Article

‘We Feel Something’
Music, Politics, and Emotion Under Authoritarianism

Schuyler Whelden
College of the Holy Cross

Abstract
On February 11, 1965, less than one year after the outset of the Brazilian military dictatorship, singer Maria Bethânia assumed one of the principal roles in the musical theater piece Opinião in Rio de Janeiro. Taking over for Nara Leão, who helped conceive the play, Bethânia was celebrated by fans, especially for her performance of co-star João do Vale’s song ‘Carcará.’ The song’s lyrics invoke imagery of the Brazilian northeast, home region of both Vale and Bethânia, and the performance includes a spoken statistical report on the migration of people from the northeast to the southern cities. Although the song’s composer denied that the song was an act of protest or political commentary, General Riograndino Kruel, then head of the Federal Police, identified it as one of the ‘subversive’ elements in the show that needed to be cut. This call to censorship contradicted the censor board’s 1964 approval of the show, during Nara Leão’s run as star. This article analyzes singer Maria Bethânia’s participation in Opinião to consider the potential for musical performance to engender political community by affective means. Drawing on archival materials and interviews conducted with audience members and participants, I argue that Bethânia’s performances were the catalyst for the formation of an oppositional ‘community of feeling,’ a collective predicated the expression of negative emotional energy toward the nascent authoritarian state. I show how audience members’ and critics’ affective response to Bethânia’s performance evidenced a shift in the tenor of the public for Opinião, which subsequently raised the suspicions of the military government. Additionally, I investigate how the dictatorship’s repressive response illustrates the possibilities and limits of a community formed through musical performance

Keywords
Maria Bethânia, Brazilian military dictatorship, Opinião, music, affect, protest music

Introduction
On Thursday, May 27, 1965, the Brazilian newspaper Correio da Manhã published a two-paragraph report on the proposed censorship of Opinião (Opinion), a musical-theater production running at the Teatro Ruth Escobar in São Paulo
Subsequent reporting in the same paper confirmed that General Riograndino Kruel, head of the Federal Police, had identified some 'subversive' elements in the show (Jafa 1965, 4). Brazil was beginning its second year of military rule following the coup of April 1, 1964, and in that context, the threat of censorship may not seem surprising, especially because Opinião's titular song famously included the provocative lyric 'they can beat me, they can arrest me, but I won't change my opinion.' The call to censor Opinião, though, shocked the artistic collective that produced the show. Thereza Aragão noted that the show had already survived the scrutiny of censors in both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (Jafa 1965, 4). Why did Opinião suddenly cause Kruel such rancor? What had changed since the show had been passed by censors?

Although multiple factors undoubtedly contributed to Kruel’s intervention, one stands out from the rest: the growing importance of the newest member of the cast, a heretofore unknown eighteen-year-old singer named Maria Bethânia (b. Maria Bethânia Viana Telles Veloso). Bethânia joined the cast in February of 1965 on the recommendation of Nara Leão, whom she replaced. Unlike Nara, who was a mainstay of the Rio de Janeiro artistic elite whose fame and publicity efforts drew huge audiences to the show, Bethânia was from the Brazilian Northeast and had virtually no social capital in Rio or São Paulo. Furthermore, critics and audiences did not laud Bethânia’s technical ability (Fontoura 2017; Michalski 1965, 4) and disparaged her appearance (Vieira 1965, 1; ‘Maria Bethânia: Samba Nôvo, Samba Eterno’ 1966, 1; Picanco 2017; Moraes 2016). Nonetheless, Bethânia served as a ‘catalyst for emotions’ (Salles 2017) and caused one reviewer to testify, ‘when we hear her sing ... we feel something’ (‘Carcará’ 1965, 5).

