa in the 20th century who argue that "tropical geography" was not necessarily and unconditionally synonymous with colonialism and racism.[19] Recent works confirm how "the postcolonial and the post-tropical [...] signal a range of critical conjunctures"[20] in a world where notions of tropicality are constantly reshaped by "ecological and political cultural-economic shifts"[21] in the context of current anxieties about climate change.

A specific Brazilian declination of tropicality was "Luso-tropicalism" by Pernambucan sociologist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987). Inspired by Freyre's famous book *Casa grande e senzala* [*Master's House and Slaves' Barracks*][22] which had a significant impact in Brazil in the 1930s, Luso-tropicalism served later to construct narratives of the Portuguese, and in general of the "Latin races", as "better" colonisers than the "evil" Anglo-Saxons. Luso-tropicalism especially allowed alleging that, in Brazil, the Portuguese succeeded in performing a more "humane" exploitation of Black people. In the following decades, this myth of a "positive" assimilation was politically instrumentalised by the Portuguese dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, constructing

13 Buttimer, 2012.
14 Ferretti, 2017.
15 Clayton, 2013, 180.
16 Bowd, Clayton, 2019, 155.
17 *Ibid*., 87.
18 *Ibid*., 91.
19 D'Alessandro-Scarpari, 2005.
20 Sidaway, Yeoh, Bunnell, 2018, 329.
21 Sidaway *et al.*, 2020, 4.
22 Freyre, 1933.

a "Luso-tropical geopolitics"[23] to claim the possession of the last surviving Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia, a propaganda campaign in which Freyre himself participated. Contradicted by the historical record of colonial brutality in Brazil and elsewhere, Freyre's approach was severely criticised by anticolonial scholars such as Amílcar Cabral (1924-1973), who derided the Brazilian scholar for having "transformed all of us who live in the colony-provinces of Portugal into the fortunate inhabitants of a Luso-tropical paradise".[24] In Brazil, a notion which is still associated with that of "Luso-tropicalism" is "racial democracy", which advances an equally optimistic view of the Brazilian model of miscegenation and mixed society, and which is likewise criticised as a slogan that hides the reality of ongoing racial and social discrimination.[25]

Yet in the 1930s, Freyre's ideas were considered as politically progressive by Brazilian leftist scholars, who deemed Freyre himself, until that period, "a leftist" who only later "changed a lot"[26] becoming a conservative. Ian Merkel has recently analysed the French reception of Luso-tropicalism, which included some scholars whose contributions I discuss here, especially Roger Bastide, who was the French translator of *Casa grande e senzala* in 1952.[27] According to Merkel, Luso-tropicalism interested French social scientists of the École pratique des hautes études, including Lucien Febvre (1878-1957), Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) and Georges Gurvitch (1894-1965), because it provided a model of miscegenation for the French empire, which was undergoing a difficult phase of decolonisation. While Merkel perceptively notes "the interest of intellectuals such as Braudel in maintaining the status quo in Algeria and the French Empire more generally",[28] I would not attribute similar intentions to people like Febvre, Bastide or Gurvitch, who, while expressing heterogenous views, cannot be considered political conservatives.[29] Merkel, however, discusses how, although to different degrees, all of these three scholars pronounced some critiques to Freyre, arguing that racial relations in Brazil were less peaceful than what Freyre pretended.[30] More recently, Merkel has provided a brilliant synthesis on the importance of French-Brazilian intellectual exchanges for protagonists of French social sciences Braudel, Bastide, Pierre Monbeig and Claude Lévi-Strauss.[31]

Extending these rich scholarly trends, I define 'social tropicalism', in opposition to Luso-tropicalism, as a notion which takes onboard critiques of racism and colonialism in building proposals for an engaged geography. Although these notions were the

23 Sidaway, Power 2005, 530.
24 Cabral 2017, 1.
25 Schwarcz, Gomes, 2018.
26 Andrade, 2008.
27 Merkel, 2020.
28 Merkel, 2020, 28.
29 Ferretti, 2015.
30 Merkel, 2020.
31 Merkel, 2022.

result of the cross-pollination of ideas coming both from Europe and Brazil, they were first inspired by the earliest studies that Castro carried out in his Recife years. Started well before the arrival of the French university missions in the country, this research was laid out in works such as *Alimentação e raça* (1935) and *Documentário do Nordeste* (1937). In *Documentário*, a collection of short tales on the dramas of northeastern people compelled to migrate from the poor regions of the *sertão* to the growing urban ghettos in the coastal cities, Castro expressed his empathy towards people who were racialised, as well as his early critiques of racism and environmental determinism.[32] On this point, I engage with recent scholarship examining the contribution of Brazilian critical geographers,[33] among whom Castro played a primary role.[34]

Archie Davies analyses how Castro developed 'anticolonial metabolic geographies',[35] pioneering studies of human bodies as places for the exercise of colonial power. This included studying "how the tropical climate influenced basal metabolism", as "the white, masculine working body at the base of Northern metabolic science was replaced in Castro's work with the hungry migrant from the *sertão*".[36] I particularly focus on some of Castro's early works on the relation between food and climate to better understand his challenges to Euro-centric views of tropicality. It is worth noting that, in the following decades (after 1950), Castro's ideas became internationally influential due to the planetary success of his books, published in dozens of languages. His networking as the chair of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) from 1952 to 1956, as a member of numerous international organisations, and as Brazil's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva in 1963-1964 contributed to his worldwide renown.[37]

Based on original texts and archives located in Brazil and France, including unpublished correspondence, I address these scholars' works and networks. In the first part of my paper, I discuss the French university missions in Brazil in the 1930s and 1940s as places for the establishment of politically progressive circuits well beyond their institutional setup. In the second part, I show the roles that were played by Castro, Ramos, and Bastide's scholarly networking in circulating anti-racist and anti-determinist scholarship. In the third part, I discuss Castro's writings on "acclimatation" as the most explicit, accomplished and influential expression of "social tropicalism".

