

# AFRO-BRAZILIAN MUSIC AND THE EXPRESSION OF AFRO-BRAZILIAN SPIRITUALITY

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## RESUMO

Este é o segundo de uma série de três artigos que propõem que uma “cultura mística” bastante intensa de origem africana, como expressa na música afro-brasileira, está pouco a pouco subvertendo o elemento católico até hoje predominante no Brasil, assim se tornando um importante veículo para a expressão da religiosidade brasileira. Em seu primeiro artigo, publicado em 2004, a autora descreveu o sincretismo religioso brasileiro e o desenvolvimento da religiosidade afro-brasileira. Desta vez, mostrará como a música afro-brasileira se apropria de expressões do catolicismo para usá-las em seu próprio contexto. Finalmente, no último artigo, ela prestará atenção na forma como a espiritualidade afro-brasileira integra os santos católicos ao panteão dos deuses afro-brasileiros.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Música Afro-brasileira. Sincretismo Religioso. Catolicismo

## ABSTRACT

This is the second article of a series of three articles that will argue that a rather intense “mystical culture” of African origin, as expressed in the lyrics of Afro-Brazilian songs, is little by little

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subverting the Catholic element predominant thus far in Brazil, therefore becoming an important religious vehicle for Brazilian spirituality. In her first article – published in 2004 –, the author described Brazilian religious syncretism and the development of Afro-Brazilian spirituality. This time, she will show how Afro-Brazilian music appropriates expressions from Catholicism, and uses them within its own framework. Finally, in the last article, she will pay attention to the way Afro-Brazilian spirituality integrates Catholic saints into the pantheon of Afro-Brazilian gods.

**KEYWORDS:** Afro-Brazilian Music. Religious Syncretism. Catholicism

Music is a natural means of expression that gives vent to Afro-Brazilian spirituality. Early in Brazil history music played an important role as a means to bring consolation to the colonist who was often distant from his immediate relatives in Portugal and to the slaves bereft of their fatherland.<sup>2</sup> This comforting feature of early colonial music was the result of the interplay of Roman Catholic liturgy and African drums. Mario de Andrade appraised the music of the Jesuits in Brazil, and came to the conclusion that it was because of that music's soothing effect that it was possible for the colony to do without a police force for so long.<sup>3</sup>

### AFRO-BRAZILIAN MUSIC AND BRAZILIAN SPIRITUALITY

Brazil was from the very beginning a country with too little

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. VASCONCELOS, Ary. **Raízes da música popular brasileira: 1500-1889**. São Paulo, SP: Martins, 1977. p.3. Music must also have represented an important component of Indian culture in Brazil, but, as Neves puts it (p. 13), little is known of Indian music during colonial times. One of the factors that can explain its lack of influence upon Brazilian musicality is the nomadic character of Brazilian Indians who, at the time of the discovery, were far less advanced than the Indians of the Andes.

<sup>3</sup> ANDRADE, Mario de. Evolución social de la música brasileña. in: GÓMEZ, Zoila García (ed.). **Musicología em latinoamerica. La Habana: Arte y Literatura**, 1985. p.141.

bread and too much circus. And from the very beginning African music was an essential component of the incipient Brazilian musicality. Spiritually and materially were both present in every attempt to produce a Brazilian popular music.<sup>4</sup> At least 25 instruments from Africa are used in mainstream Brazilian music: the *atabaque*, the *adufe*, the *berimbau*, the *agogó* or *agogô*, the *carimbó*, the *caxambu*, the *cucumbi*, the *chocalho*, the *fungador*, the *ganzá* or *canzá*, the *gongom*, the *mulungu*, the *marimba*, the *puíta* or *cuíca*, the *piano de cuia* (also known as *balofon* in Africa), the *pandeiro*, the *quissangue*, the *roncador*, the *pererenga*, the *socador*, the *tambor* or *tambu*, the *ubatá*, the *vuvu* or *vu*, the *xequerê* or *xeguedê*, and the *triângulo*.<sup>5</sup>

