

The Chokwe in the Work of Anajá Caetano: African Practices in the Novel *Negra Efigênia* / Os Quiocos na obra de Anajá Caetano: Práticas africanas no romance *Negra Efigênia*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the ritualistic practices described in the novel *Negra Efigênia: paixão do senhor branco* [Black Efigênia: White Master's Passion] (1966), by Anajá Caetano, which are related to the Chokwe ethnic group. The novel is an important literary contribution that reveals sociocultural aspects of both the time when it was published and the period portrayed, slavery. Despite this, both the work and the author have been little studied to date. In the novel, there are various religious and cultural references to the Chokwe, an ethnic group of African origin. I aim to compare how these practices appear in the novel and how they resemble or differ from the customs of this people.

KEYWORDS: Chokwe; Anajá Caetano; Slavery; Afro-Brazilian Literature

RESUMO

Este artigo visa analisar as práticas ritualísticas descritas na obra Negra Efigênia: paixão do senhor branco (1966), de Anajá Caetano, que têm relação com a etnia dos Quiocos. O romance é uma importante contribuição literária que revela aspectos socioculturais tanto da época em que foi lançado quanto do período retratado, o escravocrata. Apesar disso, tanto a obra quanto a autora foram pouco estudados até o momento. Há, no romance, diversas referências religiosas e culturais aos Quiocos, grupo étnico de origem africana. Busco comparar como essas práticas aparecem na obra e como se assemelham ou se diferenciam dos costumes desse povo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Quiocos; Anajá Caetano; Escravidão; Literatura Afro-brasileira*

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Introduction

The novel *Negra Efigênia: paixão do senhor branco* [Black Efigênia: White Master's Passion] (1966) is Anajá Caetano's debut novel and tells of the formation of the town of São Sebastião do Paraíso, in the south of Minas Gerais. Although it was published in the 1960s, the story covers the period from the end of the 18th century until the abolition of slavery.

Most of the author's biographical details are unknown, and the little that is known is contained in the book's supplementary texts. In a section called "Special Tribute," she informs the reader about her ethnic-racial origins and how this reflects on the novel:

This work was already in press when a curious event occurred in the author's life: the unexpected visit of Prince Yao Boateng, Ambassador Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Ghana, and the Embassy Counselor, the economist Ebener Amatei Alkuete. They both wanted to meet the black novelist [...] who, in Brazil, almost a century after the liberation of the slaves, was writing a novel of customs, faithfully reporting the centuries-old habits of African tribes. Curiosity was satisfied. The author clarified the origin of those reminiscences. A descendant of Angolans from the "Chokwe" tribe, she had kept in her memory all those stories about her ancestors, most of which were told by the fire in the old, sunny residence of her foster father, Dr. José de Souza Soares [...] May this praiseworthy and dignified gesture be yet another link between free Africa and its descendants across the Atlantic (Caetano, 1966, p. 15).¹

Thus, I analyze the author's aesthetic choices for transposing these behaviors and rites into written narratives. I examine how the descriptions in the book are close or not to the practices that actually exist in the Chokwe ethnic group, with the objective of highlighting the ancestral African presence in this work of Brazilian literature.

¹ In Portuguese: "Esta obra já estava no prélo (sic), quando um fato curioso ocorreu na vida da autora: a visita imprevista do Príncipe Yao Boateng, Embaixador Plenipotenciário da República de Ghana (sic) e do Conselheiro da Embaixada, o economista Ebener Amatei Alkuete. Desejavam ambos conhecer a romancista negra [...] que, no Brasil, quase um século após a libertação dos escravos escrevia um romance de costumes, reportando com fidelidade hábitos multisseculares (sic) de tribos (sic) africanas. A curiosidade foi satisfeita. A autora esclareceu a origem daquelas reminiscências. Descendente de angolezes (sic) da tribo dos 'Quiôcos' (sic) conservara de memória todas aquelas narrativas de seus antepassados, na sua maioria feitas ao pé do fogo, junto ao borralho da velha e solarenga residência de seu pai de criação, o dr. José de Souza Soares [...] Seja o gesto louvável e dignificante mais um elo, entre a África livre e seus descendentes aquem (sic) Atlântico."

