



## THE RITUALISTIC PERFORMANCE OF THE SINGER CLEMENTINA DE JESUS: ELEMENTS OF SUPPORT FOR AN ANCESTRY



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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this production is to understand through an image of the singer Clementina de Jesus and her stage presentation as a ritualization and manifestation of the sacred. For this approach, we used analyses of some images of the artist, highlighting categories such as: language, gesture, rite, symbol and the song of Clementina de Jesus, who when singing involves the elements described above that express the memory of an ancestry. The systematization is the result of a part of the chapter of Terezinha Lima's dissertation, which was entitled "The Black Eve: Memory of an Ancestry that crossed time". It is understood "The performance", RICOEUR, (1978) "An art that meets elements: rite, language of a symbology establishing a mediation in the rescue of a memory of divine actions, the "mysterious" surroundings of things mediated by a human experience. Subsequently, analysis of bibliographies that enabled the systematization and construction of the present essay. Thus, the following work is based on the assumption that the aforementioned images expressed in the song of Clementina de Jesus to which we refer from the sixties, whose artistic expression that resigified a religiosity and at the same time can attribute values, until then not extinct to this people. Clementina de Jesus, a post-abolition heritage, but she carried with her the burden of a suffering life, memories that worried her, because her childhood could still witness the invisibility of how African peoples were affected.

**Keywords:** Ritualistic Performance. Ancestry. Clementina de Jesus.

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## INTRODUCTION

Clementina de Jesus was born at the beginning of the twentieth century, on February 7, 1901 in the city of Valença - RJ, in the region of Vale do Paraíba, a traditional stronghold of *jongueiros*, daughter of<sup>3</sup> Amélia de Jesus dos Santos and Paulo Baptista de Araújo Leite. The singer, a descendant of freed slaves with the law of free birth, since she was young sang memories of her parents' suffering life in captivity. The present text was built based on bibliographies that address the history of blacks. And yet, the text proposes, through the singer's singing, to discuss the singer's performance that, when singing, gives life to a religious field of belonging present in her voice. Thus, "performance" is so extensively concerned with the imaginative and emotional nature, and consequently with those uncertain elements of knowledge, which accompany a narrative of religion through its constitutive axes: language, gestures, rites, myths, and symbols. Therefore, through her musical compositions, she can refer to the culture of a past of her ancestors (TURNER, 1974).

Therefore, the elements mentioned are present in every religious action. In "Religion and Language", Nogueira (2016), considered a complex scientific field articulated with other fields in the area of knowledge, language and religion constitute complex "arrangements" to be understood and demystified. Still, for the author, language is so powerful that it leads a space and consecutively to a time, strengthening practices to be structured that later become part of conventional actions established by society.

However, religious actions are manifestations that constitute through a ritual that is very much around a myth, and materialized through ritualistic actions. The rites, in general, are manifested through art, especially the different elements that are interconnected to the art of a symbolic language. The symbol and the myth in this context of memorial rescue of the black people, is associated with a narrative through a language, the function of the rite we show to be divine imitations, thus enabling the transcendent to the art of the singer Clementina de Jesus.

Therefore, it is in this way that the rite is present through the singer's art, establishing a communication from the language of a certain context, a memorial rescue of the black people, however, there is a narrative from these elements, which we understand that the rite establishes a social function which manifests itself in actions materialized by the divine.

To understand the transcendent in the philosophical sense implies a nature absolutely superior to others. From the perspective of phenomenology, the symbol is an

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<sup>3</sup> The term "partideira" refers to the samba musician who stands out in the art of improvised verse, also known as *versador* (LOPES, SIMAS, 2017).

element that acquires meanings. When dealing with a religious experience, the transcendent becomes a mediation, not being objective, nor defining itself in words, but the "mysterious" is perceived, around the thing mediated by a human experience, the element that transcends has a meaning for a social group, whose function is to give continuity to an intentionality (RICOEUR, 1978, p. 88).

Therefore, the music of the sixties became an instrument with a fundamental role for people who were on the margins, they were visible expressions that resigified a religiosity that it was possible to attribute values, until then extinct for black people, it is considered a politically rich moment. The Samba de Partido-alto, and other musical genres present in the Canto de Clementina de Jesus, where blacks began in an organized way to contest their own condition as an experience of the theory of "embaquramento". Thus, it was considered a "living collection" when portraying memories of its childhood and music through art was an instrument of strategy and mobility, the link that could materialize its Afro-religious culture (CASTRO *et al.*, 2017, p. 68).