In this article, I argue that the audience’s affective response to Bethânia’s performance is an underacknowledged element in transforming Opinião into the kind of political collective that state leaders found threatening. I show how ‘feeling something’ was neither beside the point nor a by-product of the show’s political messaging but was intrinsic to it. Where much scholarship on Brazilian popular music of this era has shown how lyrical messaging and double meaning helped artists critique the military regime while skirting censors, this analysis points to the performance itself as constitutive of a political reading. I demonstrate how Bethânia contributed to the formation of what sociologist Mabel Berezin calls a ‘community of feeling,’ a term that theorizes the astructural and frequently ephemeral political communities that form as the result of collective emotional expression (Berezin 2001). Berezin shows how momentary ‘expressions of emotional energy’ can create the basis for investment in political collectivities (Berezin 2002, 39).

As a theoretical tool, the notion of a ‘community of feeling’ is further useful in understanding the role that artists played in critiquing Brazil’s nascent military...
dictatorship and offering a model for coming together in opposition to it. It sheds light on the role music plays in protest, social movements, and politics more generally by explaining the ways that a musical performance’s emotional valences can be constitutive of a political community. In what follows, I situate communities of feeling within the extant literature on the function of emotion in politics, social movements, and protest music. I then briefly introduce Opinião and the political environment that birthed it. To contextualize the Bethânia’s reception after joining the show, I examine press materials that highlighted Bethânia’s status as a baiana (woman from Bahia) to show how the authenticity of her performance is tied to a complex racialized framing. I continue with a close reading of two iconic performances from the show.

My analysis draws on thirty-four interviews that I conducted between 2015 and 2019, including eighteen with participants and audience members of Opinião. Interviewees were identified primarily through word of mouth, with some recommending others during or after the interviews. Interviewees cited in this article were born in the 1940s, having attended or participated in Opinião as young adults. All were in their 70s during the time of the interviews. Most interviews were conducted over the course of one to two hours in the homes of the interviewees, who granted permission to be cited by name. Audio recordings of all interviews were subsequently fully transcribed. In addition, I pored over an abundance of archival materials, including newspaper and periodical reviews, advertisements, playbills, and published interviews accessed at Rio de Janeiro’s Biblioteca Nacional, personal ephemera and audio recordings of interviews and performances located in the archives at Museu da Imagem e Som, the Insituto Moreira Salles, both located in Rio de Janeiro, as well as in the personal collections of interviewees. These interviews and archival materials form the basis for my analysis of Bethânia’s performances of the songs ‘De Manhã’ and ‘Carcará.’ as I listen for the aspects of these performances that contribute to audiences ‘feeling something’ (Maria Bethânia 1965).

**Opinião as a Community of Feeling**

Countering a long-prevalent view that political participation is made up solely of rational choices and reasoned behavior, in recent decades social scientists have begun studying how emotions are key in inspiring protest activity (Jasper 1998b, 404-408), in fueling ongoing social movements (Jasper 1998b, 404-408; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001, 11; Kemper 2001, 67-68; van Troost, van Stekelenburg, and Klandermans 2013), and in the formation and maintenance of political communities, large and small (Nussbaum 2013). This scholarship tends to refute characterizations of emotion as irrational (Jasper 2006, 28), opting instead to examine how emotions are part of a complex process that accompanies the decision to call out injustice and agitate for change (Kemper 2001; van Troost, van Stekelenburg, and Klandermans 2013). While myriad scholars have argued that anger is nearly always present in recognitions of and fights against injustice (Jasper 1998b; Holmes 2004a; Holmes 2004b; Lyman 2004; Kessler and Hollbach 2005),
some argue that anger is a more effective impetus for protest when balanced with positive emotions, such as hope and joy (Reed 2004; Sabucedo and Vilas 2014). Music scholars have also begun to examine the importance of emotion relative to lyrics in protest and movement music (Mondak 1988, 34-36; Berger 2000, 60-61; Hemmasi 2013).

