

# Brazil's music of sorcery according to Mário de Andrade: an introduction by the editors

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Initially “The music of sorcery in Brazil” was given as a lecture by Mário de Andrade to the Brazilian Music Association (Associação Brasileira de Música), in Rio de Janeiro, in 1933. The author never managed to complete its revision for publication. This was undertaken by Oneyda Alvarenga, who published the text of the lecture and a series of related documents in Volume XIII – *Música de Feitiçaria no Brasil* – of the Complete Works of Mário de Andrade (Editora Itatiaia/Instituto Nacional do Livro, 1983).

“Sorcery” had become a subject of Andrade’s interest early in the mid-1920s, as he became increasingly fascinated by Brazilian folklore. The Mário de Andrade Archive in the Institute of Brazilian Studies (Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros - IEB) at the University of São Paulo (USP) contains two boxes with the title: “Música de Feitiçaria”. There can be found the two versions of the lecture indicated by Alvarenga (Andrade, 1983, pp. 23-70), and many documents and notes of Andrade’s research on the subject, part of which were also published in the attachments to Volume XIII of the Complete Works of Mário de Andrade. The first version was the basis for the establishment of Oneyda Alvarenga’s text and was used as a reference for this English translation.

As is well known, Mário de Andrade was committed to creating a form of Portuguese that he hoped could express in a genuine way Brazilianness, that is, the cultural characteristics of the Brazilian way of speaking. Rosenfeld (1973, p. 186) found an opportune way of understanding this re-creation of Portuguese as “Brazilian language ‘of combat’”, to be understood in the context of Brazilian Modernism of the 1920s-1940s. He considered this effort to be “an antithesis that has been overcome (and integrated) in the dialectic of development”. This is surely one of the great difficulties faced by this, or any other translation of the writings of Andrade. What guided us was a desire to convey as faithfully as possible the thought of Mário de Andrade to those who do not read in Portuguese.<sup>1</sup> The final result remains of course open to interpretations and new readings.

<sup>1</sup> One of our first difficulties was how to translate the word *feitiçaria*. The choice was between “witchcraft” and “sorcery”. We chose the latter in conformity with the way in which Evans-Pritchard (1965) defined the two terms in his analysis of Zande interpretations of affliction. While he defined the innate capacity for doing evil (even involuntarily) as witchcraft, he used the term sorcery to refer to conscious acts. We would like to thank Flávia Toni, Maurício Hoelz, Carlos Sandroni and Michael Iyanaga who helped us with the translation of some of the musical analysis. The meaning of the words in italics can be found at the glossary at the end of this edition of “The music of sorcery in Brazil”.

The first version of the lecture, as Alvarenga pointed out (1983, pp. 11-21), is longer and was probably written by Mário de Andrade without worrying about the time it would take to read (31 typed pages, with hand-written additions, corrections and with references to commercially produced recordings of musical examples). The shorter second version (21pages, with revisions) was actually read to the Associação Brasileira de Música.

Mário de Andrade, however, made use of his notes for diverse ends. Whole stretches of the lecture that convey the colour of Andrade's heteroclite composition, appear from time to time throughout his works. Some parts derive directly from Mário de Andrade's journey through the Northeast of Brazil between the end of November, 1928 and the beginning of February, 1929. Andrade's main aim was field research but he also arranged to write a column for the São Paulo newspaper *Diário Nacional*. The articles were written in the form of a diary during the trip and were published between December 14, 1928 and March 29, 1929. The narratives he used in "Música de Feitiçaria" come from his writings in the city of Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, from December 26 to 28, 1928 (Andrade, 1976, pp. 248-254).<sup>2</sup> With them, the flavour of his direct research experience in the *catimbó* of the Brazilian Northeast intermingles this erudite and studious text in search for the role of music, with its distinctive rhythms and melodic form, in the mystical trance of Afro-Brazilian religions.<sup>3</sup> Other parts of the same material appeared in his article "Geografia religiosa do Brasil", published in the series *Publicações Médicas*, number 124, August, 1941.<sup>4</sup>

The first ten lines of the text published by Alvarenga are identical to the first paragraph of "Geografia religiosa", which also contains the seven first pages of the lecture together with additional information.

