SÉRIE ANTROPOLOGIA

145

**BLACK MUSIC OF ALL COLORS.
THE CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK ETHNICITY
IN RITUAL AND POPULAR GENRES OF
AFRO-BRAZILIAN MUSIC**
José Jorge de Carvalho

Brasília
1993

Black Music of all colors.
The construction of Black ethnicity in ritual and popular genres of
Afro-Brazilian Music.

José Jorge de Carvalho
University of Brasília

The aim of this essay is to present an overview of the charter of Afro-Brazilian identities, emphasizing their correlations with the main Afro-derived musical styles practised today in the country. Given the general scope of the work, I have chosen to sum up this complex mass of data in a few historical models. I am interested, above all, in establishing a contrast between the traditional models of identity of the Brazilian Black population and their musics with recent attempts, carried out by the various Black Movements, and expressed by popular, commercial musicians who formulate protests against that historical condition of poverty and unjustice, forging a new image of Afro-Brazilians, more explicit, both in political and in ideological terms. To focus such a vast ethnographic issue, I shall analyse the way these competing models of identity are shaped by the different song genres and singing styles used by Afro-Brazilians running through four centuries of social and cultural experience. In this connection, this study is also an attempt to explore theoretically the more abstract problems of understanding the efficacy of songs; in other words, how in mythopoetics, meaning and content are revealed in aesthetic symbolic structures which are able to mingle so powerfully verbal with non-verbal modes of communication.

The conceptual model I envisage here is simultaneously historical and structural. Certain symbolic configurations (such as the case with the Afro-Brazilian world) which are condensed in definite moments of time tend to get crystalized, and from then on they lead a life of their own as unique models of identification. A classic study of these configurations is the famous essay by George Foster, Culture of Conquest (1960), which deals with the history of the Iberian popular culture and its crystalization in Latin America. For various reasons, it is possible to argue that the Afro-Brazilian world has this distinct profile, even if we see it in the context of the African heritage in the New World as a whole.

My basic assumption is that any discussion of the complex issue of Afro-Brazilian identity has to start, necessarily, with an understanding of the experience of slavery. Slave relationships have crystalized as a repressed collective complex in Brazilian society and the world of ritual and form (including music and dance) is just but one sphere among others (social relations, economy, sexuality, politics, and family being also central) where its consequences can be assessed. It is for this reason that all the musical models of Afro-Brazilian identity I will be discussing here make comments, directly or indirectly, on slavery.

Finally, I regard the present discussion of Afro-Brazilian music as a study case to show the importance of these theoretical issues to a new assessment of the established views of the role of music in the construction of identity and ethnic differences.

I. Traditional Cult Music

Undoubtedly, the main matrix of Afro-Brazilian identity is still the traditional cults of African origin, such as the candomblé of Bahia, the shango of Recife, the tambor de mina of São Luís and the batuque of Porto Alegre.[1] They concentrate some of the most powerful symbols shared or at least known by most Brazilians: the orishas or santos - the African gods that take possession of cult members - and the drum ensembles, among which the better known are the atabaques of Bahia.

There are powerful ritual conventions which are used by cult members that allow them to exercise an almost absolute control on this musical and symbolical world and keep it quite separate from the wider field of Western cultural tradition in Brazil. All the hundreds of songs of this repertoire are sung in African languages, mostly Yoruba, Fon, Kimbundu and Kicongo. Moreover, there are other musical parameters, more directly connected to performance, that prevent speech as being the explicit or dominant symbol of their rituals. For instance, in a typical shango ritual, the loudness of the drums, plus the clappings and shoutings tend to overpower the voices; the soloist, who is the only one whose text is sung more clearly articulated, is barely heard; and the chorus is heard, not only feeble, but vague, like a mass of undifferentiated voices. And even so, the text is sung in a foreign language that has been lost for the last three generations. Because of this strong ritual control to have it preserved, I was able to translate about three hundred shango songs, all in Yoruba, together with Dr. Oluyemi Olaniyan, from Nigeria (see Carvalho & Olaniyan, 1981). Although people don't have access to the literal meaning of what they are singing anymore, around 70% of the texts sung in the more traditional cult houses were still intelligible to the ears of an attentive Yoruba listener. I reckon that there can be something of the order of three thousand ritual songs with texts in African languages, in all sorts of conditions (intact, corrupted or mixed) in cult houses along the country. And every time a cult member changes from one "Nation"[2] to the other he has to learn an entire new repertoire. Therefore, even though no new songs have been composed for the last eighty years or so, the tradition is not going to die so quickly.

The same stress on preservation is put on the drumming and the dance patterns: instead of improvising or recreating, perfect reproduction is the greatest value. Like the Gregorian chant, therefore, this is a frozen musical repertoire. Ideologically, shango music presents itself as a closed object. A bit like that beautifully ornamented Tlingit club representing a divine being that Lévi-Strauss comments in La Pensée Sauvage (see the photograph in Lévi-Strauss 1962: 158) this musical repertoire seems to be entirely protected from the world of historical transformations, so that it can't be penetrated by the event. From the shango point of view, if this music has suffered changes in the past, that is bad enough; but its is not changing now and it shall not change in the future.

---

[1] - Thinking in terms of the African traditions in the New World as a whole, this musical tradition is more or less equivalent to the Cuban lucumi, that part of santería which also perpetuates Yoruba and Ewe traditional religions. In order to simplify the ethnographic references, I shall refer mainly to the shango cults to indicate this traditional model, since my main research focused on them.

[2] - Name given to the different cult traditions in Brazil. The better known are Nago, Ketu, Ijexa, Gege, Angola, Congo and Mina.

Apart from that, the Portuguese language, sung or spoken, is almost entirely absent from the rituals. Consequently, comments on changing relations - be they social, political, sexual, seasonal, or even mythical - are hardly made explicit. Biographical and allegorical associations to the life of Blacks in Brazil, so common in macumba songs, as we shall see later on, are practically impossible to be formulated.

From the point of view of ethnic identity, therefore, candomblé and shango cults do not establish social, racial or color distinctions: everyone is a potential member, since all human beings have orishas. So, blacks or non-blacks, Brazilian or non-Brazilian, are oppositions that do not make sense in the world of the orishas; they are just African, on the mythological level; and on the level of individual identification, they are simply universal.