There are several *personae* involved in the context of music making in an Afro-Brazilian religion such as Bahian *candomblé*, for instance.<sup>6</sup> The cult leader (whether a man: the *babalorixá* or *pai-de-santo*, or a woman: the *ialorixá* or *mãe-de-santo*) seems to be the major repository of musical repertoires. The master drummer (the *alabê*) contributes substantially to the appearance of the trance phenomenon by means of his drumming. The associate leader (the *iakerê* and the *babakerê*, little mother and little father, respectively), among other functions, has the responsibility of leading and teaching the special canticles of each daily activity, and acts as the organizer of the choral response to the singing. Finally, the initiates

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed description of how black music influenced the techniques of Brazilian music in general, see ALVARENGA, Oneyda. **Música popular brasileira**. Porto Alegre: Globo, 1950. p.23-4.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. GALLET, Luciano. **Estudos de folclore**. Rio de Janeiro: Carlos Wehrs & Cia., 1934. p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> Béhage discusses the most important contexts for musical performance in *candomblé*: the “baptism” of drums (that takes place shortly after a new drum has been constructed), the *saída de iaôs* (the first public appearance of the new initiates), the *orunkó* (the new-name giving ceremony), the *quitanda das iaôs* (a rite of transition of the initiates from the sacred to the secular world), the *água de Oxalá* (a purification rite), the *pilão de Oxalá* (a communion rite), the *axexê* (a funeral ceremony), the *ogan* and *alabês* (confirmation rites), and, finally, the *xirê* ceremony (the most generalized public ritual, open to all – even tourists). BÉHAGE, Gerard. Patterns of Candomblé Music Performance: An Afro-Brazilian Religious Setting. in \_\_\_\_\_ (ed.). **Performance practice: ethnomusicological perspectives**. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1984. p. 228-49.

(*iaôs* or *adoxus*) represent the chief protagonists in most performance contexts.

In Brazil, African rituals were more resilient to change than myths. The constraints of the movements of the human body worked as change-limiting factors to rituals. But there were no such limitations for myths, and that made them especially susceptible to change. So, African mythology in Brazil is present mainly in the collective memory of *babalaôs*, *babalorixás* and *filhas-de-santo* through their dance movements. In fact, African myths have practically disappeared in Brazil. Bastide enumerates the following reasons for their disappearance: (1) those myths reflected the structure of African society, but such structure was destroyed by means of enslavement; (2) a reinterpretation of archaic customs has happened in Brazil; (3) the “impoverishment” of African myths was not due to psychological forgetfulness but to the lack of reference points with which to connect their recollection. There has been, however, one single important venue for the preservation of African mythology in Brazil: Afro-Brazilian music. Music has become a depository for expressions and stories derived from ritualistic contexts.

Afro-Brazilian music has bloomed and flourished in the State of Bahia, in Northeast Brazil. Salvador City, the capital of Bahia, is “the largest black city outside of Africa, and the second largest in the world.”<sup>7</sup> Ninety percent of its more than three million inhabitants are black or mulatto. This feature is well captured in the song “Pega que oh...!” by Rudnei Monteiro and Edmundo Carôso: *Bahia, seu coração é todo cor*, “Bahia, you’ve got a colored heart.”<sup>8</sup>

In fact, Bahia is also a leading market for the Brazilian musical

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<sup>7</sup> DANTAS, Marcelo. **Olodum**: de bloco afro a holding cultural. Salvador: Casa de Jorge Amado, 1994. p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of Salvador’s ethnicity and the cultural mobilization of black people in the capital of Bahia, see MORALES, Anamaria. **Etnicidade e mobilização cultural negra em salvador**. Salvador: Universidade Federal da Bahia, 1990. See also SANSONE, Livio. *Negritude sem Etnicidade*. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2004.

industry, surpassing most other states in music production. This explains why I have chosen to focus on *Axé Music*, a modality of Afro-Brazilian music mainly cultivated in Bahia.<sup>9</sup> This by no means indicates that African spirituality has no bearing upon the music of other Brazilian states but that it is more easily detected in the music of Bahia. In fact, specialists acknowledge the influence of Afro-Brazilian music upon other Brazilian rhythms. McGowan and Pessanha say that “vibrant Afro-Brazilian rhythms energize most Brazilian songs, from samba to *baião*.”<sup>10</sup>

Afro-Brazilian music reflects the influence of the expansion of African spirituality in Brazil. In order to verify how strong this influence is in the lyrics of such music, I have selected and examined 27 songs performed by Afro-Brazilian groups and individual artists from Bahia. I selected those 27 songs by browsing the Internet and randomly choosing songs performed by four renowned Axé groups and two individual artists: Olodum, Carlinhos Brown, Timbalada, Daniela Mercury, Ara Ketu, and Muzenza.