Mabel Berezin’s notion of ‘communities of feeling’ offers a theoretical apparatus for naming and examining the emotive forces that fuse and bind political communities in the moments they coalesce (Berezin 2001). Just as Raymond William’s concept of ‘structures of feeling’ contrasts feelings with formal beliefs and ideologies to emphasize their emergent and variable qualities (Williams 1977), Mabel Berezin posits that communities of feeling ‘bring individuals together in a bounded, usually public, space for a discrete time period to express emotional energy’ (Berezin 2002, 39). Rather than assuming that emotions are secondary to social life, she highlights how social and political rituals are not only inextricable from their emotional valence, but often formed by them (Berezin 2002, 43; Collins 2001, 29). Though it may be uncommon to think of an audience as a community, in the case of Opinião, attendees tended to return to the theater with surprisingly regularity, even to the point of substituting this show for erstwhile banned cultural-political organizations such as the cultural wing of the National Student Union (CPC da UNE) (Whelden 2019, 19-20). Communities of feeling are crucial to the maintenance of a secure nation state, which persists as a stable institution due to the emotional investment of its constituency (Berezin 2002, 38; Nussbaum 2013, 2-3). Because the emotional energy that communities of feeling generate can either support or oppose the secure state, they have greater power in times of state formation and dissolution, a relevant factor at the time that Opinião was mounted, as I discuss below.

Conceptualizing Opinião as a community of feeling is further useful as it foregrounds the affective valence of the show’s politics. As Ana Hofman has argued, music can be a crucial and effective facilitator in the creation of social relations within a political context (Hofman 2020, 93). The affective experience of live music, in particular, can showcase the potential for new social relations that have the potential to continue beyond the spatially and temporally bounded moment of performance. Farzaneh Hemmasi’s work on the sung performance of affect is also significant here (Hemmasi 2013). She shows that state responses to a politically charged performance do not only arise in response to lyrical content, but also in response to performances that become legible as political statements due to the affect they communicate (Hemmasi 2013, 71-72). As a theoretical tool, the notion of affective politics refocuses the analysis of Opinião in multiple ways, then: toward the ways that the show’s audience could become a political community, towards the importance of performance choices in motivating that community, and towards the affective grounding of the backlash that the performers, authors, and audience experienced by the authoritarian government of the time.
Setting the Stage for Bethânia

In the months preceding the 1964 military coup, Brazil was gripped by extreme political polarization. The country’s president, João Goulart, who had only acceded to the office following the resignation of his predecessor, agitated for structural reforms intended to redistribute land in rural areas, combat the country’s vast illiteracy, and provide health care to the underserved (Skidmore 1988, 9). As these efforts were opposed by legislators, Goulart turned to public rallies to stir popular support. At the end of March, the military, supported by the CIA, carried out a coup d’état and initiated a twenty-one-year military government. In addition to restrictions on constitutional freedoms, the government banned a number of political parties and cultural institutions. Notably, among the military regime’s earliest ‘security measures’ was the shuttering of the Centro Popular de Cultura (People’s Center for Culture), or CPC, an activist organization dedicated to using art to educate working-class Brazilians about social inequities (Napolitano 2001, 67; Mendes 2011, 21; Ridenti 2014).

Opinião, which was mounted eight months after the coup, has long been characterized as the first cultural response to the dictatorship (Gomes 1991, 607; Hollanda and Gonçalves 1982, 22; Boal 2000, 229; Kühner and Rocha 2001, 46; Carvalho 2016; Caymmi 2015). The performers in the show were musicians, rather than trained actors and they sang songs with explicit and implicit political themes. In lieu of dialogue, they told stories drawn from their own life experiences and gave opinions on social and political matters. The production’s credited playwrights advanced the notion that each was a representation of a distinct segment of Brazilian society (Mostaço 1982; Damasceno 1996; Boal 2000; Schwarz 1992, 146). Nara Leão, a twenty-two-year-old woman raised in the wealthy Rio neighborhood of Copacabana, stood for the middle-class intellectual and student population. Zé Kéti, a forty-three-year-old samba composer from Rio’s North Zone, was the representative of the urban working classes, particularly those from the city’s favelas. João do Vale, a thirty-one-year-old composer from the northeastern state of Maranhão, represented the rural poor and Rio’s large migrant population. Despite their different backgrounds, they came together to ‘sing grievances and protests’ (Porto 1964).