## **CLEMENTINA DE JESUS AND THE BELONGING OF AFRO-BRAZILIAN CULTURE**

To speak of Clementina de Jesus is to recall a profusion of residues from this specific ethnic segment. She was responsible for presenting the history of a people through her singing<sup>4</sup>, with a culture loaded with color. The studies around his person were seen by many critics such as his discoverer, Hermínio de Carvalho, among others such as: Turíbio Santos; João Bosco; Pixinguinha; and other figures responsible for this "amalgamation" that we call Brazilian culture. For these critics, the singer came to be seen as a mystical symbol, almost divine for the responsibility of contributing to the affirmation of the black people. It was considered a "living collection", as it portrayed memories of his childhood, and music was the mediation of materialization of the Afro-religious culture.

For this approach, analysis of two images is used, the first with regard to the expression of singing, which when staging through gestures the singer Clementina de Jesus attributes a cultural feeling, in her repertoire, there are religious songs, Corimas, Sambas, Partidos, Jongos, among other musical genres. For a theoretical contribution of performance in the view of Victor Turner (1974), "it is to advance in the sense of possibilities that it can be surrounded by a complex knowledge in its multidimensions of a reality". According to C. G. Jung (2000), myths present to the community the subjective way that is

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<sup>4</sup> The songs sung by Clementina de Jesus are considered songs from saints' houses, also called work points or doctrines. Most of them are considered to be in the popular domain and are sung even today in the terreiros of Brazil.

related to the natural events of things, the unconscious is an active subject of this action and is associated with the phenomena found in nature.

In this way, it is art manifesting the sacred, religion and man as religious, it presents a reorientation of gazes in the world of life. In this sense, it is understood that religious manifestations only occur in the instance of the human being (CONCEIÇÃO, 2011). The rite is the performance that materializes through art, symbolically tells us something, and a language imbricated with information is found (NOGUEIRA, 2016).

## THE MYTHOLOGY ABOUT THE IMAGE OF A BLACK DIAMOND

In societies, language is part of a communication, so the word "Corpus" (Latin: plural corpora) does not simply mean body, in historical sciences, it refers to a collection of texts, a complete collection of writings (SARDINHA, 2000, p. 44). Among the elements of a language, we find a set of myths imagined by a people, we understand myth as traditional and legendary inventions that seek to explain certain facts to invoke the supernatural. Its origin comes from various explanations that have gone through time. It is characterized by a discourse of reports of an event in the realm of the subjective or the transcendent. Therefore, it is part over the centuries and throughout the surface of the earth, of millions of souls that have revived and exalted themselves, being part of human spirituality, always being related to a "certain vision" of the world (CROATTO, 2001, p. 350).

However, the rite asks for the word in a natural way, it is a symbol which has the importance of participating in the narrative quality of the myth, there is a harmony between them, because the rite achieves this participation with the transcendent, the symbol is the specific element of the rite. In this way, the symbol is inherent to a context and by extension performs a social function, through communication it establishes an experience directed to the human being (RICOEUR, 1978, p. 88).

Figure 1: Clementina de Jesús (1966). Author: Selo Odeon



From the image, we can evidence the religiosity of the singer Clementina de Jesus, through her manifested performance of a sacred language individually, this manifestation of man is always and in any part of the world complex, and religion is so intensely concerned with the imaginative and emotional nature (TURNER, 1969, p. 13).

Music at that moment became the calm, it began to play a fundamental role, because it was through it that blacks created a mechanism of cultural rescue, coming from other regions of Brazil, such as Lundu, a dance that comes from the Bantu batuque, to Samba de Partido-alto, and other musical genres present in the memory of the Canto de Clementina de Jesus. The singer is considered a priestess when representing a social segment. Clothing becomes a symbolic prop that becomes universal, it will always be expressed in the dialectical relationship between structure and action, but it will provide us with a language about the principles of semiotics to be unveiled through its interpretations (NOGUEIRA, 2016, p. 245).

Language also comes from the bias of culture, because all language is culturally conventional, therefore, from this dual process between: language, the form of expression and the content of this language, evidence a communication. According to the following quotation we can better identify the message conveyed by the singer Clementina de Jesus, when singing she has her own gesticulation and that also emerges "possessing traits that language itself can explain":

Anyone who starts to attend a religious group must be subjected to a long period of learning the image, narratives, gestures, classifications, hierarchies and genealogical trees of divine and enlightened beings of valued and other forbidden actions. Once literate in the language of a group as such, they gesticulate and insert themselves into the complex systems of organization of the reality of that group (NOGUEIRA, 2016, p. 245).