Olodum is the most well known and commercially successful of the Afro-Brazilian groups.<sup>11</sup> Several thousand members compose this group, which is headquartered in the Pelourinho, the former site of slave auctions and whippings. Carlinhos Brown is the escalating Bahian songwriter and singer who blended Brazilian Pop Music and Rio Samba with Axé Music and Funk. In fact, Sergio Mendes won a Grammy Award in 1992 with the album *Brasileiro* that includes mostly lyrics that Carlinhos Brown wrote. Timbalada, whose debut album was released in 1993, is an important Axé group that numbers a few hundred musicians. Daniela Mercury is

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<sup>9</sup> Axé Music is the name for samba reggae and other recent Afro-Brazilian styles performed by Olodum, Carlinhos Brown, Timbalada, Daniela Mercury, Ara Ketu, Luiz Caldas, and Margareth Menezes, among others.

<sup>10</sup> MCGOWAN, Chris; PESSANHA, Ricardo. **The brazilian sound: samba, bossa nova and the popular music of Brazil**. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> The name of the band derives from *Olodumare*, the Yoruba supreme deity. For additional information concerning the band, see Dantas.

a kinetic performer with a sensual poise and a lively magnetism. She was responsible for taking the national popularity of samba-reggae to a new level. Ara Ketu is an Axé group that celebrates the Yoruba concepts that Afro-Brazilian spirituality values. Muzenza is a very important group because of its associations with the black people from other parts of Latin America. It has a special affinity with Jamaica. In fact, it uses the green, yellow, and black colors of that country's flag as its particular insignia (those colors roughly coincide with the colors of the Brazilian flag).

Words of religious connotation present in the different lyrics provide the main criteria for grouping the songs. So, I was able to group the songs in four categories. Group One includes two songs that make use of no words with a religious overtone: "À primeira vista" (*At First Sight*) and "Todo canto alegre" (*Every Happy Song*). Group Two includes nine songs that refer to Afro-Brazilian elements exclusively: "Carimbolada soul" (*A Soul With Sundry Faces*), "Doce esperança" (*Sweet Hope*), "O canto da cidade" (*The City Anthem*), "O mais belo dos belos" (*The Prettiest of the Prettiest*), "Pega que oh!..." (*You Touch It and Oh!...*), "Rosa negra" (*Black Rose*), "Swing da cor" (*Color Swing*), "Tá na mulher" (*It's in a Woman*), and "Toque do timbaleiro" (*A Drummer's Beat*). Group Three consists of eight songs that contain words somehow related to Catholicism, and that cannot be applied to Afro-Brazilian religion: "Alegria geral" (*Everybody's Happiness*), "Elétrica" (*Electric*), "I Miss Her," "Lua de São Jorge" (*Saint George's Moon*), "Rosa" (*Rose*), "Toda menina baiana" (*Every Girl from Bahia*), "Vida rudimentar" (*The Bare Necessities of Life*), and "Zona solidão" (*Loneliness Zone*). Finally, Group Forth is comprised of eight songs whose lyrics refer to both Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian spirituality: "Camafeu" (*Cameo*), "Choveu sorvete" (*Ice-cream Rain*), "Convênio com Cristo" (*Covenant with Christ*), "Espada de Xangô" (*Xangô's Sword*), "Se você for" (*If You Go Away*), "Som dos tribais" (*Tribal Sounds*), "U-Maracá," and "Vida ligeira" (*Life Is So Short*). In

summary, two songs make no reference to religious elements; nine songs include expressions utilized in Afro-Brazilian rituals or common religious practices; eight employ words connected with Catholic practices; and eight others include expressions used by both religions.