This orthodox characterization of Opinião as the thesis statement of its authors captures the show’s basic premise, however it understates the performers’ own participation in this process and the differing approaches they took in their political commentary. Not only were the show’s monologues derived from the real experiences of these performers, but João do Vale and Zé Kéti were responsible for the composition of nearly all the songs. Investigating these performers’ contributions in and of themselves, then, shifts focus from the political views of the exclusively white, male, and middle-class authors to the performers, all of whom occupied subaltern positions in Brazilian society, either in terms of class, race, or gender. Shifting from the orthodox view also makes more room for analysis of Maria Bethânia, who, though she replaced Nara Leão on stage, did not replicate her class and regional identities.
Another challenge to the orthodox interpretation of *Opinião* comes in the form of audience recollections of the show’s importance in their lives. Filmmaker Cacá Diegues told me, ‘I went to see Opinião every day…. We all attended Opinião as if we were attending mass’ (Diegues 2016). It may seem surprising that the same audience members would return to the same production night after night, but, as Diegues and others explained, the Teatro Arena de São Paulo\(^2\) had become a political gathering place during *Opinião*’s run (Buarque 2017; Vergara 2017; Escorel 2017; Tâmega 2017; Macalé 2017; Moraes 2017). Because organizations like the CPC, for which Diegues had served as president, had been banned, artist-activists needed a new space to meet. Given *Opinião*’s links to an organization disbanded by the military government, it may seem curious that it survived the state’s censors. First of all, unlike the CPC, *Opinião* was not labeled as a political organization. It is unlikely that the military government was aware audience members treated it as such. Second, though the show’s performers sang songs with explicit political themes and told autobiographical stories inflected with implicit social commentary, they obscured and coded their critiques. They decried living conditions for the poor, spoke out against the disenfranchisement of Black Brazilians, and attested to the sexism experienced by working women. But as most of these social injustices existed prior to the coup, their commentary merely implied that the military was ill-equipped or unwilling to address them. In fact, the performers were careful never to mention the coup by name (Costa, Vianna, and Pontes 1965).

According to audience members, *Opinião*’s orientation shifted when Bethânia joined the cast. In late January of 1965, Leão contracted laryngitis and suggested she be replaced by Bethânia, whom she had met while on tour in Salvador, Bahia (Halfoun 1965). The production team was skeptical about hiring Bethânia both because of her lack of pre-existing audience in Rio and the fact that, as a northeasterner, she did not occupy the same sociogeographic category as Nara. There would no longer be a representative of Rio’s upper middle class in the show, which threatened to disrupt the political symbolism of the original cast (Boal 2000, 230). Despite this skepticism, Bethânia made her debut on February 13, 1965, eventually serving to bolster, rather than undermine, the show’s political valences. She quickly became the centerpiece of *Opinião*, captivating critics and audiences, and continuing in the show for the rest of its Rio run, as well as its stints in São Paulo and Porto Alegre. During the show’s time in São Paulo, she released her first 45 rpm single, featuring the songs ‘Carcará’ and ‘De Manhã,’ which she performed in *Opinião*. In the end, she gave more performances than Nara Leão and, in that time, brought out a new dimension in this political community, becoming the ‘catalyst for emotions’ that would shape the production moving forward (Salles 2017).

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\(^2\) The Teatro de Arena de São Paulo was located in Rio de Janeiro, in the Super Shopping Center de Copacabana. The theater was later renamed the Teatro Opinião, in celebration of *Opinião*’s success and importance. In São Paulo, the show was staged at the Teatro Ruth Escobar.
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The Baiana: Racialized Authenticity and Affective Politics