All this brings us to the necessary choices we made in preparing this English translation of the lecture. Andrade was something of a bricoleur. In Alvarenga's edition (Andrade, 1983) there are innumerable notes that collate "The Music of Sorcery in Brazil" and "Geografia Religiosa". There are also many notes related to parts of the first and longer typewritten text of the conference. She had to choose between the crossings out and the author's additional notes in order to establish the final version for publication. We believe, however, that "Geografia Religiosa" results from another of Andrade's aims that is quite clear from the title. For this reason and to avoid confusing the reader over possible alternatives for a particular stretch of the text, we chose not to include such notes. Even so, those notes that add some new perspective to the text are transcribed or indicated as Editors' notes.<sup>5</sup>

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The heteroclite nature of the composition of "The Music of Sorcery in Brazil" also allows several angles of reading which, put together, make it particularly complex. One of the more sensitive aspects for the contemporary reader is the fact that Andrade had no compunction in revealing his own very often critical evaluations of the "preposterous" ceremony to *fechar o corpo* (close his body)<sup>6</sup> to which he asked to be subjected. He also openly criticized the two practitioners, who participated in the ritual and collaborated in his field research. Master Manuel he described, for example, as "an accomplished farceur, a cynical and turbulent charlatan". Alvarenga has reproduced in her presentation of the conference's published version Andrade's field notes on Master Manuel and another spiritual leader, Master João. These show that Andrade

<sup>2</sup> See Lopez (1972) and Jardim (2015) on the life and work of Mário de Andrade.

<sup>3</sup> Those studies were strongly influenced by evolutionary and diffusionist anthropology of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the twentieth.

<sup>4</sup> This is available in the IEB archive. Flávia Toni informs us that other stretches of the conference were published in another article called "Papel da música na feitiçaria" ("The role of music in sorcery"), unknown to Alvarenga, published earlier in the same series (*Publicações Médicas*. ano VI, August, 1934, n. 1, p.66-72). "Terapia Musical", included in *Namoros com a medicina* (Andrade, 1980), may also be related to the same interest.

<sup>5</sup> The complete notes of Oneyda Alvarenga can, of course, be found in the Brazilian edition.

<sup>6</sup> "Fechar o corpo" is a ritual believed to protect a person against any sort of attack either spiritual or not.

removed his more critical impressions from the lecture itself: “Manuel dos Santos – with no African blood. A mature man. Sharp as they come, a truly presumptuous sorcerer. Talkative, show off, a pedant. A certain amount of education, having studied at the Ateneu grammar school in Natal up to the third year. A musical and clear voice. Good rhythm that he emphasizes by moving a hand and sometimes a leg. He generally sings the melodies with gusto, showing that he knows them by heart. He rarely hesitates. And if he does, his colleague is there to help. Sometimes, when he didn’t know something, he would invent it with the presumptuousness of a life of fake sorcery. He would do this even with melodies, while his colleague performed according to tradition. Although I’m not sure whether his colleague had the courage to reveal everything he knew. The melodies, yes. But I can’t guarantee his biography of the masters. M. de S. got tired. A restless type. He moved a lot.” “João Germano - A mature man. Quiet, humble, mulatto, serious. He seemed to believe in his own sorceries. He was the one who suffered the beatings in the *catimbó* session that I witnessed. And although these beatings frightened him, I didn’t detect the slightest insincerity, the slightest presumptuousness. A good person, even pleasant. An untiring patience. His voice was less than his colleague but he sang music that I could recognize. On the whole, it was M. dos S. who led the singing. J. G. kept things under control with patience. I also asked them to sing a few songs together. They agreed. For all these reasons, I can vouch for the exactness of my annotations. They were made with maximum care and represent exactly what M. dos S. and J. G. knew” (Andrade, 1983, pp. 19-20). Master João “was sincere”. Manuel not so (Andrade, 1983, p. 56).

