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“IT IS WHEN THE BELLS RING THAT THE SAINTS ARE CALLED”: FOR AN AFRO-BRAZILIAN ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

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Abstract: This article presents data from an anthropological investigation focused on Afro-Brazilian religious and musical manifestations present in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Beat, extreme south of Brazil), based on a set of documentary sources available in both Germany and Brazil that take as an object of analysis a collection of Afro-Brazilian ritual artifacts deposited at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin and its possible consequences. The investigation is relevant both from an archival point of view and from an ethnographic and ethnomusicological point of view, and aims to contribute to the development of a topic that has been sparsely studied by researchers to this day. Working with a combination of new empirical sources, I conduct “ethnography of/in museums and archives” from both countries involved, comparing German sources with Brazilian ones. It is worth noting here that the first part (Germany) has already been completed. The interpretative lines suggested here foresee a combination of theoretical perspectives arising from Post-Colonial Studies within a Contemporary Anthropology combined with Ethnomusicology approaches.

Keywords: [Anthropology, music, Afro-Brazilian religions, black slavery; ethnographic collections, museums].

“Speaking in phenomenological terms, music is a technology that reveals the world to us”
(HEIDEGGER, 1977).

THE RELIGIOUS MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE IN THE EXTREME SOUTH OF BRAZIL

A unique portrait of Afro-Brazilian religiosity, the Pietzcker Collection can be considered the only Afro-American ethnographic collection in Berlin and one of the oldest in any European museum, encompassing a set of ritual objects probably from African slaves smuggled to the extreme south of the Brazil. Originally containing 67 artifacts from Afro-Brazilian rites, it has its origins in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and arrived in Berlin in 1880, donated to the then Royal Museum of Ethnology (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) by German merchant-traveler Wilhelm Pietzcker (Karg, 2007).

It can be considered one of the most extraordinary of its kind for two reasons: first, because it was acquired during the period of slavery in Brazil and, second, because not the south, but the northeast of Brazil, especially the state of Bahia, is known as the “cradle” of Afro-Brazilian religiosity. This means that these objects are important documents from the formative period of Afrogaúcho rites. African slaves in RS came, for the most part, from Bantu-speaking ethnic groups from Angola and the Congo area (Oro, 2002). Their surviving notions of faith in the extreme south of Brazil are called Beat, the best-known being, Candomblé from Bahia, further north.

The differences between beat and candomblé arise from the different ethnic origins of African slaves. Among the artifacts in the collection are insignia (orixá tools), ritual adornments of initiates (necklaces, bracelets, hats), containers (for sacrificial use), ‘anthropomorphic’ figures such as dolls, musical instruments such as (bells), among others. Most of the objects are decorated with cowrie shells, a decorative element of African

origin, some of them almost completely covered by them. Performing rituals of African origin was a prohibited act in Brazil during the 19th century. Even so, they were carried out in secret in yards, where the police used to continually repress (Lírio de Mello, 1994). Confiscated during a major police raid on a secret religious meeting run by a “black magician” (*Neger Zauberer*) for around 100 black men and women, the artifacts would have remained seized in a police station in the Rio Grande do Sul province, destined for destruction, until they were acquired by the collector through a supposed “donation to the local hospital” (Hermannstädter, 2002, p.25), whose contribution made it possible to remove them from their original context and send them as a “welcome gift” to the then newly appointed director of the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*, the ethnologist Adolf Bastian, considered the founding father of German Anthropology. Regarding the only musical instruments in the Pietzcker Collection, (VB 254, VB 255, VB 263)¹, it can be said that there are three bells in total (Pinto, 2002; Karg 2007).

THREE BELLS: MULTIPLE SOUNDS, SOME NARRATIVES

Who defines a Bell? How can it be defined? Who are the different uses of these musical instruments within beat aimed at? In what contexts of action is the bell identified? How to articulate the speeches of different interlocutors related to these instruments? What is the meaning of the bell? And how are these narratives about them organized? Reflecting on these questions allows us to understand how such a religious musical instrument acquires different meanings for the same subjects depending on the place