As I have discussed elsewhere (Carvalho 1988), the historical narratives that circulate among the members of the traditional Afro-Brazilian cults pass over absolutely in silence about the period of slavery in Brazil. They tell us about the orishas in Africa (where they were all powerful) and then they tell us the heroic saga of the great leaders who established the Afro-Brazilian religious traditions since the turn of the nineteenth century up to the present day. One of the more probable reasons why they don't touch the crucial period of slavery is that they would have to explain why the orishas failed to liberate the Negroes who worshipped them at that time.

As to the racial signs of the orishas themselves, in most cases they simply do not exist: instead of images of Black gods (such as the African ones), cult members tend to make use of images taken from the Catholic iconography of the saints, especially those associated to the orishas by means of the established processes of religious synchretism. In other words, not only the color of cult members are not questioned: that of the gods is not clarified either.

Coherent with its universal religious view, candomblé and shango music (as well as batuque and mina), with their percussion ensembles of a high technical complexity, have never been used outside its ritual setting; it is only in appearance that Brazilian popular music has incorporated these cult rhythms. As a matter of fact, all the incursions we have seen so far show the adaptation of drum rhythms used in the more synchretic kinds of cult (such as candomblé de caboclo, umbanda, macumba, etc.), which are more compatible with the song structures used in popular music.

Shango music certainly concentrates Afro-Brazilian identity, but not to a point of helping to construct ethnic differentiation. And this is so because, as we have seen, its religious outlook is universal. Its dominant way of processing identity is that of conditional inclusiveness: anyone can join this powerful Afro-Brazilian identity, provided that he or she shows to be linguistically, ritually, melodically, rhythmically and choreographically competent. In other words, shango identity is defined fundamentally in aesthetic terms and, especially due to the complexity of its art, its demands on the new follower are higher than in any other form of Afro-Brazilian culture.

Finally, if shango moves towards an African identity, that is certainly a religious identity and not an ethnic one as it has sometimes (mistakenly in my view) been argued.[3]

---

[3] - For a thorough discussion of the cult's politics and its indirect statements as regards citizenship in the Western sense of democracy, see Segato (1992).

II. The Colonial Model of the Congos

The other traditional model of Afro-Brazilian identity is well represented by the Congadas, or Congos, or Ticumbis, a folk drama which expresses the conciliation between the social sponsor (the white man) and the devotee (usually, humble descendants of slaves and mulattoes). The "Kingdom" of Congo is one of the main allegorical structures of the small amount of power (as temporary as a day in the year) which was guaranteed for the Black people in Brazil. This mythico-historical "Kingdom" was created by the slaves since the early 17th century , when they were allowed to have their own Catholic brotherhoods, usually connected with the Rosary of the Blacks or with St. Benedict. On the day of celebration, the Congos would parade in the main streets in their elegant costumes, reenacting some royal cortéges which took place in Africa and that involved their resistance against the Portuguese domination in the continent of their ancestors.

I must explain from the start that there are two Portuguese words to call someone a Black person - preto and negro - and, as far as I know, they can differ ideologically in a way that I don't think the word "black" differs from the English word "negro." Nor can I find an equivalent pair in the Spanish vocabulary.[4]

Preto is the word we find more frequently used in the congadas, vissungos, moçambiques, catopês, candomblés (in Minas Gerais) and other folk groups of similar description to denominate the Brazilian Black person. On the other hand, the new Black consciousness in Brazil invariably uses the word negro: "consciência negra", "resistência negra", etc.

The Congos are mostly the expression of the experience of the pretos. Although the main symbols are a clear evocation of Africa - the king and queen of Congo - and their practitioners are Blacks, the Congadas use the expression "meus irmãos" (my brothers) as well as "meus pretinhos" (my little Black ones); it is always an implicit community, conditioned fundamentally by social position - poor, humble, illiterate, peripheral dwellers of the small towns.

The musical material of the Congadas is varied; some of them are almost as deeply rooted African as that of candomblé, whereas in other cases they combine quite openly Western musical structures and instruments with Afro-derived rhythmic patterns. The overall aspect, however, is that of an African kingly party performing a public ceremony in a solemn occasion.

Here is a fascinating example of a song text from a Congo group from Pombal, Paraíba:

Zabelinha vira pão
Vira eu, vira você
Quando os branco
Estão olhando

---

[4] - The difference between preto and negro has been already explored by Renato Ortiz (1977), but I believe there is still a lot more to be said about it.

5

com seus óio
de muçambê
Dança dança meus pretinhos
Depressa, sem mais tardá
Quanto mais depressa andá
Mais depressa acabará
Pilunguinha pilunguinha
Olê olê pro nosso Reis
Aqui'stá nossos pretinhos
Dançando cum'é de ser
Aqui'stá nossos pretinhos
Tocando cum'é de ser

(Little Isabel turns into bread
turns into me, turns into you
When the white men are watching
with their eyes like the muçambê flower
Dance dance my little black ones
Hurry, with no further delay
The hurrier you walk
The sooner you will finish
Pilunguinha pilunguinha
Say hello to our kings
Here are our little Black people
Dancing as it should be
Here are our little Black people
Playing as it should be).

Pretinhos here can mean anyone of the participants, regardless of their colour: after all, if a blonde man is participating in a group of Congos, he is bound to be as poor and socially inferior as any Black with whom he keeps company.

As to the text, it is a paradigmatic example of what I call "the aesthetics of opacity": the vocal style is chosen to hide the words as much as possible: jumping, dancing, turning, drumming, and keeping the mouth half closed make it difficult for the outside watcher to appreciate exactly which words are being sung. Apart from that, in most Congadas the text itself is highly undefined linguistically, with broken Portuguese words combined with Bantu words, some of them perhaps also broken. Thus, the Congos follow partially the aesthetics of disguised and indirect statements of the shango cults, making strong demands on the listener to decode its linguistic mode of communication, which is clearly dominated by non-verbal modes, such as music, dancing, dramatic action etc.[5] On the other hand, is spite of all the disguise, it does tell a message verbally, whose meaning can (and must) be pursued and interpreted as part of the Portuguese literature, beyond the artificial divisions of erudite and popular.

