

Interview with Roberta Estrela D'Alva + "Resist - Afoxé do Mangue"

Signs of turbulence

by Ecio Salles

| Brazil |

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In the early 1990s, Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda¹—A Brazilian intellectual that always had a sensitive eye for the most riveting issues in national culture. organized an event called *Sinais de Turbulência* (Signs of Turbulence). There, intellectuals, artists and activists began to ponder the question of when social and cultural actions in and of the favelas, in response to growing violence, placed the peripheries at the center of the map.

The FLUP (Literary Festival of the Peripheries) is a sort of child of this moment. At its start, in 2012, the FLUP's creators entered into a context in which literature was already a common language for the country's peripheries. On one side, the *saraus* boomed (and, more recently, poetry slams have followed a similar path). On the other side, publications deemed marginal or peripheral literature began to occupy bookshelves in libraries and bookstores, revealing names like Paulo Lins, Ferréz, Sérgio Vaz, Lisandra Souza and many others.

In many of these movements, there is a transformational community and personal energy -- one of the possibilities of aesthetic expression, political protest and literary production, one that is irresistible and unavoidable. These movements are essential to the undoing of

prejudice and the limited vision that the peripheries are mere absence and violence. In these *saraus*, there is no deficiency. There is, rather, the power of a people sharing their best. This, for us, points to new signs of turbulence in Brazilian culture.

The idea is to give space to those artists that, independent of age, gender, race, etc -- have in common a *lugar de fala*² Literally "place of speech," used to describe ones origin and context, often in relation to the topic they are addressing from the periphery and a significant contribution to Brazilian literature.

Roberta Estrela D'Alva is one of the this movement's central figures. Actress, poet, intellectual, host for the TV show *Manos e Minas*, Roberta is a reference for the literary arts in Brazil, and especially so for poetry slams, the most recent form of literary expression in Brazil's favelas.

In three sentences, who is Roberta Estrela D'Alva?

I am an actress and MC, director, researcher, TV host, poet, founding member of the group Bartolomeu de Depoimentos (the first hip hop theater troupe in Brazil) and of the collective Frente 3 de Fevereiro. My principal theme is orality, and through this research I was responsible for the arrival of poetry slams to Brazil. Life in the city, in its contradictions and particularities, is my source of inspiration and played a major part in my upbringing.

What is your literary style?

My most direct relationship with literature came principally from theatrical texts, given that I am an actress. I went from the page to orality and then from orality to the page when I began to write poetry for a spoken word solo called *Vai te Catar!* From the moment in which I began to organize the slams I met many poets and saw many of them advancing in their writing and publishing books. This has created its own market with the rise of independent

editors, which I consider to be a really positive thing.

What readings were decisive for your education?

Of the readings that changed the way I see the world and that deeply influenced me, a few stick out: *Macunaíma* by Mário de Andrade, *O Grande Sertão: Veredas* by Guimarães Rosa, *Lolita* by Nabokov, and in the field of theory, Paul Zumthor, Brecht, Bachelard, Benjamin, Agambem, Jerusa Pires Ferreira and Angela Davis.

For you, the periphery means....

The periphery for me is a physical and symbolic territory, complex and diverse, from which spring the most interesting and innovative cultural protests -- like hip hop, for example.

Revide

Roberta Estrela D'Alva
(Afoxé do Mangue - spoken)

That when the fire comes
the flame then spreads and burns

The mangrove bleeds
the mouth dries out
the people insist and push

and argue
chit chat
clock-in

stay alive
but still rein
in the middle of the chaos and the filth
there's thirst for justice

that does not pass
it is no prank
it unwinds
this muzzle
and the bite
is not for free

it's just a crazy dog
it's a learned snake
that learned to lunge and strike
that learned what is at stake
that doesn't take the noise
that doesn't hold its tongue

it's a black woman that doesn't deny his race

And if this be a fight for peace
Let us be Mandela
Let us be Racionais
to think and sing
with heart and fury

that is made from blood but also from sun
solitude, faith, and from pain
from brotherhood and love
and that's why I go
and I go

And I fly...