Both the press and the Opinião production team framed Bethânia as an outsider by highlighting her regional origins and consistently referring to her as a baiana, a term that literally translates to ‘woman from Bahia.’ As I discuss below, baiana carries racialized implications of Blackness and invokes stereotyped imagery pervasive within Brazilian popular culture. The process of establishing Bethânia’s authenticity as a baiana began in a string of newspaper stories, rehearsal reviews, and interviews that preceded her debut. Each notice, profile, and review referred to Bethânia as ‘the baiana’ at least once, in many cases using the word in place of the pronouns ‘she’ and ‘her’ (Michalski 1965, 4; Brasil 1965a, 6; Poerner 1965, 1; ‘Carcará’ 1965, 5). Given that this show was her introduction to Rio audiences, these descriptors may have led some audience members to assume that Bethânia herself is Black, though she would not be read as such by many who were familiar with the singer. This fact speaks not only the complexity of racial categorization in Brazil, but to the euphemistic nature of discussing race in Opinião, which includes no overt references to the racialized identities of its performers. That said, Bethânia’s status as a baiana was emphasized repeatedly, including by Bethânia herself in her first monologue in Opinião: ‘My name is Maria Bethânia Viana Teles Veloso. I have this Bahian landowner’s name but I’m just Bahian’ (Costa, Vianna, and Pontes 1965, 85).

Although Bethânia’s appearance did not adhere to these stereotypes and challenged racialized expectations, this exoticizing gesture contributed to audience members’ reading of the singer as authentic. As we will see, this aspect of Bethânia’s performances in Opinião illustrates some of the complex ways that racialized notions of authenticity contribute to the affective or felt manifestations of identity categories and their politics. Specifically, the notions of authenticity attributed to specific racialized and regionally determined identity categories seems to allow audiences to experience the emotions derived from performances of people of these groups as authentic, and thus help create the necessary conditions for creating a community of feeling.

Bahia invokes notions of Blackness more than other parts of Brazil, in part due to its large population of people of African descent and the prevalence of cultural forms associated with African heritage there (Pinho 2010). Many of these cultural forms, furthermore, have become emblematic of Brazil, meaning that Black Brazilians are often characterized as authentic culture bearers (Crook and Johnson 1999, 1; Hanchard 1994, 5). Music journalists and scholars have reinforced this view by pointing to Bahia as the birthplace of samba (Brasil 1965b, 2) and arguing that the Bahian women who provided support to early samba musicians had inherited matriarchal family structures from African roots (Tinhorão 1974, 218). This gesture was widely legible because of the baiana’s pervasiveness in Brazilian popular culture as a symbol of authentic Brazilianness. The baiana is mentioned in dozens of songs. In Rio de Janeiro’s official carnaval competition, every parade is required to have an ala de baianas (wing of baianas) marching with the (Cabral 1996, 79), typically wearing the flowing white dresses associated with the Afro-Brazilian religion of candomblé (McCann 2004, 60). Describing Bethânia as a baiana so frequently, then, was not only an accurate acknowledgement of her home state, but a gesture


authenticating her connection to the African roots of Brazilian culture. While
discussion of racialized difference and discrimination based in physical features such
as skin color has increased in Brazil during the latter part of the twentieth century,
calls for social justice along racialized lines were repressed during the dictatorship
(Hanchard 1994, 120). Regional identity, then, often served as a euphemism for
racial difference. In Bethânia’s case, this was confusing, given that she did not fit the
stereotyped profile of a baiana, but nonetheless an important marker of her
connection to a place that has often been evoked as an origin point for Brazilian
culture (Albuquerque 2014).

Labeling Bethânia as a baiana was also a way of marking her difference from the
audience, who primarily came from the southern metropoles of Rio de Janeiro and
São Paulo. Filmmaker Antônio Carlos Fontoura claimed that ‘by being
northeasterners, it’s another kind of thing that [Bethânia and other Bahians] bring. Another musical sensibility, in a way’ (Fontoura 2017). Director Augusto Boal has
written that Opinião’s production team worried about the show being ‘disfigured’ by
Bethânia’s presence, because she did not fit any of the categories associated with the
original cast (Boal 2000, 230). Bethânia was a northeastern like her co-star João
do Vale, but, unlike him, she was not from the serrão (the drought-plagued interior
of the Brazilian Northeast). Fontoura captured the sentiments of many with whom I
spoke when he replied: ‘Bethânia was a change. Because the very conceit [of the
show] was to have a girl like Nara that represented the dominant class. … In truth,
it lost its initial DNA, in a way. Because even though Bethânia was urban, she was
not that golden youth, none of that. She was a Bahian girl’ (Fontoura 2017).