Our corpus reveals two important aspects of these songs. First, there is a striking balance concerning the references that the 27 songs make to both cults. That is, the same number of songs made at least one reference to either Catholicism or Afro-Brazilian cults, or to both Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian spirituality. And that is – by its own merits – quite surprising since the vast majority of Brazilians profess Catholicism and only a small minority openly identify themselves as practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions. But as we shall see later, the contexts in which the two different jargons are used is indicative of a much stronger African influence.

Despite this apparent balance, the corpus suggests that there is a predominance of the African element. In the 27 songs I found 39 religious expressions covering a broad scope. The percentage of references in the selected corpus to each one of the two religions is as follows: 13 references to Catholic expressions, representing 33.3% of the total; and 26 references to African Cults, representing 66.6% of the total number of references.

The 26 words that refer to Afro-Brazilian spirituality are, alphabetically: *afoxé* (a *candomblé* party-offering), *arerê* (invocation of an *orixá*; literally, “o hear me”), *axé* (divine power), *Borocô* (one of Nanã’s names), *candomblé* (primitive type of *umbanda*), *emba* (spell), *Iansã* (one of Xangô’s wives, the goddess of the thunderstorms), *Ijexá* (African tribe), *ilê* (a meeting place for *candomblé* practices), *mãe-de-santo* (high priestess; literally, *a saint’s mother*), *mandinga* (spell), *muzenza* (priestess), *Nanã* (the mother of all *orixás*), *Obá* (wife least loved by Xangô), *Ogum* (the god of war), *ojuobá* (Xangô’s priest),

*Olorum* (supreme god), *oraieiê* (greeting to Oxum), *orixás* (intermediary gods), *Oromilá* (the creator god), *Oxalá* (the governing god, Olorum's son), *Oxóssi* (god of the chase and Ogun's brother), *Oxum* (Xangô's beloved wife, the goddess of the rivers), *ronda* (line to prevent the evil spirits to come down upon a medium), *Xangô* (the god of thunderstorms and Oxalá's son), and *Zambi* (supreme god).

The 13 expressions related to Catholicism are, alphabetically: *bênção* (blessing), *Cristo* (Christ), *Deus* (God), *fé* (faith), *irmã* (nun), *missa* (mass), *oração* (prayer) *padre* (a Catholic priest; literally, "a father"), *Santa Bárbara* (Catholic equivalent to Iansã), *santo* (saint), *São Jerônimo* (Catholic equivalent to Ogum), *São Jorge* (Catholic equivalent to Oxóssi), *Senhor* (Lord).

It is possible to arrange these references in a certain structure, despite their heterogeneity. Words that denote deities and supernatural entities occur 20 times. Words that describe divine attributes and their manifestation occur twice. Expressions that refer to liturgy and rituals (including sacred places, ceremonies and officiating ministers, such as *mãe de santo*, *padre* and *irmã*) occur 14 times. Phrases addressed to the deities occur twice: *arerê* and *oraieiê*. One only expression that depicts the condition or the sentiment of the worshipper occurs: *fé*, "faith."

If we take into consideration that the corpus surveyed includes mostly Catholic words of common use – that is, words that belong to the Portuguese lexicon and might be used with no connection at all to Catholicism, such as "faith," "prayer," "sister" and "god" – and that most of the African words in the corpus have no other purpose in the language but to refer to Afro-Brazilian rituals, we can begin to appreciate the power of *umbanda* in Brazilian everyday life.

The contexts in which Catholic expressions appear in Afro-Brazilian songs betray the fact that their connection to Catholicism has been weakened and they are no more a genuine property of Brazilian



catholicity. A few considerations will suffice to prove this statement. In the first place, Afro-Brazilian songwriters appropriate some common expressions utilized by Catholics and consistently utilize them with Afro-Brazilian cults (*candomblé* and its modalities). Secondly, the saints that the Church has canonized are merely a smoke screen that but superficially conceals Afro-Brazilian deities.

The Catholic saints worked as a façade for the African gods, as it will become more evident from my discussion in the third article of this series. This is due to a few similarities between them, which have been emphasized by Afro-Brazilian spiritualists. The *orixás* were seen as guardian angels or patron saints. Besides, both *orixás* and saints are said to have once lived on earth, and both *orixás* and saints are said to have sought an intimate connection with the deity. In fact, one can say that Afro-Brazilian mysticism disguises as an imitation of sacred history.