1 The Story

The protagonist of the novel is Efigênia, a woman who is born into slavery and is kidnapped at some moment of the story by Antônio Bento, a farmer who is well known in the region for having freed his slaves and treated them as settlers. Unlike the other enslaved people she lives with, she has access to reading. This happens through Paulinho, the son of the owners of the big house in which Efigênia grew up. The two are close in age, grow up together and end up falling in love with each other. Before the relationship really develops, Efigênia is taken with her mother, Benedita, to Antônio Bento's farm.

The farmer says that he likes Efigênia, that he doesn't want her as his mistress and that she doesn't have to stay with him if she doesn't want to. Coming from "Fazenda da Tronco" [Farm of the Log] where she was born and raised, the protagonist ends up having a relationship with her kidnapper and having two children. Antônio Bento was already married and, despite the little contact he had with his wife, had a legal bond. When she dies, he and Efigênia formally marry.

After Antônio Bento was killed at the behest of the "Fazenda da Tronco" landlady, Paulinho resumed contact with Efigênia to help protect her rights, as she was married to the deceased and had children. He had studied in the capital and become a lawyer. Efigênia returns to Fazenda da Tronco with her mother and children. At that moment, the owner of the farm, Paulinho's father, frees his slaves, asking for forgiveness for the atrocities committed there and fearing divine punishment.

The story ends with Efigênia and Paulinho getting married on May 13, the day slavery was abolished. The final chapter depicts the long celebration of the blacks for the conquest of freedom and the madness and death of the landlady who had committed so many evil deeds throughout the story. The author describes an atmosphere of happiness and unity between people of different races:

The deaf rhythm of the *atabaques* was mixed with the litanies of the devotees of the congregation of the Apostolate of Mary, who sang sacred songs in choir, accompanied on the organ by Dona Maria, the sacristan's wife. In the square of the parish church, delicacies were served in abundance to all the guests, who mingled nonchalantly in a friendly and cordial intimacy. The *congadas* roamed the streets of the town in carnivalesque exaltation. The people didn't leave the town. By May 16, it was clear that the crowd had dispersed. Father Thomás, at

the door of the parish church, received greetings from blacks and former slave masters for the festival he had managed to organize, uniting them all under the same purposes and designs, with God's blessing (Caetano, 1966, p. 319).²

Thus, the work seems to point to a future in which racial and social differences would be appeased, symbolized by the marriage between a former slave and a literate, wealthy white man. It should be remembered that the book was published in 1966, in a context of civil-military dictatorship in Brazil. By narrating the history of the formation of the city of São Sebastião do Paraíso and returning to the theme of slavery and the troubled relations that existed during that period, the author reinforces the cruel nature of slavery and the rich contribution of black people, both in terms of building the country and in terms of religious and cultural contributions. She also points out that this promise of unity and integration of black people into society did not happen properly.

2 Oblivion

The novel's preface is signed by Eduardo de Oliveira, a poet and important intellectual of the time. In his words,

With this novel, Anajá Caetano immediately revealed herself to be a writer of enviable talent, whose merits in creating historical fiction will be confirmed over time. With this work, she is assured of a prominent place among those who have best made this genre a reason for literary affirmation and a source of aesthetic manifestation; this novel of customs reminds us of Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, Manuel Antônio de Almeida, and so many others, so it is permissible to call her the "novelist of the slaves" (Oliveira, 1966, p. 12).³

² In Portuguese: "O ritmo surdo dos atabaques se confundia com as litanias das devotas da congregação do Apostolado de Maria, que cantavam em côro (sic) músicas sacras acompanhadas ao órgão pela dona Maria, a senhora do sacristão. Na praça da Matriz as iguarias eram servidas com abundância a todos os convivas, que se ombreavam despreocupados numa íntimidade (sic) amistosa e cordial. As congadas percorriam as ruas da vila numa exaltação carnavalesca. O povo não abandonava a cidade. Já dia claro, a 16 de maio a multidão foi-se dispersando. Padre Thomás na porta da Matriz recebia os cumprimentos de negros e ex-senhores de escravos pela festa que conseguira realizar, unindo-os a todos sob os mesmos propósitos e designios (sic), com a benção de Deus."

³ In Portuguese: "Assim é que Anajá Caetano, com êste (sic) romance, revelou-se, de pronto, uma escritora de talento invejável, cujos mértios (sic) de criar ficção histórica se confirmarão ao longo do tempo. Com êste (sic) trabalho, fica-lhe assegurado um lugar de destaque entre os que melhor fizeram deste gênero um motivo de afirmação literária e uma fonte de manifestação estética; êste (sic) romance de costumes recorda-nos Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, Manuel Antônio de Almeida, e tantos outros, pelo que nos é lícito cognominá-la de a 'romancista dos escravos.'"

