

ILÉ AXÉ OPÔ AFONJÁ

"Jornal da Bahia",

Salvador, Friday, 29th of July of 1983



"Candomblé says no to syncretism"

- News writer: Vander Prata -

Iyalorixás assume their faith as a religion independent from catholicism

From here onwards, the children of the people of Saint will not learn their tradition of Orishas in syncretism with the catholic religion anymore. The Iyas and Babalorixás of Bahia do not want as well, to allow their religion be treated as folklore, sect, animism or primitive religion, "as it has heppened in this country, in this city". They want to say enough, to the utilization of their dresses and rituals in official contests or touristic marketing.

This position assumed by some of the most respected "mães" (mothers) of Salvador - Stella of Oshossi, Mãe Menininha of Gantois, Tete of Iansa, Olga of Alaketo and Nicinha of Bogum - shall reflect intensely in the local community, a city which grew seeing the cult of Candomblé being syncretized with catholicism. "Can you imagine "Senhor do Bomfim" without Oshala?" Serene,

Mãe Stella of Oshossi - one of the most respected Iyalorixás of Bahia - always secretive towards publicity and the press, spoke with exclusiveness to "Jornal da Bahia", explaining:

- The catholic saints and images have their value. We do not want to stop having faith in Saint Barbara. Sure, an elevated spirit. But we know that Iansa is another energy, it is not St.Barbara. Religion is not something to be imposed, it depends of the consciousness of everyone. But we want respect with the Candomblé. It is a non-sense, for exemple, to give food to Iansa at St.Barbara's feet. It has no meaning. The food is of Iansa, it is another energy, completely different of what it is St.Barbara, do you understand?

Free Thought

Mãe Stella had participated actively in the recent World Conference of the Orisha's Tradition. She has no doubt that this attitude will reflect on the population. About what will the catholic church say? She answer: "The Father of Saint who has coherence with his principles will not syncretize anymore, he will convey our knowledge to his children. About what the church may say, the cult, the thought is free. I respect D.Avelar, but everyone must have his own consciousness. To control the consciousness of others, in this end of century, is no possible anymore". And she says more: "And also we are not forcing everybody to believe in Candomblé". To conclude:

- Candomblé is not incompatible with catholic religion. But it is so vice-versa. Then, it is up to each individual to say that he is of Ogum, what does not means that he has no faith in St.Antonio anymore. Just, as I said before, they are different energies. Vice-versa.

Mãe Stella knows very well what happens with the rituals/magics of the faith of the Orishas. Salvador is considered touristic pole by Brazilian Government,

and Candomblé as its strongest popular expression. What would happen with Bahia's carnival without the reference to Candomblé? She strongly opposes herself to the utilization of sacred symbols-dresses.

- To go out wearing the symbols and dresses of Saint is no more than lack of respect, a profanation of our religion.

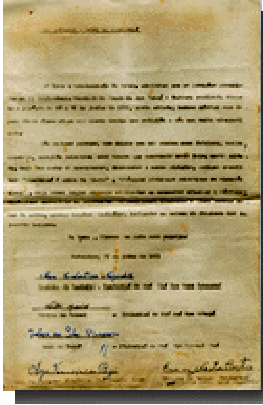
How would be the carnival performance of "Filhos de Gandhi" or even the modern version of Afoxé, the Badauê? Mãe Stella do not consider its merit ("they are afoxés, the joy of carnival") but, she strongly disagrees with "the profanation of Orishas". To profane, here means: to take out of the Candomblé's House ("Terreiro"), precepts and secrets of the cult.

- There is no justification to delude. We need to be respected as religion and not be taken as the press does here in Salvador, putting our Houses and cult in the column of folklore.

- We are not in the times when we had to hide our religion anymore. Our ancestors, for the sake of not being massacred, were obliged to syncretism. This is what we want to stop doing.

Another aspect of our talk to Mãe Stella: the artists, the researchers, finally, the growing approximation of intellectuals to drink in the source and then use the learning, in art or academic thesis, without any return to Candomblé. She answer: "The clevers who wander around the Candomblé are not acting rightly. I'm not against a painter to make a picture of Shango, but when he starts to use this just to earn lots of money, to profane, this is wrong. This has the tendency to disappear with the growing of our consciousness, inside our Houses.

During the II World Conference of Orishas' Tradition, Mãe Stella claimed for



concret action: the teaching of Yoruba language and the teaching of the Orisha's Tradition, "and not just the Catholic religion, because if you ask a child which one is his or her religion, he or she will answer 'Catholic', and in reality he or she is son or daughter of people of Saint, but they are afraid, they had a wrong teaching".

How it would be the concretization of your idea? Mãe Stella hopes that "the authorities act to satisfy the desire of a whole community". For what is up to the Iyas and Babalorixás, they had already done the first step. This vigorous letter divulged yesterday brings in its core a shout of liberty: *Ma beru, Olorum wa pelu awon omorisa*. In other words: "Have no fear, God is with all 'children' of Orisha".

From here onwards, the sons and daughters of people of Saint, break, tenaciously, with almost five centuries of silence, imposed since the coming of the dungeons and pillories, to make one only voice with Mãe Stella:

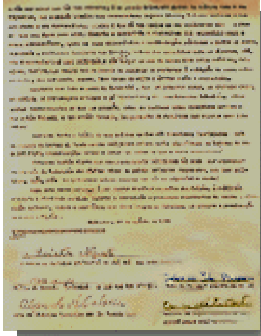
- We are beyond the time to hide our religion.