32 Ferretti, 2020.

33 Melgaço 2017; Ferretti and Pedrosa 2018; Davies, 2019b.

34 Carter 2018; Ferretti 2019; Davies, 2019a.

35 Davies 2019b, 850.

36 Davies 2019a, 44.

37 Ferretti, 2021a; Davies, 2019a.

French-Brazilian intellectual cooperation

French university missions in Brazil in the 1930s and 1940s were studied extensively by Brazilian and French scholarship,[38] highlighting how some French junior scholars working in Brazil later became prominent in various fields of the social sciences. This was the case with geographers Pierre Monbeig and Pierre Deffontaines, among others. Yet most existing works, including on the Brazilian side, focus on the influence that these intellectuals played in shaping the Brazilian academic world, often highlighting the centrality of French intellectual (and implicitly neo-colonial) diplomacy.[39] Only recently have scholars started to investigate the deep rethinking of these intellectuals' Euro- or Franco-centred intellectual tools which resulted from the unsettling experience of a new (tropical) country. It is the case with Merkel, arguing that "Brazil was much more than a receptacle for Braudel and his academic training",[40] making a similar point concerning Lévi-Strauss.[41] At USP, Braudel learned from Brazilian colleagues, which suggests that Brazil was an important place for the formation of French social sciences, including the history of the influential French journal *Annales*.[42]

Precious (although not exclusive) sources for understanding these processes of intercultural cross-pollination are the Archives diplomatiques in La Courneuve (Paris), where the institutional correspondence of French teachers overseas survives, and the Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros at USP, which contains personal archives of Pierre Monbeig and of Brazilian scholars who collaborated with these missions (including Caio Prado Júnior).[43] Relevant correspondence also survives in rich collections such as Bastide's archives at the Caen Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), the archives of Luis da Câmara Cascudo at the Ludovicus Institute in Natal (ICC) and Castro's archives at the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Coordenação-Geral de Estudos da História Brasileira (CEHIBRA) in Recife. These documents show the political relevance of the French missions in interacting with local progressive political networks. Although tied to their *devoir de réserve*, that is, their formal mandate of non-interference in local political affairs, the French scholars composing the early missions (with some exceptions) were mostly leftist or progressive people.

Pierre Deffontaines was close to social Catholicism and refused fully-fledged political engagement, although he participated indirectly in helping persecuted anti-fascists in Spain.[44] However, even a moderate person like Deffontaines could be instrumental in shaping future relations between scholarship and politics in Brazil:

38 Ferretti, 2014; Angotti Salgueiro, 2006; Silva, 2016; Théry, Droulers, 1991.

39 Lefèvre, 1993; Suppo, 2002.

40 Merkel, 2017, 134.

41 Merkel, 2020.

42 Angotti Salgueiro, 2021; Ferretti, 2014; Lira, 2021; Gemelli, 1995; Paris, 1999.

43 Heidemann, Iumatti, Seabra, 2008; Merkel, 2017.

44 Delfosse, 1998, 152.

that is, in the foundation of the Association of Brazilian Geographers (AGB) in 1934. Since its Fortaleza Congress in 1978,[45] the AGB has been one of the most important arenas for discussing critical and radical geographies in Brazil. In September 1934, it was founded at Deffontaines' house in Higienópolis (São Paulo) by four members, including the French geographer and Caio Prado Júnior. One of the closest collaborators of Deffontaines, and later of Monbeig, Prado would become a prominent Brazilian historian and sociologist. A member of the Communist Party, Prado was imprisoned in subsequent years under Getúlio Vargas's Estado Novo, an authoritarian regime initially inspired by European fascisms and which lasted from 1937 to 1945. According to Manoel Seabra, Prado was attracted by geography because it was then the academic discipline which offered the greatest possibility for "studying current realities".[46] After his student experience, Prado remained in touch with Monbeig, who evoked "our old AGB"[47] in his letters, and became a life-long friend of Pernambucan critical geographer Manuel Correia de Andrade.[48] To give an example on how eminent French scholars relied on their Brazilian counterparts, still in 1963 Monbeig wrote to Prado from Paris with a list of questions on one of his own research subjects, that is the "pioneer fringe" of the agricultural expansion from the Brazilian coast to the hinterlands, referred in that case to the Brazilian Northeast. On this matter, Monbeig consulted both Prado in São Paulo and Andrade in Recife, and their suggestions informed his works on the subject.[49]

It can be argued that French geographers were also intellectually indebted to Castro, who was Deffontaines's colleague at the Federal University in Rio de Janeiro and often wrote to the Recife geographer praising his early works on geographies of food as pioneering contributions to what Deffontaines deemed: "The most important problems of human geography".[50] Deffontaines expressed interest in the Brazilian Northeast analysed by Castro, defining it as: "One of the most extraordinary regions for studying human geography".[51] Dating from 1937, before Deffontaines' key works, such as his geographical monograph on Brazil which took into account Castro's contributions on the Northeast,[52] this correspondence exposes how Castro's work could have had some direct influence over Deffontaines' social geography. Deffontaines' 'social' approach was considered an original contribution within the French school of human geography, alongside works of another of Castro's correspondents, Max Sorre (1880-1962). Sorre's

45 Silva, 2016.

46 Seabra, 2008, 49.

47 São Paulo, Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros (hereafter IEB), CPJ-CP-MONB001, Monbeig to Caio Prado, 8 February 1941.

48 Andrade, 2008.

49 IEB, CPJ-CP-MONB002, Monbeig to Caio Prado, 23 October 1963.

50 *Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Coordenação-Geral de Estudos da História Brasileira* Acervo Josué de Castro (hereafter CEHIBRA), 582 Deffontaines to de Castro, 15 August 1937.

51 CEHIBRA, 582, Deffontaines to de Castro, 30 September 1937.

52 Deffontaines, 1940.

letters to Castro show that, even before the French translation of Castro's books on hunger, Sorre was aware of Castro's works in Portuguese[53] and that, like Deffontaines, he considered hunger a central theme for geography. The fact that, in France, this topic was deemed new when it was addressed by Sorre in his key work *Fondements de la géographie humaine* (published in 1952),[54] confirms the pioneer role that Castro's works played in the conscientisation of some French human geographers concerning the geographical study of matters such as food and poverty.

In the 1930s, from São Paulo, Monbeig repeatedly invited Castro to give speeches on the Northeast,[55] and especially on the *Mocambos*[56] (informal settlements mainly built by Afro-descendants or *caboclos*[57]) a politized subject that shows the progressive political characterisation of these exchanges. In 1937, despite their commitment to non-interference, French geographers such as Monbeig overtly complained about the authoritarian Vargas regime.[58] In Rio, historian Henri Hauser denounced a "true wave of obscurantism" which threatened academic freedom at the Federal University, in the context of a public opinion "mixing up sovietist communism with all expression of independent thinking".[59] During the Second World War, when the French embassy in Brazil represented the Vichy collaborationist regime and was directly boycotted by scholars such as Monbeig,[60] Brazilian universities became a place of refuge for anti-fascist intellectuals such as Bastide, who could not be prosecuted or forcedly repatriated given that he was serving the Brazilian government.[61]

A future colleague of Bastide, Febvre, and Braudel at the EPHE, Georges Gurvitch, considered a similar solution. A Russian naturalised French citizen, Gurvitch included Pierre-Joseph Proudhon among his authors of reference[62] and had to flee France during the Nazi occupation. Before finding sanctuary in the United States, he sought an appointment in Brazil. As Gurvitch confided in a letter to Bastide, this was "the sole hope [he] still ha[s] to continue teaching"[63] after a 1940 law removed all naturalized citizens from public service. Despite an invitation from Bastide to come to the USP in 1946, Gurvitch did not travel to Brazil until Freyre's invitation in 1952.[64] The anti-fascist commitment of several members of French university missions in Brazil is also shown by

53 CEHIBRA, 581, Sorre to de Castro, 14 December 1949.

54 Simon, 2021.

55 CEHIBRA, 574, Monbeig to de Castro, 1 June 1939.

56 CEHIBRA, 574, de Castro to Monbeig, n.d.

57 This (highly racialised) term indicates broadly a Brazilian of mixed ethnic origin, generally European and indigenous.