#### AFRO-BRAZILIAN MUSIC AND THE APPROPRIATION OF CATHOLIC NOMENCLATURE

The appropriation of ordinary Catholic nomenclature by Afro-Brazilian songwriters is evident by the consistent usage they make of expressions such as “faith,” “prayer,” and “blessing” and by the way these musicians apply them to Afro-Brazilian cultic circumstances. The word “faith,” formerly employed by Catholics to describe their confidence in God, is now also used to describe their trust in the African gods, to the point that whenever the religion is not specified, it refers to the faith in the African gods and not faith in the Catholic God. This is the case, for instance, when the word *fé* (“faith”) appears in “Se você for:”

*Vou falar com Zambi*  
*Abraçando a fé*  
*Já gritei na praça*  
*Que te amo*

*I will address Zambi*  
*I will embrace the faith*  
*I've shouted on the streets*  
*That I love you*

*Oh rainha linda**O my beautiful queen*

In the song, the young lover pleads with his beloved so she can stay. He says that if she leaves him, his heart will not bear it. Carnival has just arrived and it is no time for him to be alone. He then makes a religious vow: he will become a convert if his god *Zambi* will make her stay. It is evident that the word “faith” is not used here with any Christian connotation. It explicitly refers to the faith in the African gods.

The occurrence of *fé* in the song “O canto da cidade” represents additional evidence that, in Bahia, the word is primarily applied to Afro-Brazilian spirituality:

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>A cor dessa cidade sou eu</i>  | <i>I am the color of this city</i>       |
| <i>O canto dessa cidade é meu</i> | <i>The song of this city is mine</i>     |
| <i>O gueto, a rua, a fé</i>       | <i>The ghetto, the street, the faith</i> |
| <i>Eu vou andando a pé</i>        | <i>I proceed on foot</i>                 |
| <i>Pela cidade bonita</i>         | <i>Through the pretty city</i>           |
| <i>O toque do afoxé</i>           | <i>The afoxé is playing</i>              |
| <i>E a força,</i>                 | <i>Where does this power</i>             |
| <i>de onde vem?</i>               | <i>come from?</i>                        |
| <i>Ninguém explica</i>            | <i>No one knows</i>                      |
| <i>Ela é bonita</i>               | <i>It [i.e., the city] is so pretty</i>  |

Here, the composers connect the attractiveness of Salvador City to many elements: its singing, its people and its faith in the *afoxé*, the party-offering of the *candomblé*. Again, there is no reference at all to Catholic practices. The faith of the city is linked solely to the *afoxé*.

Similarly, the song “Camafeu” shows *fé* against the background of Afro-Brazilian spirituality. Here, the interlocutor vigorously extends an invitation for a dance following the rhythm of the drums. He wants people to see him dancing and he expects them to join him.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Ai ai vem me ver (bis)</i>              | <i>Oh oh come see me (twice)</i>                  |
| <i>Nesse bala fé</i>                       | <i>In this faith-dance</i>                        |
| <i>Nesse arerê</i>                         | <i>In this arerê</i>                              |
| <i>Baila que baila...</i>                  | <i>Come and dance...</i>                          |
| <i>Toca timbau, vem parir o som</i>        | <i>Play the timbau, come give birth to sound</i>  |
| <i>Toca timbau no Koriefã</i>              | <i>Play the timbau in the Koriefã</i>             |
| <i>Toca timbau esse toque vem de longe</i> | <i>Play the timbau, this beat comes from afar</i> |

The playful dancer sees his inventive ballet as an expression of faith. But this is no ordinary dance. It is an *arerê*, an invocation of the *orixás* (the in-between gods). Besides, the fact that the beat comes from afar reminds the invitee that it is not a homegrown festival; it is a dance that comes from across the Atlantic.