---

[5] - For a wider theoretical discussion on the aesthetics of opacity and transparence, see Carvalho 1992.

The Congo players, who are mostly but not necessarily Blacks, are addressing both themselves and those who want to join them as pretinhos: happy, fond of dancing, united in the act of participation. Pilunguinha means a little and lousy mule, and what exactly is this animal doing here we can only guess, since it is not clarified by the ethnographer. Perhaps it is evoking a character in the similar folk-drama of the bumba-meu-boi, very common in this Northeastern part of the country.

As to the white man, he is watching the dance, possibly marvelled by the transformations which are taking place, with his light eyes, sweet as the muçambê flower! Such a tender and lyric picture of the white man is used probably to avoid an open expression of resentment or confrontation, but it at least constructs a strong symbol of distance of the role played by the Colonial master.

This Colonial model of folk dramas include also variants that express an opposition between blacks and whites which are not as tender as this one from Pombal. There is another folk group from the state of Alagoas called Quilombos,[6] that perform a drama representing the Kings of Blacks and their fights against the Kings of the Caboclos (Indian mestizos, which are said to have fought on the side of the whites in their attempt to recapture the runaway slaves and destroy their settlements). The most famous of the Brazilian quilombos was called Palmares, and flourished exactly in the state of Alagoas. This folk group, therefore, perpetuates the memory of that moment of freedom of the Blacks in Brazil.

Among the various song texts of quilombos that have been collected by folklorists, the following is particularly revealing of its ideological outlook:

Tiririca
faca de cortá
forga negro
branco não vem cá
si vinhé pau há de levá.
Forga parente
caboclo não é gente.
(Tiririca weed
knife that cuts
Black man, take your day off
and enjoy yourself
White man does not come here
if he comes he will be beaten up
Kinsman, enjoy yourself
A caboclo (mestizo) is not a human being)

What we have therefore in the Congos model, is basically the symbolic construction of Blacks and whites as explicit positions: the Blacks dance and enjoy themselves; the whites watch in silence, retreated for one day (ceremonially, at least) from their role as masters. One must bear in mind that, although this symbolic structure is aimed

---

[6] - Quilombo was the name given in Brazil to the maroon societies, i. e., communities formed by slaves who ran away from the farms and plantations in search of freedom.

primarily at defining in racial terms who is dancing and who is watching, there may be circumstances in which one can find people of all colours on both sides of the divide. The text also condemns the mestizos who betrayed their cause of freedom and made a undignified pact with the white slave holders.[7]

In another curious and practically unknown form of Afro-Brazilian tradition - the <u>pemba</u> from Minas Gerais, a cult which is exactly midway between a <u>Congada</u> and a modern <u>Umbanda</u> possession cult - it is frequent the use, in many ritual songs, of the expression "meus irmãos" (my brothers).

      Boa noite meus irmãos
      Ai meu Deus boa noite
      Viva todos meus irmãos
      Viva Deus viva meus irmãos
      Meus irmãos adeus adeus
      Visitei os meus irmãos
      Paz de Deus fica conosco
      Até quando eu voltar

      (Good night my brothers
      Ah my God good night
      Hail all my brothers
      Hail God hail my brothers
      My brothers goodbye goodbye
      I visited my brothers
      Peace of God be with us
      Until I come back).

Due perhaps to the cult's isolation - both geographical and cultural - from the great centres of African influence in Brazil, <u>pemba</u>'s songs are much poorer and simplified, in musical as well as in literary terms. This symbolic isolation can also explain why <u>pemba</u> members are not capable of stating overtly at least some of the divisions - economic, social, sexual, political, racial - which deeply mark their lives as poor and oppressed people. They seem to have encompassed them (although it is difficult to prove that they have neutralized entirely these divisions) in this repetitive and apparently empty formula "my brothers," which works, therefore, as a kind of secret code: those who are like us -Blacks, catholics, poor, oppressed, marginalized - recognize themselves as our brothers; and we can say no more about who we are.

III. The Model of <u>macumba</u> and <u>umbanda</u> cults.

The third powerful model of Afro-Brazilian musical culture which reveals all the subtleties and ambiguities of Black identity in Brazil is the synchretistic style of cult, called

---

[7] - For a recent review of the literature on the <u>Congos</u> in English, see Lins 1992.

either macumba, in Rio, jurema, in Recife, pajelança, in São Luís, candomblé de caboclo, in Salvador, or, in more general terms, umbanda. Surely, there are significant differences between umbanda and the other cult forms, especially in terms of their clientelle, for umbanda houses receive a much greater number of White people than juremas or candomblés de caboclo do, for instance. Furthermore, most interpreters of the world of Afro-Brazilian religions are very critical of the umbanda movement, arguing that it operates a kind of "whitening" (branqueamento) of the African tradition in Brazil. Nonetheless, I am using these terms here with a great degree of ethnographic generalization to emphasize that they all have in common certain fundamental differences when contrasted with the first model of candomblé and shango.

Umbanda is possibly the extreme case of inclusiveness and incorporatedness, following the strategy of implicit community to the extreme; to charicature (and at the same time being accurate), in some umbanda temples, even a Japanese is a Black! A bit like the Divine Commedy, the juremas, macumbas and other similar cult forms are built around a pantheon of major and lesser deities which look like an allegory firmly rooted in history: many of the characters (or dramatis personae) who are worshipped as supernatural entities are human types, equivalent to people who have actually lived and it is with them that one can build a mytho-poetical view of the entire Brazilian experience - and, most especially, of the Afro-Brazilian experience.

All these synchretistic cults (which are, obviously, institutions collectively designed to produce new cultural syntheses) create a rich space to express the dilemmas of Black ethnicity; on the other hand, they make a strong ritual effort to leave this problem unanswered. In this sense, their symbolic and political strategy is the opposite of the new Black movements, which want to define, to affirm and, if possible, to solve it once and for all, according to explicit ideological lines.