Despite having great promise and being compared to literary greats such as Joaquim Manuel de Macedo and Manuel Antônio de Almeida, the book was only published once. Furthermore, it is not known whether Anajá Caetano wrote any other books. Even though the book was published in 1966, there are few academic works that investigate the work, most notably *Race and color in Brazilian literature*, by David Brookshaw (1986) and more recent ones, such as the doctoral thesis *Corpo de romances de autoras negras brasileiras (1859-2006): posse da história e colonialidade nacional confrontada* [Body of Novels from Black Brazilian Authoresses: Confronted Possession of National History and Coloniality], by Fernanda Rodrigues de Miranda (2019) and the article *A obra de Anajá Caetano: uma escritora brasileira negra na literatura de ficção* [The Work of Inajá Caetano: A Black Brazilian Writer in the Fiction Literatyure], by Cyntia Rodrigues (2022).

Published in the midst of the civil-military dictatorship and depicting the period of slavery, the work exposes a Brazil deeply marked by African influences and racial differences, which was not exactly in line with the image the country was trying to show. These factors, along with the fact that it was a black writer, may have contributed to the novel's low circulation and the lack of information about the author's biography. Miranda (2019, p. 162), when analyzing Caetano's work, states that

In short, the perspective that abolition did not bring about real change, but only served the interests of the elite itself, is translated in the novel through the social contract (marriage) that gives the white man (again) official ownership over the black woman – regulated by the state, the church and the community. In this way, the novel reaffirms the constitutive coloniality of the nation, already evident in the other works by black novelists that precede it.⁴

By returning to the theme of slavery, the novel *Negra Efigênia: paixão do senhor branco* seems to invite the reader to look at the past and, consequently, contrast it with the present. In the process, it can be said that the power relations stemming from slavery have been updated, maintaining hierarchies based on race, social class and gender.

⁴ In Portuguese: “Em síntese, a perspectiva de que a abolição não instaurou uma mudança de fato, mas apenas veio ao encontro dos interesses da própria elite, é traduzida no romance através do contrato social (o casamento) que dá ao homem branco (novamente) a posse oficial sobre a mulher negra – regulamentada pelo estado, pela igreja e pela comunidade. Dessa forma, o romance reafirma a colonialidade constitutiva da nação, já patente nas demais obras de romancistas negras que a antecede.”

3 The Chokwe

The analyses made here are based on the book *Chokwe*,⁵ by Manuel Jordán (1998), a researcher who investigated and described the lifestyle, practices and religiosity of the Chokwe. According to the author, this group is present in countries such as Angola, Congo and Zambia. They are a people of Bantu origin whose language is Kichokwe.

In looking at this ethnic group, my aim is to see how their culture and customs appear in the book *Negra Efigênia: paixão do senhor branco*. I'm interested in finding out both what has actually been preserved and maintained here in Brazil and what appears to have been syncretized with elements from other African matrices.

In addition, in order to investigate how this knowledge transmitted through orality is consolidated and how it is transposed into written text, I use the concept of *oralitura* [Oral-literature], by Leda Maria Martins (2021, p. 37), who defines it as

designates the complex texture of oral and bodily performances, their functioning, the processes, procedures, means and systems for inscribing the knowledge that underpins and founds bodily epistemes, highlighting in them the transit of memory, history and worldviews that are processed through corporealities. It also alludes to the spelling of this knowledge, as performative inscriptions and the erasure of the dichotomy between orality and writing.⁶

Using excerpts from Anajá Caetano's novel, I make a comparison with the practices of the Chokwe, observing what is maintained and what changes in the author's description. In addition, I also investigate how this reverberates within the narrative and how it is transported into writing.

⁵ JORDÁN, Manuel. *Chokwe*. Nova York: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 1998.

⁶ In Portuguese: "designa a complexa textura das performances orais e corporais, seu funcionamento, os processos, procedimentos, meios e sistemas de inscrição dos saberes fundados e fundantes das epistemes corporais, destacando neles o trânsito da memória, da história, das cosmovisões que pelas corporeidades se processam. E alude também à grafia desses saberes, como inscrições performáticas e rasura da dicotomia entre a oralidade e a escrita."