In fact, none of the 27 songs examined in the corpus, uses faith in relation to a specific Catholic context. The word appears twice in a trivial context in which it only means trust in something. In “Vida ligeira” it is *fé na estrada* (“trust the road”), a word play on *pé na estrada*, the Brazilian idiom for “hit the road.” In “Som dos tribais,” even though *fé* refers to the confidence one is supposed to have in the dexterity of a drum-player, it is reinforced by the word *axé*, a very important word in Afro-Brazilian spirituality that denotes the blessing granted by the gods upon their worshippers – a blend of power and serenity:

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Sou timbaleiro e bote fé</i>   | <i>I am a drum-player and you can trust that</i> |
| <i>Sou timbaleiro e trago axé</i> | <i>I am a drum-player and I bring you axé</i>    |

Therefore, one can say that the word “faith” in Afro-Brazilian music is primarily used to describe the religious confidence of the people from Bahia in their ancient African gods.

The same phenomenon happens when Afro-Brazilian songwriters

employ the word *oração*, “prayer.” It occurs only once in the corpus – in the lyrics of “U-Maracá,” but it is not a Christian prayer. It is a prayer to *Oxalá*, the governing god, and the son of the supreme deity:<sup>12</sup>

|                               |                                      |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Vem de lá a nau</i>        | <i>Thence comes the ship</i>         |
| <i>dos aflitos</i>            | <i>with the wretched ones</i>        |
| <i>Mandinga multiplicação</i> | <i>A multiplicity of spells</i>      |
| <i>O negão da</i>             | <i>The strong Negro in the</i>       |
| <i>sensala</i>                | <i>slave quarters,</i>               |
| <i>Pisar pisador de pilão</i> | <i>A pestle’s pounding stompings</i> |
| <i>Bagaço de cana oração</i>  | <i>Cane husks, and a prayer</i>      |
| <i>Pra Oxalá ê, ê, ê</i>      | <i>To Oxalá eh, eh, eh</i>           |

It is obviously a song that describes the slave traffic to Brazil and therefore it is not altogether surprising that the word appears in an African context. However, it is nonetheless a “pagan” prayer. In fact, we should not expect references to Christian prayers in Afro-Brazilian songs.

Similarly, the word *bênção* is used in a context that has more associations with Afro-Brazilian spirituality than with Catholicism. *Bênção* occurs in “Alegria geral,” a spirited tribute to Olodum, Brazil’s most famous and celebrated Afro-Brazilian group. The song begins with a description of the ingenuity of the band:

|                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Olodum tá hippie,</i>      | <i>Olodum is hippie,</i>          |
| <i>O Olodum tá pop</i>        | <i>Olodum is pop</i>              |
| <i>Olodum tá reggae,</i>      | <i>Olodum is reggae,</i>          |
| <i>O Olodum tá rock (bis)</i> | <i>Olodum is rock (twice)</i>     |
| <i>Olodum pirou de vez</i>    | <i>Olodum is completely crazy</i> |

The short introductory eulogy is then followed by references to the two times – every week – when the group plays in *Pelourinho*, the place where the old whipping-post was located and which has now come to represent the city’s African inheritance itself. Olodum is

<sup>12</sup> Oxalá is the Afro-Brazilian equivalent to Christ. Cf. RIBEIRO, José. **Mágico mundo dos orixás**. Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 1988. p. 81.

mainly a percussion group and its drum-players rehearse twice a week in *Pelourinho* thus attracting many local spectators as well as tourists.<sup>13</sup> The Tuesday rehearsal coincides with what is known as the *bênção do Senhor* (“the Lord’s blessing”), a mixture of *capoeira*,<sup>14</sup> samba and Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <i>Todos os domingos e terças-feiras</i>    | <i>Every Sunday and tuesday</i>           |
| <i>Tem samba de roda e capoeira</i>         | <i>We’ve got samba and capoeira</i>       |
| <i>Domingo tem Olodum no Pelô</i>           | <i>On Sunday, Olodum is in Pelourinho</i> |
| <i>Na terça</i>                             | <i>On Tuesday,</i>                        |
| <i>Tem a bênção do Senhor</i>               | <i>We’ve got the “bênção do Senhor”</i>   |
| <i>Pelourinho se transforma em Carnaval</i> | <i>There is Carnival in Pelourinho</i>    |
| <i>Nesse momento, alegria é geral</i>       | <i>At that moment, everyone is happy</i>  |