Of all the dozens of types of supernatural deities which are worshipped in these cults, there is one kind of spirit which I take as the most relevant for the present discussion: the spirits known as Pretos Velhos (the Old Blacks). Macumbas, juremas, umbandas, are the home of Preto Velho par excellence.[8]

Returning to the distinction between preto and negro mentioned above, the Preto Velho is anyone, whereas the negro referred to contemporarily by the new cultural expressions inspired by the Black movements (which have a clear influence of Caribbean and North American Black movements) is a definite person; the Preto Velho is a collective image, an archetype which is available for everybody. Of course, at one level, his image does reflect socio-historical and color differences, but it can go far beyond the world of real Black persons, dead or alive, and touch spheres of symbolic identification, such as psychological and spiritual ones, which are universal.

The ambiguity (or avoidance of definition) behind the Preto Velho is one of the key factors for the centrality and diffusion of umbanda religion in Brazilian society. Being the religion of negotiations, par excellence, it stresses a figure which literally comes from the bottom of the social ladder and offers it, allegorically, as a place where people can exercise their displacement within this same society (this personal displacement can be defined in many ways or dimensions - spiritually, aesthetically, sexually, politically, etc). In other

---

[8] - It must be reminded that Preto Velho and Preta Velha are also present in many popular songs by Black composers, such as Gilberto Gil, Martinho da Vila, Jorge Ben and Clementina de Jesus.

words, the suffering of the <u>Preto Velho</u> is the suffering of every human being. The image of the Preto Velho is definitely Black, whereas its music is compromising, incorporating secular genres, especially those rhythms that reminds us of the <u>festive</u> (even if stereotypical) trajectory of the Brazilian Black people: <u>samba</u>, <u>samba de roda</u>, <u>coco</u>, <u>maculelê</u>, <u>capoeira</u>, <u>gongo</u>, <u>baião</u>, etc.

Instead of <u>denouncing</u> Black experience, Preto Velhos express it, with all its myseries and glories. Symbolically polarized and even contradictory, the Preto Velho has served so far to postpone <u>sine die</u> the decisive confrontation of the Afro-Brazilian people with a white post-slave society that has treated them so unjustly. To compensate this lack of opportunity for a real challenge to the Brazilian elite, this mythic figure becomes a locus of speech, from which various discourses can be built and radical plurality can be exercised, politically, semantically and aesthetically. Consistent with this, therefore, Preto Velhos speak to each individual, leaving up to each one the decision to build whatever collective utopia he might want to pursue.

Apart from this, it has to be stressed that the ideal of <u>macumba</u> is to build a fortress; its main symbolic expression of power is a castle, a city, a fortified building (who knows, a state), with its deffensive guard and an attacking army. It is what I call a warrior model. It differs, however, from the model of war proposed by the new Black movements in the fact that, for the former, it is always a war of <u>one</u> individual against others, whereas for the latter the war to be fought is a collective, liberation war. The various entities worshipped in the <u>macumbas</u> might represent variables, conditions, exemplars, rules of conduct, strategies for this war. However, they never define a specific collective arena from which it speaks nor a collective field against which one is fighting. Consequently, there is no room for ideological exclusion or witch hunting: everyone, individually, is fighting its private war helped by the supernatural entities who are able to converse with everybody.

This aesthetic and symbolic model has to be all-inclusive and its war-like character justifies the inclusion of secular musical genres such as <u>maculelê</u> and <u>capoeira</u>, both being a sort of war music, associated with defense and attack..

The following example of a <u>jurema</u> song from Recife shows beautifully this constant compromise with duality as well as the defense-attack aspect of this singular worldview:

> Meu pilão tem duas bocas
> trabalha pelos dois lados
> na hora do aperreio
> Valei-me pilão deitado.

> (My mortar has two openings
> It works (can be used) on both sides
> in moments of trouble
> help me, laid down mortar)

The imagery used here is related to the world of the Old Black Man as a slave in a farm or plantation, pounding grains on a mortar. This apparently obscure text is paradigmatic of a number of contents of the Brazilian social psychology as a whole. It condenses various planes of experience by means of a metaphorical language that makes maximum use of the power of ambiguity. First of all, there is a clear sexual allusion in the

text: the poetical subject, when called to speak out his sexual identity, chooses a strategic distance, a certain neutrality, or impartiality, but which leaves no room for omission: in the hours of "trouble" (sexual excitement) he can function both actively and passively, depending on the circumstances.

Reading it in another plane, the language of power present in the text is displaced to the world of social and racial relations of discrimination. The poetical subject is of a dual character, prepared for whatever comes: he is willing to embrace a good, peaceful conviviality if that is the case; however, if he feels challenged, pressured, attacked or discriminated, he can also engage in open confrontation, helped by his laid down mortar.

Now, jurema's attitude towards negotiations and ambiguities does not always mean silencing oppression suffered by Blacks. The following song even uses the signifier negro, certainly more appropriate for what is being said than the softer preto:

> Nego não entra no céu
> nem que seja rezador
> tem o cabelo duro
> vai furar nosso Senhor.

> (A Black does not go to heaven
> even he is a good prayer
> he has got a very thick hair
> is gonna hurt Our Lord.)

Here, racial conflicts are stated, but the poetical subject admits more than one line of ideological identification for the conflict. Firstly, if it is a white (to be clear, not a white person, necessarily, but the poetical subject qua white) who is singing the song, the text can be read as really racist, since it favours the non-admittance of the Blacks in heaven, on the grounds that he will hurt Our Lord. On the other hand, if it is a Black who incorporates the poetical I (let us not forget that this a song for Preto Velho), the text becomes an expression of lament or complaint against racial discrimination as well as a justification for open racial conflict: since his hair prevents him from entering heaven, even when he prays properly, the Black man can feel free to join macumba, to do black magic, in other words, to act as anti-Christ (which is the same as being anti-white). In other words, this Black might be saying, in a typically angry rastafari standpoint: to hell with the white man's heaven, for I cannot enter there!

Still, a third line of interpretation is possible. If this same rasta person sings this song (changing obviously its ritual context), he or she might be furthering the following message: I am a Black, but I am ready to fight with the white man until he is ready to redefine the rules of heaven, so that my fellowmen and fellowwomen can also enter there.

The following Preto Velho song from a umbanda temple of Minas Gerais reflects the traditional imagery associated with the roles of colonial society. Words like sinhô, sinhá and iaiá cut across styles, epochs and genres, being found in nineteenth century literary classics and in Brazilian popular music since the beginning of the century until today.