Such distinctions permeate subsequent anthropological literature, both in the voice of some anthropologists and the people they describe. Ruth Landes wrote in the early 1940s of her meeting with Sabina, a priestess of a *candomblé de caboclo* (a ritual Afro-Brazilian system in which the indigenous spiritual entities are present together with other divinities of African origin, also associated to the catholic saints), whose *caboclo* spirit spoke through her to invite Ruth Landes to become her follower after a payment of some 900 mil réis. Her colleague, Edison Carneiro, reacted: “It’s positively unethical. In my long acquaintance with ‘mothers’, I’ve never known one invoke higher power in order to gain a ‘daughter’. Amazing. ‘Mothers’ do get possessed suddenly to learn how to settle desperate problems like fatal illness, or violation of taboos, or *despachos* [spiritual attacks]. But to get you! And so much money!” He snorted. “That’s why we organized a union of the reputable temples, to outlaw such charlatanism.” (Landes 1994 [1947], pp. 191,192). Edison Carneiro was not alone in his concern with distinguishing between true and false religious practitioners among the different Afro-Brazilian religious traditions. Brazilian judges and lawyers have constantly worked to make such distinctions to this very day (Maggie 1992).

In the work of Roger Bastide (1971 [1960]) these distinctions served to hierarchize the Afro-Brazilian religions. In comparison with the *candomblés* of Bahia, supposedly steeped in their African tradition and practiced mainly by Afro-Brazilians, Bastide interprets the *catimbós* in the Northeast and the *macumbas* as more individualistic, affected by what he saw as the disaggregation of social life in the countryside and the growing metropolises. *Macumba*, as he saw it, resulted “from social parasitism, from the shameless exploitation of the credulity of the lower classes (...)" (Bastide, 1971 [1960], pp. 413-4).<sup>7</sup>

We have no doubt that many of those of us who have spent time talking to spirits embodied in their mediums have found some of them more convincing than others. Our code of ethics does not however allow us to say so, at least in public. Mário de Andrade had no such qualms, but we should not judge him for that. He was a man of his times and probably shared his views with most of the people of Brazil then as now. However, it must be noted that charlatanism and fraud, problems related to the trustworthiness of healers, diviners and makers of magic are common to religions that have as a founding principle direct

<sup>7</sup> For a critique of Bastide’s view, see Monteiro, 1978 and Cavalcanti, 2012. For an overview of Bastide’s work, see Peixoto, 2000. For a critique of the establishment of hierarchies of authenticity among different Afro-Brazilian religious traditions, see Dantas, 1988.

communication between the living with the world of the spirits, either through spirit mediumship or alternative divinatory procedures. In Brazil, for example, in kardecist spiritism – the “table line” that also appears in Mário de Andrade’s conference – a certain degree of uncertainty with respect to the trustworthiness of a medium is inherent to the system of beliefs, and permanently discussed and evaluated by the adepts in terms of their own system of beliefs (Cavalcanti, 1982). Evans-Pritchard (1965 [1937]) argued that the existence of false prophets and charlatans amongst the Azande indicates and shores up the impregnability of a cosmology based on the action of spirits and sorcery as revealed by oracles and diviners. Unexpected outcomes are blamed not on the cosmology itself, but on its practitioners.

What is important to stress is that the general impression of Andrade’s lecture is that a wondrously inebriating music reigned over everything he described. As he himself concluded: “It is impossible to describe all that occurred during this preposterous ceremony, a mixture of sincerity, charlatanism, ridiculous, comical, dramatic, unnerving, repugnant, yet extremely moving, all at the same time. And poetic.” In an article that accompanies this edition of Andrade’s lecture, Elizabeth Travassos draws attention to the performative aspects of the rituals and verbal arts that invite contemporary researchers to a re-reading of the fertile ideas not only of Mário de Andrade but also of Fernando Ortiz on this subject.