58 La Courneuve, Archives diplomatiques, Dossiers des Postes (hereafter AD), Dossier 444, Monbeig to Poirier, 15 November 1937.

59 AD, Dossier 443, Hauser to Monsieur le Recteur, 7 August 1936.

60 Angotti Salgueiro, 2021.

61 Ravelet, 2005.

62 Gurvitch, 1963.

63 Caen, Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine, Archives Roger Bastide (hereafter BST2), C1.02, Gurvitch to Bastide [1940 ?]

64 BST2, C1.02, Gurvitch to Bastide, 23 March 1946.

the correspondence between Lévi-Strauss and Bastide. Voluntarily exiled in the United States during the Vichy regime, when he was in danger due to his Jewish origins, Lévi-Strauss wrote to Bastide in 1944 to put together the names of some of the former university missions' members as collaborators for a collective publication, and to ask Bastide to greet all their "good friends in Brazil".[65] Importantly, after his return to France in 1954, Bastide likewise maintained strong links with USP scholars. These are shown by his numerous letters to former Director of São Paulo Public Instruction Fernando de Azevedo, giving news of colleagues such as Monbeig and Gurvitch from Paris[66] and stating his continuing aim of "making Brazil known and loved by the French".[67] Relations between USP and EPHE continued through one of Bastide's former students at USP, Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, who became a professor of sociology there in 1960 and regularly spent research periods in France.[68]

As a result of this networking, Brazilian geographer Paulo César Gomes discusses the cases of Monbeig and Bastide as examples of cross-cultural pollination because the Brazilian experience opened new horizons for their research agendas.[69] According to Héliana Angotti Salgueiro, the Brazilian sojourn was also paramount in Monbeig's anti-totalitarian political conscientisation during the Second World War.[70] Bastide even explicitly claimed his intellectual indebtedness with his Brazilian colleagues, defining Artur Ramos as an "inspiration".[71] These elements of context are essential for understanding the political and social relevance of the scholarly ideas that circulated in these complex networks. As I discuss below, these ideas included rescuing the notion of miscegenation from both racist views, which considered miscegenation as a "degeneration" of the "pure" race, and colonialist ideas of progressive assimilation. These scholars understood miscegenation as a tool for fighting racism, in association with cultural syncretism, a notion on which Bastide's works are still quoted and acknowledged by scholarship on Afro-Brazilian religions.[72] The political and scholarly outcomes of this networking would be later popularised by French scholars in their circles and by Josué de Castro worldwide.

65 BST2, C1.03, Lévi-Strauss to Bastide, 17 April 1944.
66 IEB, CP-Cx4, 69, Bastide to Azevedo, 8 December 1954.
67 IEB, CP-Cx4, 76, Bastide to Azevedo, 11 December 1957.
68 IEB, CP-Cx4, 85, Bastide to Azevedo, 23 December 1963.
69 Gomes, 2006, 223.
70 Angotti Salgueiro, 2021.
71 Gomes, 2006, 226.
72 Barba, 2020.

From networking to anti-racism

Castro and the radical Northeast

In this section, I show that this early networking was characterised by shared (politically and epistemologically) progressive views and contributed to the construction of non-racist and non-determinist ideas on the tropics, acknowledging the variety, plurality, and complexity of tropical regions. For that, it is first necessary to present the main actors of these networks, starting from the most famous, Josué de Castro. Born to a relatively humble Pernambucan family, Castro had an outstanding international career as a professor of geography in Recife, in Rio, and in Paris, as the president of the FAO from 1952 to 1956, as a diplomat and as a member of parliament in Brazil until his exile after the 1964 coup d'état. He reached planetary celebrity thanks to his books, which were published in about 25 languages and "sold around 400,000 copies up to the early 1960s".[73] Puzzlingly, Castro's very official recognition as a "geographer" was not straightforward in Brazil, given his early training as a medical doctor and the varied intellectual interests that inspired his work, from biology to sociology, from politics to narrative. Yet, he served for most of his career as a professor of geography, which led the most prestigious of Brazilian geographers, Castro's self-declared disciple Milton Santos, to protest against this disciplinary exclusion. Eventually, Santos suggested to his USP friend Florestan Fernandes that Castro's work be included in his book series on eminent Brazilian social scientists, arguing that "many of us did not consider (Castro) a geographer: serious mistake, to be corrected in our own interest".[74] Based in Rio since 1935, Castro was in touch with both Monbeig, Deffontaines and Bastide,[75] facilitating their contact with Brazilian colleagues such as Ramos for their respective scholarly endeavours.

One of Castro's most important acquaintances was Artur Ramos, who joined him at the Universidade do Brasil, where Ramos became the first chair of the Brazilian Society of Anthropology and Sociology.[76] Like Castro and Freyre, Ramos was a northeasterner, being born in the state of Alagoas, between Bahia and Pernambuco. To give an idea of the importance of this place of origin, it was in Alagoas that the most famous *quilombo* (community of rebel slaves) in Brazil's history, Palmares, was located.[77] First educated in a positivistic environment, Ramos defended a thesis on "Insanity and crime"[78] and then developed an interest in racial discrimination that was the focus of his work *O negro brasileiro* [The Brazilian Black][79] and which broke with racist stereotypes that were still deployed by his predecessors, including Raimundo Nina Rodrigues (1862-1906). In this

73 Amorim, 2018, 3.

74 IEB, MS-RS83-040, Carta de Milton Santos a Florestan Fernandes, 21 May 1983.

75 Ferretti, 2021b.

76 CEHIBRA, 349, "Organizada a sociedade brasileira de antropología e etnología", *Diario da noite*, 16 June 1941.

77 Schwarcz, Gomes, 2018.

78 BST2, C2.01 Ramos to Bastide, 21 May 1938.

79 Ramos, 1934.

work, written in the 1930s, Ramos placed responsibility on the "avid and exploiting Whites" who carried out the slave trade, criticising paternalistic literature, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which expressed a disappointing compassion for a "race that a false logic deemed inferior".[80] For Ramos, "white piety" could only produce caricatures of Black people, like those "Indianist lamentations" which did not investigate the causes and responsibilities of genocide. For Ramos, it was time to get rid of the 'nasty … colour line'.[81] Ramos's works were an inspiration for Bastide in considering the creative role that miscegenation and syncretism played in shaping Brazilian cultures.