> Aiuê meu cativeiro

11

meu cativeiro, meu cativerá
Preto Velho tá cansá
ia pra senzala batia o tambor
dava viva a Iaiá,   dava viva a Iôiô
dava viva ao Sinhô.

(Aiuê my captivity
my captivity, my captivity
    Old Black is tired
went to the senzala and played the drum
he gave greetings to madam
    he gave greetings to the young lord
he gave greetings to the master.)

    The Old Black Man was tired after a whole day of slave's work, but still had the good spirit of being musical in the stereotypical African way (playing the drum) and being kind to his beloved masters.
    From this very same terreiro, the next Preto Velho rhythm shows a clear influence of the second historical model in Minas Gerais, that is: rhythmic patterns taken from Congadas, and Catopês.

Lelé ulélé
Rei de Congo lêlê ô.

(Lelê ulélé
King of Congo lêlê ô.)

    As I said in Part Two, sometimes the Congo and the Umbanda models overlap. There is no supernatural entity called King of Congo, but reference to the world Congos is just a symbolic reinforcement that helps to create a richer frame of meaning, related to Colonial Brazil, for the appearance of Pretos Velhos.
    The following umbanda song is unmistakeably from Rio, sounding very close to a Carnival tune:

Eu fui na beira da praia
pra ver o balanço do mar
eu vi um retrato na areia
me lembrei da sereia
comecei a chamar
Oh Janaína vem ver
Oh Janaína vem cá
receber suas flores
que eu vim lhe ofertar.

(I went near the beach
to see the movement of the sea

I saw a portrait in the sand
It made me think of the mermaid
I began to call:
Oh Janaína come to see
Oh Janaína come here
to receive your flowers
that a I came to offer you).

As I have argued elsewhere (Carvalho 1984), the production of <u>umbanda</u> songs in records, especially in Rio and São Paulo has become a small sector of popular commercial music. Small wonder then, that one finds a LP dedicated to spirits which utilizes practically <u>all</u> the rhythmic genres which form part of the carioca popular music (<u>batucada</u>, <u>jongo</u>, <u>samba</u>, <u>pagode</u>, etc.)!

The next song, coming from the <u>tambor de mina</u> of Maranhão, is the paradigm of the kind of ambiguity and paradoxixality which characterizes the whole of Afro-Brazilian cultural tradition.

Eu sou banzeiro eu sou banzeiro
Banzeiro grande é o tombo do mar
ê mar ê mar ê mar
Banzeiro grande é o tombo do mar.

(I am banzeiro I am banzeiro
big banzeiro is the clash of the sea
Oh sea oh sea oh sea
big banzeiro is the clash of the sea.)

First of all, the melody allows for constant extemporization, since it is constructed upon a simple major chord which leaves the endings open to equivalences between thirds and sixths. Moreover, there is always a certain imprecision in the intonation of the ending thirds, which oscillate between minor and major. If we turn now to the text, we see even more oscillations and contradictions.

In the first verse, the poetic subject states: "I am banzeiro". <u>Banzeiro</u> is a tricky word: it comes from <u>banzo</u> , a Bantu word that means the lethal nostalgia which caught the African slaves as soon as they arrived in the Brazilian coast. They would seat immobile, in front of a house, sometimes staring at the sea, and would die there out of an absolute apathy. However, <u>banzeiro</u> means also the oscillating movement of a drunken man. And more precisely, in this ritual context, it means the movement of the sea waves. The problem is that the same word is used to express both the calm sea as well as the sound of the violent waves resulting from the clashing of the Amazon River waters against those of the Atlantic Ocean. Apparently the subject has chosen to identify himself with the violent waves, for in the second verse it is said: "Big <u>banzeiro</u> is the clash of the sea." Then the sea is celebrated in the third verse; and finally it is once more stressed the presence of the big <u>banzeiro</u>.

From the point of view of identity, therefore, we are here dealing with a gray area,

as far as a process of subjectivation is concerned: the I, the immaterial subject of the song, comes and goes, as if he is, this way, playing second fiddle to other three material subjects: the banzeiro (the oscillating movement), the tombo (the clashing act) and the sea itself.

There is still another contradiction present in this song text: Banzé means trouble, confusion, so that a banzeiro can also mean a trouble-maker, an agitator. Thus, banzeiro is a conflicting adjective, pointing to radically opposite qualities experienced by the poetical subject. To have banzé is to reach a state of uncontrolled euphoria, quite the contrary of the depression which comes with banzo.

But this song has captured even more semantic and mythological associations. Although present now in Brasília, it comes from the mina tradition, where African deities are worshipped in the same festival as the local ones (caboclos, or encantados). As it combines a wobbling melody on top of a markedly mata rhythm (a rhythm for forest spirits) and at the same time emphasizes the semantic paradox of banzeiro, it seems to unite the calmness, nostalgia and sense of loss which are associated with Iemanjá (the national goddess of the sea, worshipped throughout the country) with the vivacity, strength and overt aggressiveness that is sometimes shown by the spirits of caboclos and encantados.

IV. Commercial popular music

Now, as I have already indicated in the beginning, the real change in this model of aesthetic construction of Black identity in Brazil has been carried out by styles of popular (understood as commercial) music which explicitly and self-consciously want to identify themselves with the Blacks.[9] I don't have the space here to trace the history of this movement, but one of its pillars is the creation, about twenty years ago, of some afoxés (groups which appear in the Bahian carnaval) that accept only Blacks as their members. Moreover, their costumes and hairdo's are taken from African styles, expressing a strong will to affirm and assert Black pride in Brazil. For these associations (the most famous being Olodum, Sons of Gandhi and Ilê Ayê), a man (or woman) of Black color is a negro, like an African, and not a preto (the oppressed and unliberated Afro-Brazilian who still calls a white man his Master, as we have already seen in the umbanda song from Belo Horizonte). Some of these groups, like Ile Aye and Sons of Gandhi, only allow people of black skin to join them and perticipate in their public appearences during Carnival. This is certainly one of the most radical changes ever to appear, so far, in the field of the public representation of race relations in Brazil.

The following song, which was quite successful in commercial terms, shows well this new attempt to foster negro-African pride. It is highly didatic, in the sense of celebrating the prowesses of African kingdoms, and it aims to instruct the Brazilian black person about ethnic groups, history and costumes of mother Africa.

