

## **ANTÔNIO GODI \_AFRO-MUSICAL PERFORMANCE: LEGITIMIZATION AND INCLUSION IN THE ELECTRONIC CONTEXT**

\_In 2005, when the phenomenon of axé-music is celebrating its 20th birthday, reflections on the context of its emergence may lead us to a better understanding of the peculiarities that guide cultural productions and the entertainment industry in contemporary Bahia. The explosive expansion of this market is seen as a result of a new social-cultural context, connected to a process of “metropolitization”, which includes the advent of the so-called electronic culture. It is necessary to take into consideration the fact that, in the 20th century, black culture has achieved widespread visibility and legitimacy, greatly due to music. However, insofar as it refers to Bahia and axé-music, these achievements do not represent perceptive social conquests, despite the style’s tight bonds with black culture and the large number of Afro-descendants residing in the state.

Adriano Duarte Rodrigues states that the legitimization process of individuals, formed by the system of social classes, operates within the boundaries of “public spheres”, where, “the game of social interactions gain visibility” (1990:141). Contemporary contexts point towards a “public sphere” in which the very notion of spatiality and temporality is amplified. Contributing to this is the use of new media directly connected to electronic culture. Thus the current legitimization processes of social-cultural identities depend necessarily on the access and use of new technologies.

We maintain that, musical and performance languages – found on the radio, CDs, TV and Internet – play active roles in accelerating changes, within an environment that permeates the “electronic age”, as pointed out by McLuhan. All that taking place within a transient context (the passage of the century and millennium) marked by a credibility crisis and the legitimization of new theoretical-academic categories. The contemporary world, therefore, is on the brink of a wide array of changes and de-centralizations, including epistemological ones, putting to doubt academic concepts once held sacred. The sense of identity goes through identification symbols such as clothes, hair, behavior and social rites that legitimize the existence of different groups. Contemporary social life, therefore, is permeated both by material-wise conflicts and symbolic and cultural ones. (Sahlins: 1979, Bourdier: 1987). This is why, when the aesthetic raw material – music or performance – unfolds and is multiplied into products, material and symbolic contents become confused. This phenomenon instigates studies aimed at the understanding of new existential and epistemological notions. (Cohen: 1989). The building of a new insight of time and space, associated with the speed of communication and the popularization of faster transportation means brought about strange changes to the planet (Harvey: 1989). These small revolutions would create a sense of existential cultural fugaciousness and ephemerality never seen before (Lipovetsky: 1989). The sophisticated communication technology developed over the past few decades of the 20th century would provide cultural products and symbolic elements with an inflationary phenomenon without precedents. Products that exceed notions of class, “ethnos” and nation have multiplied and created new paradigms. In recent days, identity references are associated to issues of age, gender, and transitory variables such as pop music fads.

And, according to that same line of thought, music has proved to be a determining language in the configuration of new notions of identity and inclusion. Although it is plausible to point at young blacks of the African Diaspora as protagonists of a hybrid electronic culture, we understand that today ethnicity is not limited only to the color of skin, but also to the complex diversity of re-qualifying underground cultural traditions. (Woodward: 2000). These multi-ethnic groups of young people impose themselves, together with music and performances, as key-categories of inclusion; we witness the

formation of tribes that adopt rock, reggae, funk, rap, etc as a part of their lives. One may believe that these tribes attain acceptance and legitimization thanks to a certain theatricality adopted in video clips as well as shows.

In contemporary plurality, music and youth are the first of all identity and inclusion references. In the entrails of these movements, a number of different behaviors surface, through the formation of what Osgood calls "subcultures": tribes that transcend cultures, nationalities and ethnicity, which armed with music and electronic communication, disseminate and legitimize their identity symbols

In an incisive text that points to new cultural geographies, Paul Gilroy, suggests that the music of the "Black Diaspora" should be seen as a "fundamental and central element" to better understand historical conflicts of Western "post-slavery" cultures (2001:161).

One can take a step further, and propose that the aesthetics of black music in modern times has only lately gained a status of product and fashion, contributing decisively to the legitimization and acceptance of Afro-descendent cultures in the 20th century (Godi: 1999). Today, we are far from the "post-slavery" period mentioned by Gilroy, "modes of production" have been reconfigured and black aesthetics continues to be a determining factor for the understanding of cultural and social-ethnic conflicts.

New technologies and ethnic music have been determining factors for the formation of new global cultures. However, one must insist that no music exists dissociated from the body, even because the body itself is the vehicle for its execution and reception. Music reverberates in the body, in dance and performances, representations of local and global things tied to rhythms and tribes. Consequently, we claim for the construction of an epistemology that contemplates music as an important instrument to bring new forms of socialization to the surface.

It is important to remember the plurality of the music that portrays the musical landscape of the Black Diaspora throughout the last century: jazz, rock, soul, funk, samba and salsa, among others. They unfold and multiply around the globe, in aesthetic styles and varied behaviors. It is sufficient to recall their influence on Bossa Nova, Jovem Guarda and Tropicalismo in Brazil during the 1950's and 1960's, and their renovation as heard in a dynamic version of local rock music in the following decades.