A religious ritual is like a consecrated behavior, in which the symbolic complex is clothed with persuasive authority, fusing *ethos* and worldview, religious symbols can be represented by mythical or dramatized accounts, they can be performed, when staged publicly, religious rituals are considered as cultural performances. Cultural performances, specifically religious ones, involve verbal and non-verbal language, singing, dancing, staging and dramatization, involve a complex meaning of interpretation, it is one of the oldest means of communication (GEERTZ, 1973, p. 24).

From the rite presented in his gestural performance, he represented a "text" and consequently a language. We can conceptualize the term Rite – Latin word, *ritus*, is close to the Sanskrit word, which means *Rita* (*Mita*), of the cosmic force over which deities such as *varuna veil*. It is the normal structure of things, of what happens in the cosmos and in

human life (NOGUEIRA, 2016, p. 330). The singer, when performing at the Youth Theater in Botafogo, as she sang, a person went into a trance, or rather, the mimic gestures passed a language. In the testimony of Paulinho da Viola who watched the scene.

We sang several curimas. She was a well-known curima: "I saw Santa Barbara in the sky, the thunderstorm rumbled there in the sea". While Clementina was singing, in the fourth row, with the theater full, a woman went into a trance. I think some people realized that and the husband held her tightly (CASTRO *et al.*, 2017, p. 153).

Other testimonies confirm how well the singer presented the elements that made up a ritualistic action. For John Bosco, it was not difficult to go into a trance listening to Clementina de Jesus. Elton Medeiros says: "We arrived at the theater and called Clementina mother" (CASTRO *et al.*, 2017, p. 153). In the ritual process there is the presence of powerful energies and emotions linked to human physiology. Therefore, every rite will be for a symbolic language, as well as for the life of the myth, they are participatory connections of one and the other simultaneously (TURNER, 1974, p. 16).

Certainly, the elements mentioned above compose a mime, paradigmatic and syntagmatic dialogue of analysis. But the image itself also speaks for itself. It plays a fundamental role in semiotic systems, because the presentation of all meaning is composed from it. We can understand when Heron Coelho refers to the singer, "Clementina brought to the fore a musical fortune and a range of references rooted in oral tradition that, if not passed on and recorded, would certainly wither in the limbo of oblivion" (CASTRO, 2017, p. 11). Hence the greatness of his work, the merit of all his deeds which, although late, emphasized fundamental aspects such as the recognition of a blackness intrinsic to certain faces of our culture.

We conclude this topic by highlighting the singer's performance, the incessant search to report to her ancestral people, in a way that is representative of a primitive ritual. Thus, we can show how important Clementina de Jesus was to seek a memory that represented an entire social segment, in a process that was still rustic, therefore, the quote below says a lot about this rite still in the initiation phase.

(...) Elton Medeiros, from the tirade of a high party, asked: Clementina, Where are you? So, the overwhelming force of her presence dominated everything. With his many gestures of crossing and uncrossing his raised hands, Quelé opened his contralto voice of rare timbre and his own, very personal divisions. The voice seemed to rise from the earth, coming from the hollow of time, provoking disturbing and ancient feelings, called memories, perhaps of this black Eve, African germinal of the entire human race (CASTRO *et al.*, 2017, p. 19).

Thus, the legacy left by his discography went beyond the musical sense and became a record of cultural expression. Clementina in Santanna's view (2016) was respected within the musical environment, when she sang, her voice was something that overflowed. In the documentary, *Rainha Quelé*, by São Paulo director Werinton Kermes, João Bosco reports:

I think Clementina was born more than three thousand years ago, she connects us to our ancestors. I was always living with her, participating in her life and I was letting go in this world that she awakened in me. I might have had that and I didn't know it, but she was the one who said: You have you know, you're going to use it. Because you can't live a life in Brazil without knowing about Clementina's existence (SANTANNA, 2016, p. 201).

Therefore, the image presented in her performance establishes a communication by staging, giving spiritual visibility to her "I", a religious subjectivity that contemplates her interior. However, a situation that ratifies the permutation between the double belonging<sup>5</sup>, that is, she called herself a Catholic religious, but her singing continued to represent the Afro-Brazilian religion. She was the force that walked in different directions in search of solidification of the black group. It is essentially a set of beliefs and practices that plead for the notion of a supernatural world and simultaneously an effort through a mythological language.

Figure 2: Clementina de Jesús. Author: Glen Batoca



<sup>5</sup> According to Nei Lopes, this double belonging has its origin in the arrival of this population as slave labor to Brazil. The slave owners claimed that in order for the African population made up of slaves to achieve the salvation of their souls, they should be uprooted on the African continent, being a good that was done to them, thus free from the paganism of anthropophagic practices, idolatry, among other organizations, so that blacks could achieve spiritual salvation through Christianity (LOPES, 2011, p. 55).



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