4 Comparison between Excerpts from the Novel and the Practices of the Chokwe

4.1

“Yes,” he thought, stirred by an inner turmoil, his nega Benedita was the most coveted ‘muari’ of all that troop of girls who made the men of the slave quarters despair. If they lived in her native Angola, she’d be about to be taken to the “ritungo.”.. Yes, when she became nubile, she would have been removed from living with men and, in the “ritungo,” the long preparation for marriage would take place – “the mucanda.” It would be many, many moons of expectation before she was ready to marry... yes, the virgin’s initiation was long... She would have to learn everything a woman needs to be a dedicated companion, a faithful wife and devoted to her man... To prove these qualities, she would have to play the “ririmba-rim-ba,” every dawn, before the rooster crowed... That’s how it was, that’s how it was. Then came the wedding. The big party. She would dance and finally throw off the cloak of purity – the “zeva” – to give herself to him pure, absolutely pure (Caetano, 1966, p. 95).⁷

According to the online dictionary, *muári* means “the chief wife of the soba in Lunda.” Soba, in turn, means “chief of an African tribe or ruler.” It is worth highlighting the proximity of the Lunda ethnic group to the Chokwe. According to Jordán (1998), the Chokwe and other nearby ethnic groups originated from the migrations of the Lunda people. Female initiation is referred to in the novel as *mucanda*, however, according to Jordán (1998, p. 44) “the female initiation is called ukule (mwali in Zambia). This name describes both the initiation camp itself and the related events through which young women pass into adulthood.”

When comparing the description of the female initiation ritual in Anajá Caetano’s book with the author’s explanation of the same rite, you can see that they are extremely similar:

⁷ In Portuguese: “‘Sim’ pensava êle (sic), excitado por um tumulto interior, a sua nega Benedita era a ‘muari’ mais cobiçada de toda aquela tropa de moças que punha em desespero os homens da senzala. Se vivessem em sua terra natal, na Angola, ela estaria em ponto de ser recolhida ao ‘ritungo...’ Sim, quando ela ficou núbil teria sido afastada da convivência com homens e, no ‘ritungo’ se processaria a longa preparação para o casamento – ‘a mucanda...’ Seriam muitas e muitas luas de expectativa até que estivesse pronta para se casar... sim, a iniciação da virgem era longa... Ela teria que aprender tudo que uma mulher necessita para ser uma companheira dedicada, uma espôsa (sic) fiel e devotada ao seu homem... Para comprovar essas qualidades ela teria que tocar o ‘ririmba-rim-ba’ (sic), todas as madrugadas, antes do galo cantar... Era assim mesmo, era assim. Depois, viria o casamento. A grande festa. Ela dançaria e por fim despojaria o manto da pureza – o ‘zeva’ (sic) para entregar-se a êle (sic) pura, absolutamente pura.”

While boys undergo mukanda as a group, girls are initiated individually during ukule. They require individual education to prepare them for marriage soon after ukule ends. While boys are normally seven to twelve years old when initiated, female initiates are older than thirteen. At this time a girl's mother, grandmothers, and elder sisters organize a series of ceremonial lessons to prepare her for womanhood. These lessons honor the family's ancestors and show the physical and mental changes the girl will undergo.

The ukule camp is built on the outskirts of the village. A small cone-shaped grass hut called a *nkunka* is erected within the camp. This is where the initiates sleep and spend their evening hours. The initiation period may last from a couple of weeks to a few months. During this time, the initiate's instructors supervise her. [...] The initiates receive intensive instruction about sexual matters and motherhood. After ukule, the initiates are ready for marriage.

The literary passage mentions *mucanda*, which Jordán (1998, p. 61) describes as "male initiation." In Anajá Caetano's work, the term refers to both female and male initiation. As for the word *ritungu*, I didn't find any references to it in the Chokwe's practices. There is, however, the word *nkunka* among them, as can be seen in Jordán's description (1998), which corresponds to the hut where the initiation takes place. One hypothesis is that the word *ritungu* is a variation of *nkunka*, due to the similarity in sound. *Ritungu* is also the name of a musical instrument and a traditional dance of the Kuria people, an ethnic group of Bantu origin located in Tanzania and Kenya.