The political affinity between Castro and Ramos was not extraneous to their common friendship with Afrânio Peixoto, the first President of the Federal University in 1935, who was soon removed due to his ideas on education, which were considered as too progressive and democratic by the Estado Novo.[82] The author of an enthusiastic preface to Castro's book *A alimentação brasileira à luz da geografia humana* (*Brazilian Nutrition in the Light of Human Geography*), Peixoto argued that Castro's work revealed the existence of "an anthropology of the rich and one of the poor"[83] through the study of the nutritional issues of a "people of fasters".[84] He always remained on friendly terms with Castro, however:[85] when Ramos was nominated chair of anthropology in 1946, Castro gave the welcome speech on behalf of the academic staff, and Peixoto was in attendance.[86] In 1947, Castro and Ramos participated together in a political campaign to protest against the banning of the Communist Party in Brazil. Although they were neither communists nor Marxists, they expressed indignation for an act they deemed "aberrant and unworthy of a democratic country",[87] instead proclaiming the need for freedom of thought and political organisation. On that occasion, Ramos spoke of "the abominable times of the Security Tribunal",[88] which was one of the instruments of repression and political control used by Getúlio Vargas's regime.

As for Castro, several authors have noted that the Brazilian geographer's attitude towards Vargas' politics was ambivalent, as he led public institutes during the Estado Novo and supported Vargas' "democratic" return to power from 1951 to 1954 due to the latter's promises in terms of enhancing the welfare state thorough state-led social reforms.[89] However, it can be argued that he was opposed to the most authoritarian aspects of the Vargas regime. In Recife, Castro strongly opposed the politics of local

80 Ramos, 2007, 730.
81 *Ibid.*, 731.
82 Machado, 2009.
83 Peixoto, 1937, 9.
84 *Ibid.*, 12.
85 CEHIBRA, 584, Peixoto to Castro, 18 March 1938.
86 CEHIBRA, 1, "Catedrático da faculdade de filosofia", Folha Carioca, 15 June 1946.
87 CEHIBRA, 1, "Copia grosseira de um relatório policial", *A tribuna popular*, 12 March 1947.
88 CEHIBRA, 1, "Copia grosseira".
89 Amorim, 2018.

Vargas' lieutenant Agamenon Magalhães, whose "proto-fascist administration [...] launched the Liga Social Contra o Mocambo [Social League Against the *Mocambo*]".[90] Castro fiercely opposed the league, defending the *mocambo* dwellers by countering what Davies defines as: "A discourse of erasure based on racially inflected hygienist pretexts of public health".[91] It is noteworthy that a prestigious Castro follower, Manuel Correia de Andrade, was arrested as a political opponent both in 1944 during the Estado Novo, and in 1964 after the military coup.[92] According to Andrade's recollections, Freyre also took part in early anti-Vargas leftist movements before turning conservative. Andrade has made a direct comparison between these two authoritarian moments of Brazilian history: "The Estado Novo was not a joke ... it was like the military dictatorship".[93] In this political context, the Northeast was a key place for the elaboration of critical Brazilian social thinking that became increasingly radicalized, shifting from Freyre's representation of the *Nordeste* region as an almost paradisiac land to the elaboration of the "problem-region" by engaged intellectuals such as Castro, Andrade, and Celso Furtado, all victims of the dictatorship's repression.

In 1948, Castro was appointed editor of the book series *Problèmes d'écologie tropicale* [Problems of Tropical Ecology] by the French publisher Hermann. The first two titles that Castro included were Ramos' *Le métissage au Brésil* [Miscegenation in Brazil][94] and his own work *L'alimentation, facteur technique d'acclimatation dans les tropiques* (*Nutrition, a Technical Factor of Acclimatation in Tropics*).[95] While Castro's book was not published in French and only some incomplete drafts survive in the archives, the Brazilian scholar also invited Bastide to contribute to the series.[96] The political and scholarly relevance of this friendship can be seen in Castro's comments on the posthumous publication of Ramos' book, whose author had suddenly died in 1949 in Paris, where he served at the UNESCO offices and acted as a liaison with French intellectuals on Castro's behalf.[97] Castro announced that the "tropical" book series would have been dedicated to works on: "The human (geographical, anthropological, economic, social) problems of the world's tropical regions".[98] It was expected to pursue "a truly scientific knowledge" of those areas' problems, whose understanding had been "deturpated by all kind of prejudices".[99] For Castro, such problems "cannot be addressed any longer

90 Davies, 2019a, 94.

91 *Ibid*.

92 Ferretti, 2019.

93 Andrade, 2008, 177.

94 Ramos, 1952.

95 CEHIBRA, 303, Castro to Freyman, 1 June 1948.

96 BST2, C1.01, Castro to Bastide 30 December 1947.

97 Rio de Janeiro, Fundação Biblioteca Nacional, Correspondência Artur Ramos (hereafter CAR), Ramos to Castro, 12 September 1949.

98 CEHIBRA, 8, J. Castro, "Problemas de ecologia tropical", *Diário de Notícias*, 17 February 1952.

99 CEHIBRA, 8, Castro, "Problemas".

through the empiricism of the determinists who always saw in miscegenation a factor of degeneration and in the tropical climates an irremovable obstacle to the creation of a superior culture".[100] For that reason, Castro asked Ramos to deliver "a work on the problems of miscegenation in Brazil, considering that the concept of race should be definitively extirpated with scientific arguments, and the tropics constitute one of the most active laboratories of human turmoil in the world".[101] The shared anti-racist and anti-determinist ideas of Castro, Ramos, and Bastide are clearly shown in these documents, and the Northeast was a key place for the elaboration of these shared ideas.

Castro, Bastide and Ramos: sharing anti-racism

According to Castro, the area that was defined as "tropical" included "different varieties of climates, that result in different types of natural vegetation through their respective landscapes".[102] The Brazilian geographer commented sarcastically on the traditional cartographic representations of so-called tropical regions, arguing that this part of the world "cannot be uniformly delimited by an abstract line, like a landscape which is expressly painted and placed in a rigid wooden frame".[103] Crucially, in Castro's views, tropicalism and scientific racism were connected, and had to be equally challenged to avoid "the mistake or the bad faith of racist concepts about alleged racial superiorities, or the naïve and archaic idea of climatic determinism".[104] Castro's beliefs that the advancement of rational "science" would get rid of these prejudices undoubtedly proved to be naïve, but what is crucial here is to understand how this tropical anti-racism was elaborated and networked, and how it influenced progressive European views.