The way that Bethânia was simultaneously exoticized and authenticated by the
racialized discourse on her regional origins was crucial to the audience’s response
to her performance. First, the fact that Bethânia was framed and understood as an
authentic culture bearer helped ensure that her messages were taken seriously.
Second, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has argued, race is a ‘felt’ category, ‘produced not
just ‘objectively’ but subjectively’ (Bonilla-Silva 2019, 2). In other words, in addition
to the ways that perceptions of race organize social life structurally and
economically, race is experienced in terms of felt emotions. Racialized emotions are
deeply connected ‘to reason and values, to social membership and hierarchy, and
to political behavior’ (Kim 2016, 437). Thus, tied to social categories and lived
experiences, they often serve to reinforce and perpetuate systems of racial
domination: emotions of the dominant race are considered authoritative and
normative, while emotions of the subordinate class are seen as dubious (Bonilla-
Silva 2019, 6). Bethânia’s emotionally charged performances were informed by and
evocative of a racialized emotional experience. She offered the predominantly white
and middle-class audience an extra-discursive entry point to the hardships of class
of people through feeling. Many of the social injustices highlighted in Opinião
occurred disproportionately in the Brazilian Northeast, Bethânia’s home region.
The fact that Bethânia was northeastern may have helped better generate
compassion, an important ingredient in successful protest movements (Jasper
1998a), for people suffering there. As a mechanism for social change, this strategy
may have limits, for racialized emotions are deeply entrenched (Bonilla-Silva 2019, 7). But it also shows some of the ways that musical performance may be a model for inclusion through empathy.

Despite the use of racialized language to describe Bethânia, her appearance did not conform to the imagery associated with the baiana archetype, a fact that created dissonance for audience members and critics. Opinião, as with many cultural texts of its time, did not explicitly address issues of racial inequality, leaving them as subtext for the stories and commentaries of its performers. While testimonials of Bethânia’s co-stars, both of whom were Black men, only occasionally used racialized language, the social problems that they decried disproportionately affected Black Brazilians. For her part, Bethânia, ‘was not a typical middle-class white girl. Her frizzy hair and indefinite skin color, her thinness, her high forehead above that strong nose, her contralto voice, and even her indeterminable age created problems’ (Veloso 2003b, 44). The heavy focus on Bethânia’s appearance in these reviews is indicative of the structural sexism and racialized expectations played in evaluating the singer. Unlike her male co-stars, about whose appearance there is virtually no comment, audience members and critics were unsparing in their criticism of Bethânia. Jonas Vieira wrote, ‘Looking at Maria Bethânia … no one is capable of identifying her as a singer’ (Vieira 1965, 1). One audience member recalled ‘that horrific image of Bethânia, so skinny, with those baggy pants, that nose—no one would believe that she would be successful’ (Picâncio 2017). Another called her ‘ugly, very ugly’ (Moraes 2016). One report suggests that comments about Bethânia’s appearance stemmed directly from critics’ racialized expectations: ‘But what a baiana! Looking at that tiny person, so skinny, with that straight hair, it makes you want to purse your lips’ (Brasil 1965a, 6).