4.2

Negro Rei covered his face again with the mask and, walking ahead, led his son Tião and Benedita to the middle of the clearing where there was a large cover made of buriti palms. Underneath, several saints were arranged on their thrones according to the liturgy. — Children — said the 'mukixi' — the orishas are going to war, we will start the 'Lorogum' celebration. You wait there. Suddenly the drumming erupted (Caetano, 1966, p. 100).⁸

According to Jordán (1998, p. 31)

The Chokwe build ancestral shrines to honor their ancestors. Inside the shrines, they place sculptures, objects, and artifacts. These are meant to

⁸ In Portuguese: "O Negro Rei tornou a encobrir o rosto com a mascara (sic) e, caminhando na frente levou seu filho Tião e Benedita até o meio da clareira onde havia uma ampla cobertura feita de palmas de buriti. Debaixo vários santos estavam dispostos em seus tronos segundo mandava a liturgia. — Mi fios (sic) — disse o 'mukixi' — os orixás vão para a guerra, nós vamu cumeçá (sic) a festa de 'Lorogum'. Ocês espera aí (sic). Súbito irrompeu a batucada."

contain or represent the spirits or to serve as points of contact between living people and spiritual forces. At these shrines, called kachipango, the Chokwe invoke, or cal0l, their ancestral spirits. They offer both prayers and gifts to honor the memory of their dead relatives.

In this passage, there are already signs of syncretized religious beliefs. Despite the fact that the shrine coincides with the practices of the Chokwe, there is no evidence of the use of images, as the literary excerpt suggests. Jordán (1998, p .61) states that mukishi is the “ancestral spirit in the form of a mask.”

The orishas are deities worshipped in Yoruba mythology. According to Márcio de Jagun (2024), “Lorogun, lórogún or olorogum means ‘war ritual’: oro (ritual) + ogun (war). It is a ceremony that represents the Orishas going to war.”⁹

Martins (2021, p. 29) states that

Despite all the repression, what history shows us is that, as much as the performance practices of indigenous peoples and Africans were banned, demonized, coerced and excluded, these same practices, through various processes of restoration and resistance, ensured the survival of a body of knowledge that resisted attempts to completely erase it, whether by camouflaging it, transforming it or through countless modes of recreation that nuanced the entire process of forming hybrid American cultures.¹⁰

This intersection described in *Negra Efigênia: paixão do senhor branco* demonstrates the richness and uniqueness of the Afro-Brazilian experience. By choosing to tackle the subject of slavery, almost a century after its end, the author reinforces the idea of a Brazil deeply marked by various African influences. And she does so in a unique way, highlighting the cultural and religious practices of enslaved Africans.

⁹ In Portuguese: “Lorogun, lórogún ou olorogum quer dizer ‘ritual de guerra’: oro (ritual) + ogun (guerra). É uma cerimônia que representa a ida dos Orixás para a guerra.”

¹⁰ In Portuguese: “Apesar de toda a repressão, o que a história nos ostenta é que, por mais que as práticas performáticas dos povos indígenas e dos africanos fossem proibidas, demonizadas, coagidas e excluídas, essas mesmas práticas, por vários processos de restauração e resistência, garantiram a sobrevivência de uma corpora de conhecimento que resistiu às tentativas de seu total apagamento, seja por sua camuflagem, por sua transformação, seja por inúmeros modos de recriação que matizaram todo o processo de formação das híbridas culturas americanas.”

Samugia had spared no effort to put on a great show. He had done everything he could to design the ‘mucanda’ ceremony to perfection, just as it was done in the heart of Africa on the banks of the Zambezi River.

When he left Antônio Bento, he returned to the ceremonial field to check that everything was in order and, talking to some and others, he gave the final instructions for the ritual, which was to begin after the first rooster crowed.

Suddenly, the atabaques, as if they were trying to awaken sleeping warriors for a new battle, unleashed a rhythm of progressive, increasingly intense noise. Antônio Bento was startled, jumped out of his hammock and found Samugio face to face, smiling at him. The soba liked to play with Antonio Bento, and always did so to see how far “his white son” had the nerves to withstand the scares.

— Come, come, my son. Now you’re going to see how black Angolans can perform operations that many white people can’t. Look, my son, do you see those boys lying on the ground?

— Yes, I see them.

— They’re all boys who are going to be men in another two moons. So that they don’t stay there, we cut the skin off their vrga (*sic*). It prevents illness and certain vices.

— But I can’t see the operation from here, said Antônio Bento, trying to outdo the old soba.

— I know, my son, I know, but it’s too early for you to see what’s going to happen. Wait until we get closer.

— Samugia, he asked, how is it possible that you can perform such a delicate operation without using any medicine to reduce the pain of the cut?