After Bastide's arrival in Brazil in 1938, Castro and Bastide corresponded extensively on matters of Afro-Brazilian studies. The two men also discussed Castro's *Fisiologia dos tabus* (*Physiology of Taboos*) on cultures of food in Brazil,[105] as Bastide shared this interest in Afro-Brazilian cuisine.[106] Based in São Paulo, Bastide asked his new friend if it was possible "to visit a *terreiro* [a place for the celebration of Afro-Brazilian religions] and perhaps to attend a *macumba*?"[107] Before adding: "If so, could you be my guide, as you are so well versed in African topics?"[108] Castro endeavoured to arrange Bastide's visit with Artur Ramos and announced that this journey through Afro-Brazilian religions would take place "in Niteroí [near Rio] where we will find something more authentic,

100 *Ibid*.
101 *Ibid*.
102 Castro, 1946, 14.
103 *Ibid*., 13.
104 *Ibid*., 15.
105 BST2, C1.01, Castro to Bastide, 4 August 1938.
106 Bastide, 1952.
107 In Brazil, this word is popularly used to define various kind of rites characterising Afro-Brazilian religions.
108 CEHIBRA, 584, Bastide to Castro, 10 August 1938.

more Afro-Brazilian than here in the Institute".[109] While it is not clear what exactly Castro's ideas of "purity" and "authenticity" were, what the Brazilians proposed to their French guest was something closer to the contemporary idea of ethnographic fieldwork than traditional "armchair" ethnography. This is a further demonstration of how French scholars were not only "teachers", but also students the works of their Brazilian fellows from the very foundations of their interest in Afro-Brazilian matters.

A 1939 letter from Castro to Bastide explains the "pre-history" of the Institute of Nutrition that the Brazilian geographer would establish in Rio in the 1940s. "The Federal Government decided to create a central service of alimentation, charging me with its direction. I am to chair this new service, through which I will be able to carry out research over the whole national territory".[110] Confirming the depth of their collaboration and mutual trust, Castro advised Bastide to do fieldwork in the Northeast for his research on Afro-Brazilian sociology, a suggestion the French scholar effectively followed:

> Your plan for thoroughly studying the Black family in Brazil seems to me of exceptional importance. So far, nothing has been done in the way of research and direct observation. This study will certainly reveal a lot of obscure matters in our cultural structure. However, I don't think that you can accomplish this work though indirect information [but] only by direct inquiry in Black zones, in urban centres like Bahia and Recife. Few people have looked at the *mocambos* from inside, beyond the picturesque. [You can] start to see the problem from a new perspective.[111]

On these matters, and also thanks to Castro's advice, Bastide immediately became a reference for the Francophone world, as shown by his 1939 correspondences with Léopold Sédar Senghor, then a young *agrégé* (high school teacher) at the Lycée Marcelin-Berthelot near Paris. The famous exponent of the Negritude movement and future president of an independent Senegal wrote to Bastide asking for his collaboration with a special issue of the journal *Cahiers du Sud* that was titled *Negra*,[112] on the "problem of Black culture in the contemporary world (...) rather than on Black legacies"[113] indicating a clear political interest beyond the mere anthropological curiosity. Amazingly, in his quest for contributions on Afro-Brazilian matters, Senghor wrote to Bastide that someone "recommended that I ask one Gilberto Freyre from Pernambuco. Yet I thought that you are still the most qualified [...] to write some pages in this sense".[114] This reinforces the idea that the early engagement of scholars such as Bastide, Castro,

109 BST2, C1.01, Castro to Bastide, 7 September 1938.
110 BST2, C1.01, Castro to Bastide, 11 July 1939.
111 BST2, C1.01, Castro to Bastide, 11 July 1939.
112 BST2, C2.01, Senghor to Bastide, 7 February 1939.
113 BST2, C2.01, Senghor to Bastide, 12 April 1939.
114 BST2, C2.01, Senghor to Bastide, 2 May 1939.

and Ramos with Afro-Brazilian matters inspired the anti-racist ideas that emerged in their scholarly output, especially Castro's work on the geography of hunger, overtaking Luso-tropicalist narratives.

As he did with Castro, Bastide also extensively corresponded with Ramos, whom he contacted during his first months in Brazil, expressing enthusiasm for French-Brazilian cultural exchanges[115] and for the project of an "Afro-Brazilian museum".[116] Bastide informed Ramos of his need for a local mentor (in addition to Castro) to enter the field of Afro-Brazilian studies, about which he had become increasingly passionate since his time in Rio. He wrote: "Reading your books has further reinforced my passion for the subject. Only, in the world of Afro-American things, a guide is needed and, if you don't mind [...] it would be a great honour for me."[117] Initially trained as a medical doctor like Castro, it was in studying Black communities in the state of Bahia that Ramos was able to reflect on some religious phenomena that were formerly considered as psychopathological states, "enlarg[ing] the field of [his] research to sociology and anthropology, culture, social history".[118] In the following decade, Bastide and Ramos continued to correspond extensively, exchanging materials[119] and commenting on each other's work, including *O negro brasileiro*, a book that was highly appreciated by Bastide,[120] who remained very keen to take Ramos' advice after enthusiastically returning from the northeastern fieldwork suggested by Castro.[121] He even expressed his wish for a possible move to the University of Rio to collaborate more closely with Ramos (and perhaps also with Castro).[122]

Another acquaintance that Bastide made on the occasion of his Northeast fieldwork was Luis da Camara Cascudo (1898-1986), from Natal (Rio Grande do Norte), the great expert on popular traditions in the Northeast including the *literatura de cordel*.[123] Cascudo had also been Castro's friend and correspondent since the 1930s, and the three men shared an interest in food as an important feature of the processes of syncretism involving indigenous or Black legacies in Brazilian culture. Cascudo's philological rigour was precious in dissipating some of the more romantic ideas of his correspondents, such as Bastide's hypothesis that the *desafío* (a public challenge between folksingers in rhymed responses which was very popular in the Northeast) had African origins, which was not the case, as Cascudo demonstrated that the genre had clear Iberian origins.[124]

115 CAR, Bastide to Ramos, 26 May 1939.
116 CAR, Bastide to Ramos, 20 September 1938.
117 CAR, Bastide to Ramos, 20 July 1938.
118 BST2, C2.01 Ramos to Bastide, 1 August 1938.
119 CAR, Bastide to Ramos, 18 August 1941.
120 CAR, Bastide to Ramos, 5 September 1940.
121 CAR, Bastide to Ramos, 20 February 1944.
122 CAR, Bastide to Ramos, 23 March 1947.
123 Natal, Instituto Câmara Cascudo (hereafter ICC), Bastide to Cascudo, 4 February 1942.
124 ICC, Bastide to Cascudo, 26 November 1942.

