

Cosi, Euê: Singing the Orishas Translated Into Voice of Maria Bethânia

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Abstract

The Afro-Brazilian religions suffer great prejudice in Brazil, although internalized through textbooks the miscegenation of the three races forming the Brazilian ethnic groups, the Indians, the Europeans, and black Africans. This paper aims to highlight the culture of Afro-Brazilian religions, focusing on Candoblé, taking the music as a religious element, using the repertoire of the singer, Maria Bethânia, principal artist in the national scene to value the African and Indigenous arrays, evoking the Orishas, animals and plants, contributing to the demystification and withdrawal from marginality these expressions of religiosity and faith.

Keywords: Religious syncretism, Candomblé, Brazilian Popular Music

1. Introduction

*Quem é você e o que faz por aqui
Eu guardo a luz das estrelas
A alma de cada folha Sou Aron*

(Gerônimo/Ildário Tavares – CD Memória da pele)

Blacks and Indians, it is impossible to think of Brazil without these two origins, their brands being inserted on the physical constitution of Brazil and in its culture, standing out music and religion, and including other dimensions such as language, cuisine, aesthetics and social structure, the presence and the diversity of the black contribution is highlighted and are recorded in the Afro-Brazilian religions (PRANDI, 2005), when all ceremonials are danced and singed at the sounds of atabaques (PRANDI, 1996a, 1996b).

Sociological and anthropological literature on the Afro-Brazilian religious, especially Candomblé, is being treated as a manifestation of the Black culture or of the Black populations, mainly in the Northeast part of Brazil, and mostly in the state of Bahia (CAMARGO et al., 1973). Maria Bethânia, a Brazilian artist, demystifies this assumptions when she makes use of her voice to spread out her faith shared by many Brazilians, hitting with her singing a heterogeneous portion of the Brazilian population that buy her albums, listen to her music and intone her chants to the African gods (BRASIL & SANTOS; 2012).

Iconic representative of the Brazilian Popular Music, the performer makes use of her artistic and cultural influence in order to the appraise the religiosity of Candomblé, evoking in a conscious way its deities, and even in a didactical manner, once in several snippets of her chants there are appositional explanations of the Orishas, exemplified at the beginning of each chapter of this paper.

Taking into consideration that the chants are instrument to update the identity of the saints in their sacred-yards from the elements of everyday life, this paper aims to characterize these entities in the songs of Brazilian composers, performed by spiritual daughter of Oiá Iansã, Maria Bethânia Vianna Telles Veloso, throughout her musical journey.

2. Music: textual gender and identity trace

*Oxum, deusa das águas, Sereia,
Cantora,
Rainha,
Reges a minha garganta
De onde nasce esse som
Te oferto perfumes e flores
Por teres me dado esse dom.*

(Alexandre Leão / Olival Mattos – CD Memória da pele)

Maria Bethânia, inside her amalgam of singer-personality-being, represents what is understandable as an example of popular culture entity, as a person daughter in a common, although cultured family, dweller in the hinterlands of the Northeast part of Brazil, God-fearer and practitioner of the dominant religion, the Apostolic Catholicism of her mother, who nowadays declares herself to belong to Keto's Candomblé (BRAZIL &

SANTOS, 2012).

She could not be other ways. Since before she was born she has had her name committed to the music by her brother, Caetano Veloso, who has asked his parents, Seu Zezinho and Dona Canô, to put the name of a great success of Nelson Gonçalves, the bolero song “Maria Bethânia” of Capiba, on a girl born on June 18th, 1946 (JARDIM, 2008).

As a teenager, she had music and theater invading permanently her life: replacing Nara Leão, at 18; taking part of the beginning of the Bossa Nova genre, together with Joao Gilberto, Tom Jobim and Vinícius de Moraes, and becoming an integrant of the dance troupe Os Doces Bárbaros, with Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil e Gal Costa, in the effervescent moments of the Tropicalismo¹, in 1968 (PASSOS, 2004; JARDIM, 2008).

Being a popular singer and a performer of great sensitivity, she pleases her audience with people like most; she goes to the places her audience wants to, always singing songs of love, protest and praise.