— My son, this is a secret of the “quimbanda” — only they know how to operate.

Suddenly the atabaques stopped, and silence is a prayer among Africans. As the sun rose over the horizon, a prayer was said in chorus by the “quimbandas” and “tudanges.”

... “The day brings the sun to warm us.”

Then, like animals being led to the slaughter, the boys were seized and subdued by the “quimbanda” to be subjected to circumcision.

For about ten days Antônio remained in the bush watching all the secret aspects of the “quimbanda.” The adult blacks who had no “tundange” duties returned to the farm. In the “mucanda” only those who were obliged to assist the circumcised adolescents remained (Caetano, 1966, pp. 146-148).¹¹

¹¹ In Portuguese: “Samugia não se poupava para oferecer um grande espetáculo. Tudo fizera para projetar com requintes de perfeição a cerimônia da ‘mucanda’ tal como era feita em pleno coração da África nas margens do rio Zambeze.

Ao deixar Antônio Bento, tornou ao campo destinado ao cerimonial para ver se tudo estava em ordem e falando com uns e, com outros, dava as últimas determinações para a execução do ritual cujo começo deveria suceder ao primeiro cantar do galo.

Súbito os atabaques como se procurassem despertar guerreiros adormecidos para uma nova refrega desencadearam um ritmo de fragor progressivo, cada vez mais intenso. Antônio Bento sobressaltou-se,

Jordán (1998, pp. 38-39) describes *mukanda* as follows:

For mukanda, an enclosure with tall grass walls is built in a private place in the woods away from the village. All initiates, called tundangi, are circumcised there. This is the first Chokwe requirement for manhood. The initiates remain in or near the mukanda camp until the end of the initiation process. There, the boys remain under the supervision of caretakers, or vilombola. Mukanda may last from a couple of months to a year. The initiates are not allowed to return to the village or to approach women or uninitiated members of society until they graduate. Village elders and caretakers educate the initiates on matters such as religion, morals, sexuality, and technology. The initiation period is viewed as a symbolic death of the initiates' childhood. At graduation, the initiates are "reborn" as adult members of Chokwe society.

The ceremony presented in the literary excerpt is very similar to the original ritual, including the names *mucanda*, *tundange* and *quimbanda*. The latter is also similar to *chimbanda*, which Jordán (1998, p. 61) defines as "a healer." Anajá Caetano's narration not only describes, but also creates a whole aura that is both obscure and surprising. The fear on the part of the character Antônio Bento, the hermetic nature of the ceremony, the play with the atabaques and the sudden silence lead the reader to feel the unique character of the rite.

saltou da rede (sic), e deu com Samugio (sic) frente a frente, sorrindo para êle (sic). O soba gostava de brincar com Antônio Bento, e sempre o fazia para ver até onde o 'seu fio branco' (sic) tinha nervos para suportar os sustos.

— Vem, vem mi fio (sic). Agora ocê vai vê cumu os negro angola sabe fazê operação que muita raça branca num faz (sic). Oíá, mi fio? tá vendo aqueles mininu deitadu no chão (sic)?

— Sim, eu veja (sic).

— Sum tudu mininu que tá pra sê home daqui mais duas lua. Pru mode num fica aí basteiro a gente corta lá neles a pele da vrga (sic). Evita doença e certos vício (sic).

— Mas, daqui eu não vejo a operação disse Antônio Bento procurando ultrapassar o velho soba (sic).

— Eu sei, mi fio, eu seio, mas é cedo ainda pra ocê vê o que vai se passa (sic). Espera que a gente vai mais perto.

— Samugia – perguntou ête (sic) – como é possível que vocês consigam fazer operação tão delicada, sem usar nenhum remédio que diminua a dor do corte?

— Mi fio, isso é segredo dos 'quimbanda' só eles sabe operá (sic).

Súbito os atabaques cessaram o silêncio é uma prece entre os africanos (sic). Ao sol que raiava no horizonte uma oração foi proferida em côro (sic) pelos 'quimbandas' e 'tudanges.'

... 'O dia traz o sol para nos aquecer.'

Em seguida como animais, que fossem levados a ferra, os rapazelhos foram agarrados e subjugados pelos 'quimbanda' para serem submetidos à circuncisão.

Cêrca (sic) de dez dias Antônio permaneceu no mato assistindo a todos os aspectos secretos da 'quimbanda.' Os negros adultos que não tinham funções de 'tundange' regressaram para a fazenda. Na 'mucanda' só ficaram aqueles que tinham obrigação de assistir aos adolescentes circuncidados."