Cascudo collaborated on the iconography of Bastide's work *O Nordeste místico* which followed the latter's northeastern fieldwork.[125] The letters that Bastide sent to Cascudo, preserved at the Ludovicus Institute in Natal, demonstrate that their correspondence continued when Bastide returned to France.

With Castro, Cascudo discussed ideas for collaboration, especially related to *Fisiologia dos tabus* and a planned "collaborative study" merging their respective skills in "biology" and "ethnology", whose title would have been: "A short history of Brazilian cuisine".[126] To this end, Cascudo exposed his ideas on "a geography of Brazilian myths including 'indigenous' and 'African' geographies",[127] listing as future projects: "Indigenous myths; African myths; Portuguese myths; Formation of Brazilian myths; Geography of Brazilian myths".[128] The latter was indeed the title of one of his most successful books, providing a regional description of the spread of (often syncretic) myths across the regions of the country. Castro corresponded extensively with Cascudo, relating a tour of São Luiz, the capital of the northeastern state of Maranhão, likewise a cradle of Afro-Brazilian communities,[129] and commenting on "this Northeast, which [did] not cease to seduce [him]"[130].

In 1949, when Ramos moved to Paris to serve as the Chair of the UNESCO Social Sciences Department,[131] Bastide put him in touch with some of his progressive friends, including Gurvitch.[132] From Paris, the Brazilian intellectual wrote to Bastide to share projects including a possible UNESCO involvement in constituting on an International Institute of Afro-American Studies,[133] but his premature death undermined these plans. Following Peter Fry, Bastide's Brazilian biographer Fernanda Peixoto notes how Bastide "became African in Brazil",[134] highlighting the importance of empathy for scholars dealing with racialized and marginalised communities. Peixoto also notes that Bastide continued Ramos' work in the 1950s, contributing to UNESCO research on racial relations alongside his former student Florestan Fernandes.[135]

As discussed by Merkel,[136] Fernandes was a staunch critic of Luso-tropicalist paternalism. It is worth noting that Fernandes was a victim of political repression during the military dictatorship which ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985 and that he remained

125 BST2, C1.01, Cascudo to Bastide, 3 August 1946.
126 ICC, Castro to Cascudo, 30 October 1937.
127 CEHIBRA, 574, Cascudo to Castro, 22 January 1938.
128 CEHIBRA, 584, Cascudo to Castro, 22 January 1938.
129 ICC, Castro to Cascudo, 19 April 1939.
130 ICC, Castro to Cascudo, 28 June 1948.
131 BST2, C2.01, Ramos to Bastide, 27 July 1949.
132 CAR, Bastide to Ramos, 29 July 1949.
133 BST2, C2.01 Ramos to Bastide, 23 August 1949.
134 Peixoto, 2000, 126.
135 *Ibid*.
136 Merkel, 2020.

in touch with Bastide in those years. In 1971, while in Toronto to teach political economy, Fernandes wrote to an elderly Bastide that urgent action was needed from Brazilian intellectuals to "start forcing the situation, compelling the government to give more liberties in the field of social sciences".[137] Fernandes expressed his intention to go back to São Paulo, despite his concerns for his financial situation after the loss of his job at USP due to his "communist" political ideas. Bastide responded by expressing his solidarity, but warned Fernandes about the risks of such a return, given "the [political] climate there".[138] This correspondence shows how Bastide, who was then retired and would pass away in 1974, was still carrying out his activities with an eye to Brazil, in connection with the Brazilian friends and colleagues of his 1938-1954 university mission. Some of these friends became very prominent in making known non-racist and non-determinist ideas of tropicality. This was the case with Castro, whose works on tropical food were influential in both French and Brazilian circles and fundamental in forming a basis for his later works of international renown, as I discuss in the next section.

Tropical anti-racism

In the 1930s and 1940s, Castro developed what Archie Davies calls a "tropical geography [that] is very different from the determinist tenor of much Northern tropical geography".[139] Davies shows how Castro, although respectful of contemporary authorities in tropical geography such as Gourou, built an "anti-colonialist idea of human metabolism".[140] In this section, I deal with some of Castro's early writings that explicitly address tropicality as a foundation for anti-racist claims, and which constituted one of the main bases for the scholarly and political transnational networking reconstructed above: that is, the mobilisation of "science" for anti-racist purposes. While this had eminent precedents, as noted above, Castro's work remains part of a Copernican Revolution in the perspectives of tropical scholarship, which is especially relevant if we consider that it was mostly elaborated in the South, by Southern scholars and by some Northern colleagues temporarily based in the South.

Starting in his early writings, Castro distanced himself from idyllic Luso-tropicalist views of slavery by stressing the brutality with which African slaves were "extirpated from their lands".[141] He invited those who dealt with notions of race to consider how, at that moment, especially in Europe, "the concept of race is deturpated [...] by racist

137 BST2, C1.02, Fernandes to Bastide, 24 September 1971.
138 BST2, C1.02, Bastide to Fernandes, 10 November 1971.
139 Davies, 2019a, 138.
140 Davies, 2019b.
141 Castro, 1959a, 32

propaganda".[142] Castro rejected the idea of a "pure race",[143] given that miscegenation had gotten rid "of the myth of racial purity. It is only by ignorance or bad faith that anyone can speak of pure race today, contracting hierarchies of superior and inferior races on these grounds".[144] This arguably inspired Bastide's works on African religions, where it was argued that miscegenation had always been a feature of human history, including in the definition of French cultural roots. For Bastide, miscegenation, understood as the end of prejudices around the colour line, was "the good fortune and the future of Brazil".[145]

An especially relevant document is a book drawing on papers from two conferences that Castro gave in Rome and Naples in 1939 during an official mission to Italy on behalf of the Brazilian government. It was later published in Italian as *Alimentazione e acclimatazione umana nei tropici* [*Nutrition and Human Acclimatation in the Tropics*].[146] Although most of this book's arguments are also discussed in other works by Castro, such as *La alimentación en los trópicos* [*Nutrition in the Tropics*][147] and "Alimentação e aclimatação" ["Nutrition and Acclimatation"],[148] the specific context in which Castro's speeches took place help us to understand the political significance of his endeavours. Fascist Italy had just formalised its infamous "Racial Laws" of 1938, which declared racism an official doctrine of the state following the example of Nazi Germany. While Jews began to be banned or marginalised, all non-White and "non-Arian" peoples were classified as irredeemably "inferior". A reader who is familiar with Italian history would inevitably receive the impression that Castro was allowed to develop certain arguments only because he was a foreign guest, and because he spoke in a strictly academic context. In all the Italian public libraries, only two copies of this book survive, showing that it probably had very limited circulation.