More than her appearance, the exoticizing and racialized discourse about Bethânia’s regional origins came to bear in evaluations of her singing voice. Nina Sun Eidsheim has argued that, although race is a socially constructed concept that has no biological bearing on vocal attributes, there remains a strong ‘cultural belief that voices are the unmediated expression and evidence of transpersonal categories, such as gender and race’ (Eidsheim 2018, 39). Though the discourse around Bethânia sidestepped the topic of skin color, the consistent references to her Bahianness ensured that racialized notions were ever present. One consequence was that when audiences, critics, and collaborators praised the power and sincerity of Bethânia’s voice, they tended to attribute these qualities to her place of birth, rather than the singer’s training or labor. Her voice was ‘rustic, northeastern even, from the earth’ (Fontoura 2017). Boal recalled how spectators were lured into the theater during rehearsals by her ‘strange, unusual beautiful voice’ (Boal 2000, 229). Theater critic Yan Michalski praised her voice while noting her ‘rather crude technical control’ (Michalski 1965, 4). One newspaper said she had a ‘voice to shake one’s foundations’ (‘Bethânia Espera’ 1965, 6). As Barreto Brasil described her, ‘The damn baiana seems to have the devil in her. She sings through all of her pores. Maria Bethânia’s voice makes you think. Having a voice is one thing. Singing is the hard part. And how the little thing sings. She really sings. … The words that come out,
they come from inside. Deep inside. From the depths’ (Brasil 1965a, 6). By no means
do I intend to suggest that Bethânia was insincere in her performances, quite the
opposite. But the question of sincerity, which is so important to the performative act
of making audiences ‘feel something,’ is impossible to extricate from the complex
exoticization and racialization that the singer endured.

‘De Manhã’
‘De Manhã’ was the first song that Bethânia sang in Opinião. Composed by the
singer’s brother and based on a folk song from her home region (‘Caetano Veloso e
Thalma de Freitas’ 2012), it was added to the show at Bethânia’s behest. Its source
material helped to reinforce Bethânia’s baiana identity and the racialized
expectations thus implied. Lyrical ly, ‘De Manhã’ recounts the story of a protagonist
on the road to their beloved in the wee hours of the morning. Though the song’s
political overtones are limited, in Opinião it became an inspirational allegory for
hope, an indispensable emotion in sustaining political community (Jasper 1998b;
Reed 2004). This transformation is owed, in part, to the way that the production
team staged the song. Even more so, as I describe below, it was ‘the extraordinary
power’ of Bethânia’s performance (Moraes 2016) that helped make ‘De Manhã’
legible as a political song.

The Opinião production team saw ‘De Manhã’ as ‘the best representation of her
musical origins’ (Veloso 2003b, 46), perhaps because Veloso based his composition
on a traditional Bahian samba, which Bethânia adopted as an introduction in her
performance (Veloso 2003a, 32). This opening further reinforced Bethânia’s origins
through her use of a regional pronunciation of flor, the Portuguese word for flower.
Rather than flor, Bethânia sings fulô, a pronunciation that resulted when indigenous
people, particularly those who spoke the Tupi language, introduced extra vowels
into Portuguese words (Martins 2003). This pronunciation was still preferred in
parts of the Northeast during this period and, though it does not reflect Bethânia’s
own linguistic tendencies—as she shows later in the song—it does mark the singer
as from the Brazilian Northeast.

Veloso’s lyrics are available to interpretation as a politicized commentary on the
recent military coup—a hopeful reminder that light follows the darkness. Though
scholars have focused on the importance of negative emotions in political action,
some have highlighted the importance of hope to sustaining protest movements. As
‘the anticipation of a better state of affairs in the future’ (Jasper 1998b, 114), hope
can help convert moral outrage into action (Reed 2004, 667). The original samba
happens entirely at daybreak; there is no darkness. In the later portion, the morning
setting is substituted by the madrugada, the period between midnight and dawn. This,
coupled with the minor key, brings a somber tone to the majority of the song, which
is only broken at the dawn that closes the song. The rooster crow that occurs in the
middle of original composition has been moved to the end, making the high point
of the piece, in terms of both energy and pitch, a final flourish, breaking through
the darkness as the promise of a better future. The staging and lighting of the
performance further emphasized this message of hope. Unlike the rest of the show, which was lit by a few floodlights and staged with the actors speaking or singing directly to the audience (Boal 2000, 227; Paranhos 2012, 76), Bethânia began ‘De Manha’ a capella from the dressing room and moved through the darkened theater to the stage as she sang. As the song closed, the lights came on, in Boal’s words, ‘like a flower, bathing her in the dawn’ (Boal 2000, 230).