Music hailing from an incipient Afro-American musical market, originating in the Black Diaspora, as mentioned by Gilroy, also had a plural multiplying effect, with the power to cross borders and cultures. As is the case with rhythm and blues, funk and soul music, which decisively influenced the construction of reggae, ragamuffin and hip-hop in the late decades of the 20th century.

We insist that all the current musical forms mentioned above carry an Afro-ethnic mold within, and cannot be separated from the body, dance and other stage adaptations and reproductions in the contemporary world. All of this materializes in the form of spectacles, both real and virtual (video clips and DVDs). Based on the reflections put forth here, one can consider that notions of staging and theater spread beyond the stage, moving towards new supports, representing an agonistic life in a scenario with a strong ethnic musical character.

One of the consequences of this phenomenon is the need to rethink theoretical categories of social and cultural identity that have been enforced in academic circles over the late decades of the past century. Woodward appeals to the propositions put forth by K. Mercer to emphasize that, when notions of identity insist on being in the center of discussions on better understanding human beings, everything is in crisis (2000: 19). Perhaps, due to that, Guattari and Rolnik contemplating a world in frenetic plurality, pointed to a notion of social "singularization" (1986). Maffesoli would have bet on the formation of "tribes" of social "inclusion" currently facing the decline of "individualism" (1987). Stuart Hall tries to recover the concept of "identity" within a

perspective of understanding the social-cultural complexity of individuals and of modern/contemporary men as a product of social conditions, and comes across speculations on subjective existence within a historical phase that many would name “post-modern”(2000).

Hall emphasizes today’s hybridism as a determining variable in the formation of a new and complex social-cultural subjectivity. He invests in a historical analysis of comprehending and reconstructing the “being” in the modern and contemporary world by way of a brief report. He discusses in that report notions and concepts that have crossed modern history, trying to understand the many intersecting lines of the reconstruction of the meaning of “self” in the shared social dimensions of alterability, subjectivity and, most of all, in the verification of plural inclusions and identities. (Idem). One could believe that the existence of the individual has a by-product of social conditions anchored to the idea of materiality of time and place; the “self” which inhabits and breathes within a real body. In face of this, Goffman, when discussing the representations of the “self” in every day’s life, also sees solely the real person playing different roles (1975). With that, these social by-products cohabit with identity references tied to their traditions and reconfigure them in time in a mixing process with the technological possibilities of the modern world. That is the case of the Rasta-reggae culture in Jamaica, where traditions of the “Niyabinghi burra” drums cross with the Afro-electric music from the Diaspora; or in Bahia, where the Afro groups cross samba traditions with reggae, producing samba-reggae. Still along that same line, axé-music incorporates traditions of local samba woven with new electronic possibilities, giving rise to the “pagode from Bahia”, with the controversial group “É o Tchan” as protagonists. Axé-music from Bahia, taken beyond the representations pointed out above, also visits other local traditions, as seen in the musical cadence of electric frevo and the northeastern galope that characterizes the style of the successful group “Chiclete com Banana”. One should bear in mind that around the musical scenario that has gained visibility and importance thanks to the new interactive media, other players were decisive for the success of axé-music. We emphasize the presence of expressive composers from the Afro Groups, along with the musicians, technicians and well-known agents from the radio and record industry; all historically antagonistic segments that construed a new “cultural sociability” through music. In a world marked by ethnic intolerance, this interaction bridged by music should already be a reason for celebration. Axé-music was only made possible thanks to the exchange between socially excluded segments – made up of Afrodescendent artists and composers from Afro groups – with representatives from the middle-class carnival blocks, without forgetting the emergence of local electronic media. Perhaps it was because of this that Luís Caldas dedicated his emblematic record “Magia”, in 1985, to the “blacks from Bahia”. The song mostly played of the record, “Fricote”, also known as “Nega do cabelo duro”, written by Luís Caldas and Paulinho Camafeu, was the object of severe criticism from black communities in Bahia, who saw racist connotations in the verses. Paradoxically, Camafeu was also the author of the lead song of Ilê Aiyê’s first revolutionary carnival parade, known as “Que bloco é esse?”

To conclude this reflection on the context in which axé-music from Bahia was constituted and crystallized, we consider that its basis on Afro-Brazilian traditions was fundamental in the consolidation of an Afro-descent identity and, most of all, in the social legitimacy of the black culture. However, despite reaffirming the hybrid character of contemporary sociability, the current social context in the state continues to be unfair as it refers to the majority of the population. The Afro-popular blocks tend to disappear in the midst of extreme difficulties in which to produce their performances, marked by rehearsals, festivals and parades. These rituals, incidentally, were established as

creative plants for the musical aesthetics in Bahia in the 20th century. To finalize, one could ask why carnival in Salvador, marked by the powerful presence of Black aesthetics, has not contributed towards visible social conquests of Afrodescendants. Why do the Afro-popular carnival blocks, despite being the true producers of the dances and songs that supply the leisure and cultural markets in Salvador, continue having problems of survival? Why aren't the creators of the music and performance aesthetics in Bahia (composers and choreographers) given visibility and respectability in the market? Why don't the people who create and make the party have the appropriate space and safety in the carnival of Salvador? How come, within a context marked by an accelerated process of inclusion and legitimization of the Black culture, the majority in the blackest city in Brazil continues to suffer the worst social rates?

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