While Castro started his conferences in rather canonical terms, explaining how "the acclimatation of the White man",[149] was a problem for colonisation, he then introduced some critical remarks on the very idea of colonial conquest, arguing that the sole colonisation worthy of this name was that "of population".[150] Yet Castro was a far cry from common eulogies of settler colonialism given that he also denounced how, in Australia, British settlers had "exterminated all indigenous elements".[151] While this anti-British note may not have been unpopular among his audience of Italian fascist intellectuals,

142 *Ibid*., 99.
143 *Ibid*., 44.
144 Castro, 1959b, 45.
145 Ravelet, 2005, 2.
146 Castro, 1939.
147 Castro, 1946.
148 In Castro, 1959a [1936].
149 Castro, 1939, 9.
150 *Ibid*.
151 *Ibid*., 11.

Castro's remarks on the need for a "tropicalization" allowing settlers to take up the habits of tropical peoples were seemingly more puzzling to them. Furthermore, Castro's remarks on Portuguese anthropological studies arguing that the better adaptation to the tropics of Mediterranean (and especially Iberian) people in relation to the "Nordics" occurred because Mediterranean people can be considered as "Negroids [...] given their past promiscuity with African elements"[152] doubtlessly sounded quite scandalous to some fans of the "pure Arian race".

However, this was not Castro's main argument. While the "Mediterraneans" did better than the Dutch or the Anglo-Saxon in settling the tropics, as already argued by Freyre, Castro further contended that this was not due to physiological, that is racial, reasons, but to reasons of "cultural and technical"[153] character. These reasons included Mediterranean habits related to "food, clothes, and style of work".[154] For Castro, a Mediterranean lifestyle was closer to what he considered to be the correct dietary and hygienic behaviours to insure human health within tropical climates. While Castro denied any direct action of climate on human societies, that is environmental determinism, he admitted some influence of general "mesological conditions",[155] which should be investigated, taking into account the complexity and diversity of tropical environments in conditions such as humidity, exosystemic equilibria and social structures. This way, Castro contradicted common assertions of biological racism, given that his arguments were based on empirical research, including a survey that had been recently carried out in Recife and Rio de Janeiro. This research showed that the "basic metabolism in the tropical regions"[156] was lower than in other climates, due not only to temperature but to other variables such as humidity, which encouraged perspiration and thus enabled bodies to manage corporeal heat. Crucially, Castro's research showed that this phenomenon did not depend on "race", because samples of "Blacks" and "Whites" had shown similar changes in their respective caloric needs under similar climatic conditions: metabolism varied with place, rather than with "race".[157] For Castro, physical characteristics of certain parts of population that were considered as markers of "deficiency" or "inferiority", and were "formerly attributed to ethnic factors and racial fatalities, are only direct consequences of bad conditions of hygiene and, mainly, of bad alimentation... this is not a racial disease: it is the disease of hunger".[158]

This led Castro to discuss another key point of his social tropicalism. That is, the need to know the nutritional needs of each individual under different climates to

152 *Ibid*.
153 *Ibid*., 12.
154 *Ibid*., 13.
155 *Ibid*., 14.
156 *Ibid*., 19.
157 CEHIBRA 144, "L'alimentation tropicale".
158 Castro, 1946, 150.

understand the working of the "human machine"[159] and its need for different "fuel" in tropical circumstances. This contradicted classical arguments from environmental determinists who assumed that most tropical regions were characterised by intrinsic poverty and "backwardness". This presaged an important argument in Castro's later geographies of hunger: that is, the existence of "qualitative hunger" within a "gamut of hungers". For Castro, human metabolism does not only require a minimum amount of food in quantitative terms, but also a complete nutritional experience including specific needs in carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals. Thus, some of the most devastating food crises in Brazil, such as beriberi during the "rubber rush" in Amazonia, were due to "qualitative hungers", such as the lack of vitamins entailed by the exclusive consumption of canned food. This could have been easily avoided with more nutritional information and education, given that such "qualitative hunger" did not only affect the "poor", but also people who could purchase all the food they needed. Indeed, Castro considered continuous under-nutrition as more pernicious than outbreaks of "acute" hunger.[160]

These essays in tropical alimentation, were conceived as an introduction to Castro's future work, that is, "*The Geography of Hunger*, where, using the geographical method, I will address [hunger] in its universal expression, trying an ecological inquiry to discover the innumerable causes of the natural and cultural kind which occur in the characteristics and manifestations of alimentation in the different tropical regions of the earth".[161] While *Geografia da fome* (1946), dedicated to hunger in Brazil, did not have huge international circulation, *Geopolítica da fome* (1951), dedicated to world-wide hunger, was influential also because it was translated into several languages. In this book, Castro joked about some of the contradictions between the alleged poverty of the tropics and their empirical realities: "Tropical soils [...] are among the richest in the world so far as iron is concerned, but the diets of tropical countries are generally very low in this mineral".[162] Therefore, it was not "nature", but social and political mistakes which led to scarcity. The book scientifically refuted the idea of "tropical laziness", that was classically associated with assumptions of racial inferiority, or to the influence of climates, which were both used as a pretext for White colonisation in tropical lands. For Castro, "the celebrated tropical apathy is a myth",[163] phenomena which, on closer examination, generally reveal themselves to be simply effects of hunger or of incorrect diet. With regards to diet, Castro challenged Luso-tropicalist ideas that the slaves were well fed by the plantations' masters. For Castro, this food was monotonous and lacked

159 Castro, 1939, 29.
160 Castro, 1977.
161 Castro, 1946, 12.
162 Castro, 1977, 100.
163 *Ibid*., 141.

vitamins and minerals: "The slave's diet was bulky, but it was always bad".[164] Conversely, Castro argued that blaming miscegenation as a sort of "degeneration" meant also neglecting the fundamental contribution that Afro-Brazilian traditions gave to Brazilian nutrition, a point where Castro's arguments strongly resonated with Cascudo's, Ramos' and Bastide's scholarship. According to Castro, the Black slave "has been the true creative force of our agriculture and contributed to our food resources. Moreover, he brought with him certain customs, especially the abundant use of palm oil [which] contributed to saving entire human groups from avitaminosis".[165] In particular, Castro defended the traditional cuisine of the Afro-Brazilian communities in Bahia, which was often considered unhealthy, claiming that it contained plenty of vitamins and other essential alimentary contents.