4.4

— Father, he said, here is a present for you. It's from one of our artists from the Chokwe tribe. It's the sorcerer's mask.

— Incredible, said the reverend, how perfect the design is. It would seem to be of Greek origin.

— It's carved in white wood. The black color comes from the oil of the lagoons, where the artist, after making the work, leaves it for months until it is well painted... (Caetano, 1966, p. 288).¹²

Regarding the role of masks in the tradition of the Chokwe, Jordán (1998, p. 40) states that

The Chokwe create many different types of masks, or mukishi. These masks take on human, animal, or abstract forms and qualities. Some mukishi are meant to entertain and celebrate the occasion of mukanda. Other masks serve to protect the initiation camp from intruders. A mask called Chihongo has male human features carved out of wood. It represents an ancestral Chokwe chief.

Here, Caetano (1966) describes in detail the process of creating the sorcerer's mask. Despite the unexpected nature of the dialogue, a slave giving a Catholic priest such an important ritualistic object, there is also a certain pride on the part of the giver. This is due to the use of the word artists, which automatically elevates the importance of the object, and the explanation of how the mask was made.

Conclusion

By analyzing the literary excerpts and comparing them with the practices of the Chokwe, it is possible to see the strong influence of this group in *Negra Efigênia, paixão do senhor branco*. It is surprising that almost a century after the abolition of slavery, a

¹² In Portuguese: “— Padre, disse êle (sic), aqui está um presente para o senhor. É de um dos nossos artistas da tribu dos Quiôcos (sic). É a mascara (sic) do feiticeiro.

— Incrível, disse o reverendo, como é perfeita a concepção. Dir-se-ia de origem grega.

— É entalhada em madeira branca. A côr (sic) preta é do óleo das lagôas (sic), onde o artista, depois de feita a obra, deixa-a durante meses até ficar bem tinta...”

Brazilian novel so faithfully portrays the age-old practices of an African ethnic group, including the use of specific vocabulary in another language.

Even more curious, and perhaps contradictory, is the fact that the work centers on an interracial relationship, placing it as a symbol of post-abolition, and at the same time presents so many elements of Africanness, since black people revere and maintain, even in the context of slavery, cultural and religious elements from their place of origin.

The novel raises the issue of African ancestry in Brazilian literature, a field that is still little studied, and of the narratives that deal with slavery. Even with the historical distance, and perhaps because of this, there is an attempt to approach the subject by bringing other perspectives that are not usually seen in works that explore the same theme. In addition to the suffering of the enslaved, the author also brings up the preservation of the culture of the Chokwe, being herself an heir to this memory.

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Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

Abstract: The abstract is well-structured and clearly presents the objectives of the work, the topic covered and the relevance of the study. I would only suggest a slight revision to improve the stylistic fluidity. **Introduction:** An introduction effectively contextualizes the proven work, offering relevant information about the novel, the author and the historical context. The justification for the study is well-founded, especially in highlighting the neglect of Anajá Caetano by literary critics. It could include a more explicit problematization of the tension between the erasure of black authors and the preservation of ancestral memory in Brazilian literature. **Literature Review and Theoretical Reference:** The article makes adequate use of theoretical and bibliographical references. The incorporation of Leda Maria Martins' concept of orality is pertinent and well explored, dialoguing with the data presented. **Methodology:** The comparative method between the elements described in the novel and the historical records of the Chokwe' practices is

clear and well delineated. Analysis and Discussion: The analysis is robust and well-founded, revealing the precision with which the author Anajá Caetano inserts elements of Chokwe culture into her narrative. The use of literary examples is effective in supporting the arguments. Conclusion: The conclusion summarizes the main points of the article, highlighting the importance of Negra Efigênia as a landmark of cultural and literary preservation. Style and Language: The writing is clear and objective, with a good command of academic language. A final revision is recommended for minor grammatical corrections, such as inconsistencies in the use of verb tenses and some minor typos. Originality and Contribution: The article deals with a little-known work and author, which represents a significant contribution to the field of Afro-Brazilian literary studies. The analysis of the cultural practices of the Chokwe broadens the understanding of African ancestry in Brazilian literature, offering new perspectives on historical narrative. Recommendation: The article has high academic merit and is in line with the rigor of the journal. I recommend its publication, provided that the suggested revisions are made. APPROVED

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