Madagascar Olodum
Criaram-se vários reinados
O ponto de imerinas ficou consagrado
Rambosalama o vetor saudável

---

[9] - This is a new trend in Brazilian popular music that has a potential to destabilize many established values and ideas about the role of Blacks in the country.

Ivato, cidade sagrada
A rainha ranaialona
Destaca-se na vida e na mocidade
Majestosa negra
Soberana na sociedade
Alienado pelos seus poderes
Rei Radama foi considerado
Um verdadeiro meiji
Que levava seu reino a bailar
Bantos, indonésios, árabes
Se integram à cultura malgaxe
Raça varonil, alastrando-se pelo Brasil
Sankara, Vatholay
Faz deslumbrar toda nação
Merinas povos tradição
E os mazimbas foram vencidos pela invenção
Iê ê ê ê sakalavas onaê
Iá a a sakalavas onaá
Madagascar, ilha, ilha do amor

(Various kingdoms were created
Imerinas point became famous
Rambosalana the healthy vector
Ivato, sacred city
The ranavalona queen
Exudes in life and youth
Majestuous black woman
Society's sovereign
Estranged by his powers
King radama was regarded
A true meiji
Who led his kingdom to dance
Bantus, Indonesians, Arabs
All merge themselves into malagasy culture
Brave race, spreading throughout Brazil
Sankara, Vatholay
Fascinates the whole nation
Merinas peoples tradition
And the mazimbas were conquered by invention
Ie ê ê ê sakalavas onaê
Ia a a sakalavas onaa
Madagascar, island, island of love.

As I said, this song has reached some popular success; it is doubtful, however, whether it depended directly on this "Africa" message. Most likely is the rhythm, the nice and easy encore and so on. We shall return to it in a moment.

Another strong influence for this new generation of Black musicians in Brazil is the

Jamaican reggae. This connection, which only now is being more visible, was started mainly by Gilberto Gil, one of the main exponents or our popular music, who introduced Jimmy Cliff to the Brazilian public more than ten years ago. Of the national reggae singers, Edson Gomes is considered one of the best. He calls his work "reggae resistência" (reggae resistance) and is politically commited to the Negro cause. Here is one of his songs:

História do Brasil
        Por isso é que a gente não tem vez
        Por isso é que a gente sempre está do lado de fora
        Por isso é que a gente sempre está lá na cozinha
        Por isso é que a gente sempre está fazendo
        Um papel menor um papel menor
        Um papel menor um papel pior.

        (That's why one hasn't got a chance
        That's why one is always out
        That's why one is always there in the kitchen area
        That's why one is always playing
        A minor role, a minor role
        A minor role, the worst role.)

We are dealing here with a typical protest song: serious, complaining, defining the enemies very clearly, lining up forces and calling out for a reversal of order. In the case of reggae in Brazil, perhaps the main effect it has had so far in advancing the Negro cause is in the absorption of the Jamaican giants of this music (Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff, etc.), more than in the work of the Brazilian bands, who haven't assimilated it yet to a point of acquiring a musical personality on their own.

Now, the main problem with this explicit Negro movement in music is that faced by all genres and attempts at making musique engagée or protest songs. There is a fundamental contradiction between trying to control the polysemy of a song text (so that it is "right" politically, sexually, ethnically, racially etc.) and the process of identification which form the basis of the relationship between the listener and the composer in the area of popular music. For all these reasons, the problem is solved not by politicians or ideologues, but by musicians themselves. Ultimately, the more effective negro songs are those composed by the best composer, regardless of the degree of explicitness of the protest written in their lyrics. Take, for instance, the following song by Gilberto Gil.

Sarará

        Sara sara sara sarará
        Sara sara sara sarará
        Miolo
        Sara sara sara cura
        Dessa doença de branco
        De querer cabelo liso

Já tendo cabelo louro
Cabelo duro é preciso
Que é prá ser você crioulo.

(Heal heal heal will heal/sarará
Heal heal heal will heal/sarará
Brains
Heal heal heal cures
This white man's disease
Of wanting to have thin hair
When you already have blonde hair
Thick hair is necessary
For you to be a Black man)

This is one of the most direct songs written by Gil towards the development of Black pride. His solution is more efficacious than those presented above because of its humour, of his tongue-in-cheek protest against colour prejudices in Brazil. Sarará is a kind of blondish hair, a result of miscegenation very common in Brazil which preserves the typical thickness of the Black hair. Gilberto Gil introduces here a play of words: sarará (thick blonde hair; or better, blonde Black) also means "will heal." By praising thick hair he is elegantly answering the jurema song from Recife mentioned earlier which excludes the negro from heaven on the grounds that the thickness oh his hair will damage Our Lord.

Of course, Gilberto Gil delves into this rather touchy area without looking too serious, without tragedy. He deconstructs reified habits of looking at things by reminding us of the possibility of joining in one person the two extremes of social contrast: a blonde man and a black man. This way, although committed himself to the Negro movement, he is using practically the same symbolic structure of inclusiveness and negotiation which characterizes the tradition of Afro-Brazilian culture. For instance, he even uses the word crioulo, another stereotypical word for a white person to address a Black man (again, white here understood as a subject of speech, a position which can be occupied also by a Black). In the end, many of his songs demonstrate his capacity as a lyricist and a musician to invite us to join whatever theme of protest, accusation or affirmation he wants to express. What he offers is, first and foremost, excellent popular music; the negro cause, that he embraces as well, is located within his aesthetic explorations. Still, another of his outstanding songs:

<div align="center">Babá Alapalá</div>

Aganju Xangô Alapalá
Alapalá Alapalá Xangô Aganju
O filho perguntou pro pai
Onde é que tá o meu avô
O meu avô onde é que tá
O pai perguntou pro avô
Onde é que tá meu bisavô
Meu bisavô onde é que tá
Avô perguntou bisavô
Onde é que tá tataravô

Tataravô onde é que tá
Tataravô bisavô avô
Pai Xangô Aganju
Viva Egun Babá Alapalá

(Aganju Xangô Alapalá
Alapalá Xangô Aganju
The son asked the father
Where is my grandfather
My grandfather where is he
The father asked grandfather
Where is my great-grandfather
My great-grandfather where is he
Grandfather asked great-grandfather
Great-great-grandfather where is he
Great-great-grandfather great-grandfather grandfather
Father Xangô Aganju
Hail Egun Baba Alapalá).