Letters open to the public:

To the public and to the people of Candomblé

The Iyas and Babalorixás of Bahia, coherent with the position assumed in the II World Conference of Culture and Orishas' Tradition, realized during the



period of 17th to 23th of July of 1983, at this city, make public that after this Conference it became clear that our faith is religion and not a syncretic sect.

We cannot think - and shall not allow others to think as well - in ourselves as folklore, sect, animism, primitive religion, as it has happened in this country, this city, being it by oppositors,

detractors: pitched walls, published articles like: "Candomblé is something of the Devil", "African practices primitive or syncretic"; or by ritual dresses taken in official contests, liturgic symbols taken in touristic marketing and our sacred Houses, our temples included, indicated in the column of folklore in Bahia's newspapers.

Ma beru, Olorum wa pelu awon omorisa
Salvador, 27th of july of 1983

Signatures:

- Menininha do Gantois, Iyalorisá of the Axé Ilé Iya Omin Iyamassé
- Stella de Oshossi, Iyalorixá of the Ilé Axé Opô Afonjá
- Tete de Iansa, Iyalorixá of the Ilé Nassô Oká
- Olga de Alaketo, Iyalorixá of the Ilé Maroia Lage
- Nicinha do Bogum, Iyalorixá of the Xogodô Bogum Malê Ki-Rundo



To the public and to the people of Candomblé

Last twenty seventh of july, we made public our position in relation to the fact that we do not consider our religion as a sect, a primitive animistic practice, and consequently, we reject syncretism as fruit of our religion, since it was created by the slavery to what our ancestrals were subdued. We spoke as well,

about the great consumistic massacre our religion has suffered. The religious fundamentals shall be exhibited, shown, as we are no more slaves, nor dependents of owners to orient ourselves. The newspapers did not publish our communication in its wholeness, but just used it for news and sensacionalism.

Which ones were the fishes taken with this net? The ones of sensacionalism by the press, to which just the aspects of syncretism and its touristic influences (Bomfim washing, etc) were noted; and by the other side, it appeared the submission, ignorance, fear and yet the "attitude of slave" by some followers, even Iyalorixás, representatives of "afro" associations, looking for acceptance of political and religious authorities.

Candomblé is not a question of opinion. It is a religious reality which can only be realized in its purity of purpose and rituals. The ones who do not think in this direction, are already perverted since long ago, and as such, they may go on sincretizing, bringing Iyaos to Bomfim, attending church, receiving money to serve the touristic pole of Bahia, having access to the power, getting jobs etc.

We do not want make a revolution, we are not politics, we are religious people and so, our attitude is to distinguish, explain, differentiate what enriches ourselves, what has to do with our people, our tradition, and what is different from it, even being it hidden under the best aspect. Finally we reaffirm our position of last july, leaving it clear that political pressures have no effect over ourselves, pressures from the press, the consumism, money, from anywhere, as what is important to us is not the personal profit, the satisfaction of the imaturity and desire of fame, but the maintainance of our religion, in all its purity and truth, something that unfortunately in this city, this country has been more and more threatened by the economic, cultural, political, artistic and intellectual power. We see that all the incoherencies that emerged among people of Candomblé who want to go to the washing of Bomfim bringing their

"quartinhas" (small jar), who want to continue adoring Iansa and St.Barbara as two aspect of the same coin, are residuous, marks of economical, cultural and social slavery that our people still suffer. Since slavery, black is synonym of poor, ignorant, without any right but the right to know he has no right; he is a great toy inside the culture which stigmatizes him, his religion too, become a toy. We shall be free, fight against what destroy and disregard ourselves, against what only accepts ourselves if we are wearing the clothes they gave to us. During slavery, syncretism was necessary to our survival, but now, in its public manifestations - people of the Saint, Iyalorixás, realizing washing of the churches, going from the "camarinhas" to the mass etc - discharacterizes ourselves as religion, possibilitating the same be used as something exotic, folklore, tourism. We hope our grand-children can be proud to belong to the religion of their ancestrals, that be black, negro, bring Africa back to them, not slavery.

We hope that all people of Candomblé, the small and big Houses, the ancient and already folkloric personages, the so called Iyalorixás, praiseworthy representatives of our religion, before anything shall consider what they speak and do, independently of what they may get out of this.

We hear here in Bahia that we have four thousands "Terreiros" (Sacred Houses); quantity do not expresses anything in terms of religious foundations, in spite of have lot of meaning in terms of popularization and alienation. Better the little we have than a lot lent.

We leave it clear that our religious thought cannot be expressed through the Federation of African Cults or anyother congeneric entity, nor by politics, Ogas, Obas or anyone besides the ones who signed this letter.

All this effort of ours is because we want to give back to the cult of Orishas, the african religion, the dignity lost during slavery and the process which

followed it: cultural, social and economic alienation which possibilitated the consumism and profanation of our religion.

Salvador, 12th of august of 1983

Signatures:

- Meninha do Gantois - Iyalorixá of the Axé Ilé Iya Omin Iyamassé
- Stella de Oshossi - Iyalorixá of the Ilé Axé Opô Afonjá
- Tete de Yansa - Iyalorixá of the Ilee Nasso Oke
- Olga de Alaketo - Iyalorixá of the Ilé Maroia Lage
- Nicinha do Bogum - Iyalorixá of the Zogodô Bogum Malê Ki-Rundo

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