1. These numbers refer to the List of Objects of the Pietzcker Collection (Slg. Pietzcker 1880), in this case only to musical instruments (*Glocken*) according to the American Ethnology Inventory Books (*Inventarbücher der Studiensammlung Amerikanische Ethnologie*) and the Acquisition Minutes of the Royal Museum of Ethnology (*Erwerbungsakten aus Amerika Vol.6 und Vol.7, 1879-1881*). The indicated items appear in Cataloging Sheets (*Karteikarten*) (Karg, 2007, p. 40-1).

from which it is identified and the recipients to whom the identification discourses are directed. And, furthermore, different places can offer convergent meanings when different interlocutors are united by common objectives. Of interest to this reflection is the way in which the same musical instrument is described by different interlocutors, that is, how it is identified with regard to its uses and religious and musical practices in the Afro-Brazilian territory and cosmology that they supposedly belong to. Based on these questions, I present a case study related to religious communities of Afro-descendants in the extreme south of Brazil (Rio Grande and São José do Norte), which present some of these narratives that make up the complexity of this property.

METHODOLOGY

I made use of shared research practices, in particular participatory action research, as in the works of Braga (1998, 2003) and Tygel and Nogueira (2006). Using this methodology, as Thiollent (2003) argues, I obtained greater engagement from, mainly, the female percussionists. *Nation: Jêje* (Rio Grande/RS), but also – no less important – on the part of the mother of saint: *Mãe Vane d'Ogum* and his saint-daughter: *Alaíde do Xangô* (*Nation Jêje*, they describe the bells – instruments commonly used in religious and musical practices in each and every house of saint – with a clear perception, on their part, of the importance of valuing their knowledge and the different strategies used between private and public space.

In the words of one of my interlocutors, Eneida Guterres Menezes, better known as Eneida d'Oxalá with Xapanã (conversation on 06/08/2022), “the bell is, let's say, an

instrument par excellence that conducts energy that we use to access the sacred “ (Yard: Nação Jêje - Rio Grande/RS). As for his niece, Rosa Inêz Guterres Menezes Vaz, recognized as: *Rosa do Bará* with Oxum, also a percussionist at Religion, from the same yard, the bell acquires another connotation (*conversation on 06/08/2022*). “*It is not just a mere bell to be struck (...), because the effect of this sound is incomparably more powerful, more effective and faster than any spoken word*”.

That resonated with me, and it was almost like reading Nietzsche, when he reminds us of his relationship with music. “*In front of sounds, words can only occupy a place of subordination; they force themselves to bend to all their demands.*” (Nietzsche, 2017, p.51-52). Music would represent the most fundamental reality (*Urgrund*). “*Words would reproduce the phenomena. Behind the phenomena the most fundamental reality*” (ibidem, p. 48).

On the other hand, for Vane Menezes, better known as Mãe Vane d’Ogum (Yard: ``Nação Jêje`` – São José do Norte/RS), the bell – and here more specifically I am referring to the instrument VB 263 – the latter would acquire an even greater meaning more special. It would not only fulfill its role as a “bell”, “bell”, echoing the sounds of the sacred and therefore updating the energy. Unlike the others (VB 254 and VB 255), the third would have a different use because it had a cutting instrument (knife) ‘attached’ to it, which it would do in her words (*conversation on 05/08/2022*) “*change all the symbolism around what a bell actually is*”, All of this, according

to her, “*due to the fundamental uses to which a “knife energy” would be involved*”. It means, “*while an animal was being cut, the sound coming from the bell informed this act.*” (...) “*Here it is as if the sacrifice was informed to everyone until its last moment, until the bell stopped ringing*”. Religious practices are inseparable from sound experiences united through the same instrument. The sound changes the meaning.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The sensation of hearing was, for centuries, dominated by visual perception. Even though more recent scientific research has recovered this meaning in terms of its physical, cultural and even social aspects, analytical discourses in the field of anthropology remain focused on imagery and there are few who oppose the discussion about sound to the predominance of visuality in the human and social sciences. (Pinto, 2001, p. 222). Here, sound is, therefore, understood as a ‘conductor of energy’ (power of realization), which appears with all its symbolic content in musical instruments considered sacred, in this case, bells. Music is, therefore, understood here as a “form of communication” that has, similar to any type of language, its own codes. Music is a manifestation of beliefs, of identities, it is universal in terms of its existence and importance in any society. At the same time, it is unique and difficult to translate when presented outside its context or cultural environment (ibid., p. 223).

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