For the Afro-Brazilian mind-set, the days of the week are important because they mark the sovereignty of the different *orixás*.<sup>15</sup>

In Bahia, individual *orixás* are worshiped on the day ascribed to each deity: *Oxalá*, on Sunday; *Bara*, on Monday; *Xangô*, on Tuesday;

<sup>13</sup> Here is a description of one of Olodum’s performances at Pelourinho: “The surdo players begin to generate a solid beat and the caixas add a constant pattern of higher-pitched sixteen notes, accenting the back beats. The repique kicks in a reggae cadence, other instruments like the African kalimba (thumb-piano) join in, and rhythms build and interact. The music is mesmerizing, as samba meets reggae and creates a heavy, dense, ritualistic sound. Women start to dance spontaneously in large groups and athletic young men practice capoeira, throwing spinning kicks to the beat... The thousands in the audience are carried off into a state of euphoria by the music and dancing.” McGowan & Pessanha, p. 128.

<sup>14</sup> “Afro-Brazilian martial art brought to Brazil by Bantu slaves from Angola, practiced and performed publicly to singing and the playing of berimbau, pandeiros, and other instruments.” McGowan & Pessanha, p. 208.

<sup>15</sup> “It is interesting to note, however, that this temporal ordering of the *orixás* does not correspond to the sequence they are worshipped during a religious service (*shire*). There they are invoked in a different order: Bara, Ogum, Oia, Xangô, Ode, Xapanã, Oba, Oxum-panda, Boji, Oxum-docô, Iemanjá, Oxalá and Orun-mila.” BASTIDE, Roger. **As religiões africanas no Brasil**: contribuição a uma sociologia das interpretações de civilizações. São Paulo: Pioneira, 1960. p. 290.

*Sapata* or *Xapanã*, on Wednesday; *Ogum*, on Thursday; *Iemanjá* and her son *Ode*, on Friday; and *Oxum*, on Saturday. Thus, when one says that *Olodum* plays on Tuesday nights at Pelourinho, this is supposed to mean that the group performs under the auspices of *Xangô*. At the same time, Tuesday is the day the Catholic Church performs charity for the poor. According to Marcelo Dantas, a Catholic brotherhood distributes food for the homeless and performs a mass late in the afternoon under the blessing of the *orixás*.<sup>16</sup>

We can see that our corpus includes expressions that are apparently linked to Catholicism but which are, in fact, used in relation to Afro-Brazilian spirituality. After realizing that the words “faith,” “prayer,” and “blessing” – which one would generally assume as having a Catholic connotation – do, in fact, refer to Afro-Brazilian spirituality, our percentages of references must be reviewed. In fact, as far as our corpus is concerned, only 10 occurrences (or 25.6%) of words with a religious overtone refer to Catholicism, whereas 29 occurrences (or 74.4%) refer to the African cults.

Thus we see that approximately three out of four allusions in Afro-Brazilian music to spiritual elements refer to the ancient cults in Africa, an astounding figure for the most musical state of the largest Catholic nation on earth.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of a corpus of 27 randomly selected song lyrics from the Internet which belong to a style known as Axé Music shows that Afro-Brazilian spirituality is an important component of that type of music. This is not at all surprising since Axé Music has always chosen to express its affinity with African ancestry and the culture of black people in Brazil. Another aspect that the analysis of the 27 lyrics reveals is the

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<sup>16</sup> Dantas, p. 89.

appropriation of common Catholic words or phrases for use in the Afro-Brazilian religions. Again, that should not surprise us since Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian spirituality have coexisted alongside each other for many centuries in Brazil. On the other hand, it surprises us that Axé Music is using more and more Catholic expressions in an Afro-Brazilian context to the point that mainstream Catholicism has in essence vanished from Afro-Brazilian music. When we consider the increasing popularity of Axé Music in Brazil, one is tempted to say that this type of music has now epitomized the way Catholicism is losing ground in Brazil. In Bahia – at least – traditional Catholicism has become a hollow shell that serves only to accommodate Afro-Brazilian spirituality – which has now permeated many aspects of one’s life in that State – without overtly offending the Catholic scruples of those who want to join in.

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