Today she enjoys certain unanimity, presenting shows or releasing albums quite successfully in all regions of the Country. Accordingly, she selects an annual repertoire quite carefully, never forgetting to add to her albums music with themes about her deeper religiosity: the array of the African Candomblé. Music with quotes from Orishas or full devotions to saints of the syncretism with Catholicism, at least for 30 years now, has never been absent in her musical work (SILVA, 2007). This, besides of being a trademark of her work, has become a form of disclosure of her religions of African array, in a constant exercise of confrontation established by a society in which 73 % of the populations call themselves Catholics (IBGE, 2010), but who go to houses of Candomblé and Umbanda (SILVA, 2007).

The macerate of leaves, fruit and roots is a healing practice and culture of the native peoples in Latin America (DUTRA, 2009); according to Santos and Gonçalves (2011), also in the religions of African array the use of earthly elements, leaves and animals is a common ritualistic practice of healing, devotion or thanksgivings. In the song “Salve as folhas” by Gerônimo and Idalio, Maria Bethânia sings “Without leaves there is no shadow; without leaves there is nothing”.

The pace followed by divine entities, saints of devotion or even the supreme being of the monotheistic religions, God, is easily perceived in the most diverse movements of faith. In the song “Não mexe comigo”, Maria Bethânia, exercising sporadically her vein of a songwriter, says: “Do not mess with me, I do not walk alone...”

The songwriters are so many, but here the pioneers are highlighted: Vinícius de Moraes, Dorival Caymmi, Caetano Veloso, many from the city of Salvador and many others from the Bahia’s region of Reconcavo, famous for black culture and African religions, such as Gerônimo, Roque Ferreira and Jota Velloso.

3 The importance of the singing in african brazilian religions

*Quanto nome tem a Rainha do Mar?
Dandalunda, Janaina,
Marabô, Princesa de Aiocá,
Inaê, Sereia, Mucunã,
Maria, Dona Iemanjá,
Yemanjá, Odoya, Oya, Sereia...*

(Pedro Amorim / Sophia de Mello Breyner – CD Mar de Sophia)

Singing is a form of expressing the feeling, thought, and human spirit, bringing along models that reflect attitude, strategies and particular necessities inherent to a specific reality (SILVA, 2008).

The songs and the dances occupy a central position at the parties held on the shrines, being through sacred chants used to greet and evocate the gods, and their rhythms that the entities manifest on Earth. It is necessary to sing along with all possible enthusiasm and vigor to please the deities, although it is necessary to follow the singing with dances of laudations in order to this way the songs heard and sung transform into sacred movements that can be traced back to the origins of the African religions. The whole ceremony is followed by the tunes belonging to their deities, sung in a mixture of the Nago dialects with Portuguese. Each Orisha, each Exu and each Preto Velho entity owns proper choreography and songs that narrate mythical stories and elements of nature associated with them, heir qualities and their characteristics (FONSECA, 1996).

Prandi (1991) states that the popularization of Candomblé took place amongst music and mass means of communications since the 60s, paving the way for a growth and recognition of the Afro-Brazilian and African culture and religion. Unholy disclosure of the religion through the arts, especially popular music that reaches the masses by radio and television has undoubtedly contributed to reduce the marginality of the religion of African gods (PRANDI, 1998)

Brazilian popular music has several social elements that make it unique. Among them, the religiousness

¹ Bossa Nova and Tropicalismo were important musical movements in the Brazilian culture during the 60s, in which the singer actively participated as a muse and performer.

manifested by various artists who construct a solid connection between music and religion and from this point of view Maria Bethânia take advantage of these Afro-Brazilian rituals and in her work she call the attention of the society for the African culture. This way, the role of the performer through her singing is understood as key-point of cultural expansion of the Afro-Brazilian religions and consolidation of the social differences and religious diversity in Brazil.

4 Song for the Daughter of Oya

*Foi o vento de lá, foi de lá que chegou
Foi o vento de lansã dominador que dormia
Nos braços da manhã e despertou
(Roque Ferreira – CD Meus Quintais)*

The discography of the singer, Maria Bethânia Vianna Telles Velloso (fig. 1) sums up a total of two single compact disks, two double compact disks, 34 studio albums, 15 live albums. On this paper it was selected 29 albums (Table 1) recorded the performer between 1969 to 2016, which contains music of laudation to Candomblé, songs for Orishas and songs that represent the Brazilian religious syncretism.