Here, Giberto Gil managed to make up a song which is at once
Bahian, Brazilian, African and, finally, Black or negro. The text doesn't deal with history -
be it slave experience, Black resistance, and so on - but with divine history instead. It seems
to me that's exactly why it was successful: a mood of ancestrality, of the awe present during
a ceremonial rising of eguns (the frightful ancestor spirits still worshipped in some Bahian
candomblés), expressed iconically by the cries and wails heard at the back during the
entire song; put together with a celebration of Aganju (the youngest of the various qualities
or epithets of the god of thunder,Shango), expresses in the accentuated and percussive
rhythm of the bass. The rhythm of the song is also innovative in terms of traditional Afro-
Brazilian drumming. Moreover, Gil sings this song (or "interprets" it, as we say in
Portuguese) as if it is Shango himself who is singing! His performance conveys all the
character of this youngest version of the thunder god: fun-loving, spirited, cheerful
(although not peaceful), juvenile, restless, full of energy to be externalized.

His text aims at linking history with myth, in a sort of euhemerist theory of Afro-
Brazilian religions: the young (Black man, we can infer) asks his father who are his
forefathers and the father draws a lineage that ends in Shango, the famous king of Oyo who
did (or did not?) hang himself. Thus, the young Black Brazilian comes from the king
Shango who became an orisha. Human and divine, mythical and historical, that is the
identity of Brazilian Blacks according to this song.

V. To conclude: the mythopoetic basis of ethnicity

To recollect what has been shown so far, I hope I have now some elements to say
that the assumption of a correspondence between a certain musical genre and a social or
ethnic identity has to take into account the way musical parameters and song texts are put
together. Curiously enough, ethnomusicologists seem to have understood better, thus far,

18

the role of musical parameters (rhythmic structure, instruments, tonal organization, etc.) in the support or confrontation of a given ethnicity, than song texts themselves.

And the world of song texts takes us necessarily, wanting or not, to the more general problem of mimesis, as Erich Auerbach defined: the different ways through which reality is represented in literature - in our case, in the poetry of song texts. Let us take the song "Olodum Madagascar," for instance.

We know enough about the musicians who wrote it and played it to get their intentions: a clear negro, African song, to foster Black pride in Brazil. Now, I can fairly guess that ninety per cent of the listeners of this song couldn't really follow this rather clumsy description of a remote people with a remote history (it goes without saying that the malgaches didn't come much to Brazil; more of them went to the United States). What "caught" people was the refrain "Madagascar"; many listeners, however, would have equally applauded (and some might even have understood) an expression like "vamos dançar" (let's dance) instead! In other words, they could do with Reflexu's what Rita Pavone did with the Pete Seeger protest song "If I had a hammer," as Umberto Eco has brilliantly shown some time ago (Eco 1987): a song about teen-agers' sexual and romantic problems!

Watching Reflexu's performing the song in a Chacrinha show (a grotesque entertainment TV program) gives another clue to the problem of its "real" meaning: the African message is diluted in sheer aestheticized difference, which is the fundamental law followed by the commercial media. Reflexu's played just after a third rate stereotyped romantic singer and just before another Menudo-type group of teen agers, most of them showing to be absolutely unliberated mulattoes! So, the media accepts these products first and foremost for its entertainment value.

What I am saying is simply that the field of popular music is bigger than the field of Black music and this explains the difficulty in trying to direct value, meaning and identity markers in songs which, because they circulate through the media, potentially address everybody, regardless of their author's intentions or wishes. This is not to say they have no efficacy in identity building for the Black people. What happens usually is exactly the other way round: either their power of identification transcends the expectations of their authors or they are not efficacious at all.

As Simon Frith has rightly argued (1987), it is usually the assumption of a realist convention which lies behind most of the content analysis of popular music. And I think he is also right when he says that in popular music one is listening to someone's accent. However, what is also important to say is that there are different literary (or poetic) conventions used by different singers. Gilberto Gil, for instance, seems closer to the Hebrew approach to mimesis as described by Erich Auerbach (1987) than Reflexu's, for instance, who is not being lyrical, but clearly epical. If Reflexu's is closer to Homer (just to follow Auerbach's analysis a bit further) in his detailed description of Ulysses meeting with Euriclea, Gil's clever "Sarará" takes the whole context of race relations, beauty values and social status for granted - it is something the public only knows too well in Brazil. Thus, the text advances rapidly, as if the singer is, like Abraham, answering someone who has just put a big question to him.[10]

---

[10] - Unfortunately I haven't got enough space even to sum up Auerbach's brilliant and complex argument; I just hope the reader can have easy access to his text and trace the connections I am here proposing.

Granted this, we must see how the musical material reinforces or shatters these poetic conventions. Reflexu's certainly diluted the epical side of their song by stressing its refrain, making it thus closer to commom sense expectations of how a Bahian dance tune should sound.

Another point which is central to these symbolic processes of identification is to pay attention to who is trying to communicate to whom by means of the song. For instance, if popular music, spread by the mass media in clear Portuguese, bases its efficacy on the convention that the singer addresses every one of his listeners individually, that is not the case in the other three models we have discussed, whose conventions of communication are all dependent on diverse ritual settings.

In the shango case, singing is certainly not primarily directed to the public or to any individual part of it, but for the deities being worshipped: moreover, since the language of the songs is hermetic, no social divisions are allowed to appear, but only ritual ones. In this model, the first person singular is the same as the first person plural and they establish, indistinctly, a relationship with the third person (singular or plural, representing the orishas). The consequences of this representational structure are clear: the ethnic frontiers, which existed in Africa, were completely abolished and ethnicity gives way to religious identity.

In the model of the Congos, the singers are partially singing for the public. The main expressive emphasis, however, is rather the creation of a temporary group of fellow performers and celebrators who are, at least partially, ethnic oriented. Basically, we deal here with the relationship: We -They (first person plural - third person plural). According to this, blacks and whites are formally identified and their relationship can be ritualized in various forms of opposition, either by an estrategic distancing, or in terms of an open, although temporary, confrontation.