Other aspects of Mário de Andrade’s lecture are also of interest to present-day students of ritual. While the Northeastern *catimbó* where the author had his body ritually closed is the high ethnographic point of the conference, from a musical point of view it is the *macumba* that occupies the place of honor. The music of *macumba* in the Rio de Janeiro around the 1930s, recorded by the main recording companies of the time, is the centre of his musical analysis. This musicality displayed “great originality” and “Afro-Brazilian character” and hosted “the prototype of the music of sorcery” (Andrade, 1983, p. 43). A careful reading reveals the many mediations that are present in the choice, collection of and listening to this musical documentation, which is central to much of Andrade’s inquiry into the music of sorcery. Andrade maintained close contact with the famous black composer and instrumentalist Pixinguinha (Alfredo da Rocha Vianna Filho) – the “celebrated *macumbeiro*” and the “well-known flautist who held an important post (*ogã*) in *macumba*”, who is mentioned in the lecture and named explicitly in the newspaper article of December 26, 1928 that was later republished in “The Apprentice Tourist” (*O turista aprendiz*) (Andrade, 1983, p.248). As Flávia Toni (2003)<sup>8</sup> observes, however, it is important to pay special attention to the significance of the gramophone and recordings that Andrade so much enjoyed collecting and listening to as part of his musical research. There is something deeply modern and innovative in his interest in the music of sorcery. Listening to the *macumba* music recorded on disc one becomes aware —maybe inadvertently on the part of researchers who tend to associate Mário de Andrade only with traditional folklore — of the lively presence of the music of *macumba* in the city of Rio de Janeiro—still the capital of Brazil—and in the phonographic industry at that time.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Among the notes and cards that accompany the lecture published by Alvarenga (Andrade, 1983) there are texts written by Mário de Andrade’s collaborators at his request. Among them is a testimony by Pixinguinha on “Cerimônias de macumba” (“Macumba Ceremonies”) (Andrade, 1983, pp. 154-156). Andrade also used this data in the chapter called “Macumba” of his novel *Macunaíma* (Andrade, 1988). See Toni, 2003, pp.38-39.

<sup>9</sup> The *Canto de Ogum* (named in the conference as “*Ponto de Ogum*”) was recorded by Odeon [Odeon 10690] in 1930. Its interpreters are Elói Antero Dias (1888-1971) and Getúlio Marinho da Silva (1889-1964), with the Conjunto Africano. Getúlio and Elói are considered the ones that introduced *macumba* songs into the commercial recording companies of that time. Soares (2016) examined the trajectory of Getúlio who was in carnival groups of that time, a composer of sambas and other musical genres. As indicated by Vasconcelos (1985, pp 236-239), Elói participated in the creation of samba schools in Madureira, was a capoeirista, and a composer and interpreter of sambas and jongos. Both attended *terreiros de macumba* (Macumba religious centers). Various *macumba* songs from the recordings of these years, among them some of the main ones mentioned by Mário de Andrade can be heard on: <http://www.goma-laca.com/portfolio/as-mais-antigas-gravacoes-de-temas-afrobrasileiros/>

A list of the recordings and songs that are mentioned in the lecture can be found in the Mário de Andrade Archive at IEB/USP, spread through the series “Música Brasileira Folclórica” and “Música Brasileira Popular”. These recordings have been digitalized and may be heard *in loco* at the IEB. We hope that this translation will help stimulate further research based on reading, and listening to the music of sorcery in Brazil.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mário de Andrade's novel *Macunaíma* was translated into English in 1984 (New York: Random House). “The music of sorcery in Brazil” is the second full work of this author to be translated into English and the first of his more academic work.

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