The fact that the colonisers ignored the specific nutritional value of various plants in different climates challenged both ideas on tropical "scarcity" and some stereotypes on the superiority of the civilised. According to Castro, in Brazil, several indigenous tribes did not suffer from qualitative hunger as they found plenty of minerals, salts and vitamins eating roots and rough vegetables, while the civilisers' habit of cooking everything was responsible for a progressive and pernicious "demineralisation"[166] of the human diet. In this sense, Castro deemed medical knowledge essential , to "identify sickness from nutritional deficiencies"[167] and preventing alimentary crises. Finally, Castro noticed how the spontaneous habits of indigenous peoples of working naked or almost-naked favoured work under tropical climates, while the cultural imposition of working completely dressed resulted in the "acclimatation" difficulties of most settlers. This was part of the process through which "civilised peoples led primitive peoples to destruction under the pretext of civilising them",[168] including "massacre[s] accomplished in the name of civilisation" by the imposition of "anti-hygienic costumes".[169] For Castro, the colonial nature of hunger dated to the imposition of latifundium by the early Portuguese colonisers in the Northeast of Brazil starting in the 16th century. "Portuguese settlers busied themselves only with [sugarcane] cultivation. Sugarcane's large-scale monoculture almost destroyed the natural covering of the region, completely upsetting its the ecological equilibrium and rendering impossible the plantation of other edible plants there. That is, it became a degrading factor in that region's alimentation."[170]

164 *Ibid*., 386.
165 Castro, 1946, 129.
166 Castro, 1939, 37
167 *Ibid*., 39
168 *Ibid*., 48
169 *Ibid*.
170 Castro, 1946, 136.

Recalling and reinterpreting elements of the classical French School of human geography and especially from Vidal de la Blache, such as the notion of "techniques" which potentially free humans "from the oppressing action of the environment"[171] and that of the *genres de vie*, Castro showed that ways of life were the crucial point in "acclimatation", rather than biological "race". "Through the scientific and rational use of the different technical factors of acclimatation, all people can adapt themselves to tropical climates".[172] While tropical exceptionality was a long-lasting pillar of European science, Castro's studies shattered this exceptionalism, showing international audiences that acclimatation was a cultural (and political) matter rather than an environmental or biological one.

From a medical standpoint, Castro explicitly challenged the idea that some nutritional deficiencies or pathologies that were observed in the tropics could be "the ineluctable result of alleged racial inferiorities and of the ruthless determinism of ecological conditions that were detrimental to the development of the human species in those regions".[173] The uncritical acceptance of these stereotypes paralleled "the colonial politics of the countries that were then the masters of the tropics, because it usefully attributed to natural factors the responsibility for the biological misery of those populations that their cruel system of exploitation worsened".[174] While the tropics were "the overwhelming source of the raw materials"[175] that served to create the industrial prosperity of the colonising countries, Castro's social tropicalism fostered a plan for the tropics to become the protagonists, starting from the public policies he proposed for Brazil, such as enriching or dehydrating certain foods and other targeted solutions. Instrumental to Castro's political networking,[176] the Rio Institute of Nutrition was founded by acknowledging the need to deal with "our special geographical conditions as an equatorial/tropical country".[177]

Beyond Brazil, this endeavour should be understood in the context of Castro's wider international social engagement which had to include "a message of hope for the other tropical peoples of the globe. … This project ceases to be a mere national campaign, to become an international crusade for rescuing the tropical man".[178] Therefore, the redemption of the tropics from colonial and neo-colonial exploitation should parallel an epistemological rupture in which the tropics "add […] to European science".[179] This addition was something more than a simple "disturbance": it was

171 *Ibid*., 17
172 Castro, 1959a, 44.
173 *Ibid*., 71.
174 *Ibid*.
175 *Ibid*.
176 Davies, 2019a.
177 Castro, 1948, I.
178 Castro, 1959a, 76-77
179 CEHIBRA, 144, "L'alimentation tropicale".

the disruption of an entire mindset based on empirical findings that contradicted "high theory", which also resonate with decolonial arguments about learning from grassroots movements and concrete situations rather than applying euro-centric theories.[180] Given his concurrent dialogues on matters of hunger with French scholars such as Bastide, Sorre, and Deffontaines as noted above, one can add social geographies of hunger to the contributions through which Castro inspired Northern social scientists without always being duly acknowledged, as already noted by Tânia Magno and Archie Davies concerning his year at Vincennes University on the subjects of critical geopolitics and development.[181]

Conclusion: beyond 'French-Brazilian exchanges'

In discussing a neglected intellectual experience that shattered colonial and Euro-centric notions that were considered "scientific" and are still mobilised in debates about "development",[182] this paper has shown the importance of contextual and spatially-sensitive readings of the history of ideas to understand their political significance in specific situations. In the context of the establishment of a Brazilian "tropicalist" scholarship in the period that goes broadly from 1930 to 1950, it is worth noting that the Luso-tropicalist ideas of Freyre had not yet been used in the imperial propaganda of the Portuguese empire under Salazar and were still considered progressive, disrupting mainstream White readings of Brazilian history. Freyre himself was still considered "a left-wing man"[183] before he began to serve the Brazilian dictatorship.[184] This explains why intellectuals such as Ramos, Castro and Bastide, although critical of Freyre, still referenced his works as a step towards rescuing the memory of slavery and the African diaspora in Brazil.

The transnational and politically progressive networking of these intellectuals, which started around (and partially independently from) the French university missions in Brazil, and which continued on after it with editorial endeavours and international organisations, show how alternative ideas on tropicalism were grounded in common interests for racialised or marginalised communities around food, metabolism, popular culture and African legacies, especially in the Brazilian Northeast. Another point in common between the works of Castro, Ramos and Bastide was their interest in food as a material expression of cultures of syncretism and miscegenation, where it became another element for countering racist theories on "pure" races and cultures which contaminated international geographical scholarship during the first half of the

180 Mignolo, Escobar, 2010.
181 Davies, 2019a; Magno, 2012.
182 Power, 2019.
183 Andrade, 2008, 176.
184 Merkel, 2020.

20th century, as discussed above. Especially in the case of Castro, this translated into a scholarly and political commitment against world hunger.

While the international success of Castro's books made him the most influential figure among the scholars whose works are discussed here, recent scholarship has shown how his "French connection", which started in the 1930s around the university missions, was also one of the reasons for his editorial success in the French-speaking world and for his establishment in Paris as an exile starting in 1964.[185] These early challenges to some racist and determinist features of European science around tropicality make it possible to extend current literature on post-colonial and (post)tropical geography and reinforce ideas that geographical and spatial readings of social realities are a powerful instrument for political critique and social change.

185 Ferretti, 2021a.

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