Fig. 1: Maria Bethânia, the daughter of Oyá
Source: asset of composers (2015)

Table 1: Albums by singer Maria Bethânia selected for this study

Year	Studio Albums
1969	Maria Bethânia
1970	Maria Bethânia ao vivo
1971	A tua presença
1971	Rosa dos ventos
1972	Drama
1973	Drama – live
1976	Pássaro proibido
1976	Doces bárbaros
1977	Pássaro da manhã
1985	Maria Bethânia – 20 anos de paixão
1986	Dezembros

Year	Studio Albums
1988	Maria
1989	Memória da pele
1990	Maria Bethânia – 25 anos
1991	Canções e momentos
1992	Olho d'Água
1999	Diamante verdadeiro
1999	A força que nunca seca
2003	Brasileirinho
2003	Maria Bethânia e Gilberto Gil (ao vivo em Montreux)
2006	Pirata
2006	Mar de Sophia
2007	Dentro do mar tem rio
2009	Encanteria
2010	Amor, festa e devoção
2012	Oásis de Bethânia
2013	Carta de amor
2014	Meus quintais
2016	Abraçar e agradecer

It has been registered 49 songs with references to the Orishas (Table 2). The most quoted Orisha is Iansan (n = 9), followed by Yemanjá (n = 7) and Oshun (n = 5). The most recorded songs have been “Iansan” composed by Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso and presented on the albums “Drama” (1972), “Drama – Live” (1973) and “Diamante Verdadeiro” (1999), and the song “A dona do raio e do vento”, composed by Dorival Caymmi, recorded on the albums “Mar de Sophia” (2006), “Dentro do mar tem rio” (2007), and “Cartas de amor” (2013). No wonder the presence of the praise to Iansan by Maria Bethânia, once she declares herself a daughter of Oiá Iansan.

It often happens that songs that do not represent a specific Orisha, but praise the mysteries of the Candomblé, are used in specific rituals, such as the song Yorubahia composed by Roberto Mendes and Jorge Portugal, recorded on the albums “Dezembro” (1986), “Canções e Momentos” (1991) and “Oração a Mãe Menininha” recorded on the albums “Maria Bethânia e Gilberto Gil ao vivo em Montreux” (2003) and “Agradecer e Abraçar” (2016).

The issue about Afro-Brazilian syncretism is still much discussed nowadays; for a long time the mixture of deities with Catholic saints has been absorbed by the Brazilian religious culture (FONSECA, 2012; SANTOS & FLORÊNCIO, 2017). Therefore, nothing more natural than finding in Brazilian songbook a lot of songs situated between two cultural religions, markedly Candomblé and Catholicism. This way, Maria Bethânia utters her voice to the songs: “Medalha de São Jorge” (Moacyr Luz, album “Olho d'Água”, 1992); “Santo Antonio” (J. Velloso, albums “Brasileirinho” (2003) and “Amor, Festa e Devoção” (2010); “Santa Barbara” (Roque Ferreira, albums “Encanteria” (2007); “Dentro do mar tem rio” (2009) and “Amor , festa e devoção” (2010); “Padroeiro do Brasil” composed by Ary Monteiro presented on the album “Brasileirinho” (2003).

5 Final Considerations

*Iansã comanda os ventos
 E a força dos elementos
 Na ponta do seu florin...*

(Caetano Veloso e Gilberto Gil, CD Diamante Verdadeiro)

Maria Bethânia has a unique path in the History of the Brazilian popular music, including the release of concerts and CDs, many times yearly DVDs with guaranteed success, lifting the artist as a leader of performing and record sales in Brazil. Nowadays her albums sell on average 250,000 copies, with a total of 28 million so far, excluding the compilations.

The artist has also contributed to the growth of other artists such as Alcione, Chico Buarque or Rita Ribeiro, with special participations. Mangueira School of Samba has guaranteed her championship on the special group of samba in Rio de Janeiro telling the path of the performer who was also honored at the street-market of Acari, a Northeastern stronghold in the capital city of Rio de Janeiro.

On her discography (Table 1), it is common to find letters that value the Afro-Brazilian culture and religiosity, legitimating the religious syncretism and treasuring the culture of traditional people, such as indigenous, quilombolas and people of the Candomblé houses.

Suffice to say that the prestige and respect achieved by the singer are directly linked to the empowerment of

the people of Candomblé houses and traditional communities, including the religious of the indigenous people on the scenery of popular culture, demystifying that the animist religions are inferior, pagan or witchcraft addicted.

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