The case of umbanda and its similars is possibly the most complex, for it gives room to the expression of differences that do not appear in the two previous models. Umbanda expands the Congos's opposition between blacks and whites, especially through the figure of the Preto Velho, who is a representation of the Brazilian Black person open to identifications far beyond the color boundaries. Umbanda cults and their equivalents can therefore be regarded as true ritual laboratories for the construction of new ethnicities in Brazil and that is connected with the openness of its musical material.

As to the vast field of popular music, the issue of Black ethnicity is even more difficult to interpret, for it implies also a thorough discussion of the powerful influence of the mass media in contemporary Brazilian society. My interest has been to exemplify only the new attempts at defining a Black identity based on protest and on the promotion of the self-esteem and pride of the Black Brazilians. I hope to explore all the complexities of the representations of Blacks in Brazilian popular music in a future essay.

Finally, I believe these are the theoretical questions which we should be addressing ourselves in the present moment. The new technologies of identity construction (what Foucault used to call "technologies of the I") spread by the media might give us an ilusion of ethnicity just there where it is being dissolved into fashion and temporary identification. If the traditional approaches to ethnicity and identity were criticized on the grounds that they reified social groups and cultural expressions, we should be aware that not all of the new musical identity markers are necessarily consistent or different from the deeper structures which generate them. In other words, the main problems in the area of verbal and non-verbal communication run through equally the traditional and the contemporary

models of Afro-Brazilian culture and I hope to have provided a basic conceptual framework to discuss them.

Bibliography

AUERBACH, Erich 1987 A Cicatriz de Ulisses. Em: <u>Mimesis</u>. São Paulo: Perspectiva.

BENJAMIN, Roberto 1977 <u>Congos da Paraíba</u>. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Nacional do Folclore.

BRANDÃO, Théo 1978 <u>Quilombo</u>. Cadernos de Folclore, No. 28. Rio de Janeiro: Campanha de Defesa do Folclore Brasileiro.

CARVALHO, José Jorge 1984 Music of African Origin in Brazil. In: Manuel M. Fraginals (ed), <u>Africa in Latin America</u>, 227-248. New York: Holmes & Meier.

_____ 1988 La Fuerza de la Nostalgia. El Concepto de Tiempo Historico en los Cultos Afrobrasileros Tradicionales, <u>Montalbán</u>, Nº 20, 167-197. Caracas.

_____ 1992 Estéticas da Opacidade e da   Transparência. Mito, Música e Ritual no Culto Xangô e na Tradição Erudita Ocidental, <u>Anuário Antropológico/89</u>, 83-116. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Tempo Brasileiro.

CARVALHO, José Jorge & Oluyemi Olaniyan 1981 <u>Yoruba Religious Song Texts frm the Shango Cults of Recife, Brazil</u>. Unpublished Manuscript. Belfast: Dept. of Anthropology, The Queen's University of Belfast.

CARVALHO, José Jorge & Rita Segato 1986 Musik der Xangô-Kulte von Recife. In: Tiago de Oliveira Pinto (ed), <u>Brasilien Einführung in die Musik-traditionen Brasiliens</u>, 176-192. Mainz: Scott.

_____ 1992. <u>Shango Cult in Recife, Brazil.</u> Caracas: Fundación de Etnomusicologia y Folklore.

_____ 1991 Sistemas abertos e   territórios   fechados. Para uma nova compreensão das interfaces entre música e identidades sociais. Paper read at the International Colloquium on Music, Knowledge and Power, sponsored by the ICTM. Florianópolis, University of Santa Catarina.

ECO, Umberto 1987 A Canção de Consumo. In: <u>Apocalípticos e Integrados</u>. São Paulo: Perspectiva.

FOSTER, George 1960 <u>Culture and Conquest. America's Spanish Heritage</u>. Chicago: Quadrangle Books.

FRITH, Simon 1987 Why do Songs have words? In: Avron, Levine White (ed), <u>Lost in Music. Culture, Style and the Musical Event</u>, 77-106. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude 1962 <u>La Pensée Sauvage</u>. Paris: Plon.

LINS, Elizabeth Travassos 1992 Dramatization and Antagonism in the Brazilian <u>Congadas</u>. In: Carol Robertson (ed), <u>Musical Repercussions of 1492</u>. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

ORTIZ, Renato 1977 A morte branca do feiticeiro negro, <u>Religião e Sociedade</u>, Nº 1, 43-50.

SEGATO, Rita 1992 ¿Ciudadanía por qué no? Estado y sociedad a la luz del discurao religioso afro-brasileiro. Série Antropologia Nº 132. Brasília: Depto. de Antropologia

Discography and Recordings

1) <u>Congos of Paraíba</u>. Compact record. Instituto Nacional do Folclore, Rio de Janeiro, 1977.

2) <u>Pemba</u> cult from Ipanema, Minas Gerais, January, 1980. Recorded by José Jorge de Carvalho & Rita Segato.

3) <u>Jurema</u> cult of Recife. March, 1976. Recorded by José Jorge de Carvalho & Cristina Mata Machado.

4) <u>Jurema</u> song from Recife. Idem.

5) "Aiuê meu cativeiro." LP <u>Pai Guiné de Arruda</u>. Nelson Mateus de Nogueira com Côro da Cabana Espírita Umbandista Nossa Senhora da Glória, Belo Horizonte, MG. Fermata 22.512.1985

6) "Rei do Congo." Idem.

7) "Louvação a Janaína". LP <u>Faramin Yemanjá</u>. SOM SOLP 40464.

8) Song for Water Spirit. Brasília, January, 1st, 1992. Recorded by José Jorge de Carvalho & Rita Laura Segato.

9) Madagascar Olodum. LP <u>Reflexu's da Mãe África</u>. Reflexu's. 1987.

10) "História do Brasil." LP Edson Gomes: <u>Reggae Resistência</u>. EMI, 1988.

11) "Sarará Miolo." LP Gilberto Gil, <u>Realce</u>. WEA BR 32.038, 1979.

12) "Babá Alapalá." LP Gilberto Gil, <u>Refavela</u>. Philips, 6349329, 1977.