This possibility for hope would not be legible without the drama of Bethânia’s performance. The song is exemplary of ‘the interior strength of [Bethânia’s] interpretation, her aggressive and communicative way of singing, her exemplary concentration’ (Michalski 1965, 4), her ‘vigor and emotion’ (Motta 2000, 89), and her ‘very effusive side’ (Diegues 2016). She makes full use of the melody’s range to grow the intensity from quiet introspection to full-throated bellow. In the single extant recording of her performance in Opinião, Bethânia sings the introductory portion of the song unaccompanied (0:00-0:14).³ She begins the song in a comfortable range, but not high enough to require belting. When the band joins, they play quietly so as not to drown her out (0:52-1:08). Even with the metric pulse provided by the drums and guitar, she sings well behind the beat, pulling against the propulsion of the accompaniment (0:08-1:37). These performance choices help Bethânia stand apart from the accompaniment. By pulling against the accompaniment, she maintains her dominance within the arrangement, showcasing the ‘extraordinary power’ of her performance skills.

This power is most palpable in the way that Bethânia transforms the lyric cocoroco from a description of a crowing rooster in the traditional song to an invocation of that rooster’s crow at the end of her brother’s composition. In terms of pitch, the lyric is the high point in both compositions, but Bethânia masks that fact in the opening and emphasizes it in the finale (1:54-2:09). In the introductory stanza of the studio recording, she pronounces the word quickly, and because the first and fourth syllables of the word fall on downbeats, it imitates the sound of a rooster. But if the rooster’s crow is a wake-up call, this faithful rendition fails. Bethânia almost throws the line away in performance, moving on quickly to the final couplet. In contrast, at the song’s end, she draws the word out. She starts on the downbeat of the measure, but then milks the onomatopoeia by syncopating the melody. This in itself draws more attention to the line, but Bethânia stretches it even further, unrooting the rooster’s call from the strict rhythmic pattern so that the final syllable is almost coincidental with the beginning of the next measure. These performance choices highlight the very purpose of the rooster—that of awakening those in earshot. They take the content of the song’s lyrics and transform it into an embodied performance, bringing the emotional aspect of this awakening in line with the intellectual aspect.

³ Timestamps included here reference the commercial recording of the song, released in 1965 as Side B of the 45 rpm single of ‘Carcará’ and later that year on Bethânia’s first solo LP. In addition, I am grateful Cecília Boal and the Instituto Augusto Boal for making the unreleased amateur recording of Bethânia’s performance in Opinião available to me.
These choices allow the audience to feel the experience rather than just think it, making the politics of the song legible as feeling. In addition, her performance choices showcase Bethânia’s ability to embody the bird, something that she takes even further in her interpretation of ‘Carcará,’ the next iconic performance from this show that I will consider in this essay.

‘Carcará’

If ‘De Manha’ served as Bethânia’s introduction to the Opinião community, then her performance of co-star João do Vale’s song ‘Carcará’ was the moment that contributed most to transforming it. ‘Carcará’ received immense attention during Opinião’s run, both positive and negative. Critics write frequently and fawningly of the song, while General Kruel included the song in his list of proposed cuts. Music critic and historian Sérgio Cabral wrote that ‘her performance of ‘Carcará’ … moved the audience so much that, almost every night, she had to sing it again’ (Cabral 2001, 94). Bethânia herself participated in this narrative. In March of 1965, after about a month of shows, one journalist asked if the Copacabana public scared her. Her response: ‘Through song I think I succeed in reaching and moving many people’ (Estevão 1965, 3).

Though ‘Carcará’ has long had a reputation as a ‘cry of revolt’ and a ‘forceful critique of rural poverty’ (Bittencourt 1965, 3; ‘João do Vale no Verso e no Canto’ 1965, 3; Dunn 2001), the song’s composer denied intending any of its political valences, maintaining that it was simply an homage to a bird of prey native to his home in the Brazilian Northeast, a kind of hawk named for its call (Vale 1991). Critics and audiences, however, have understood the bird’s experiences in the song as an allegory for the plight of the rural northeasterner. For example, journalist and politician Carlos Lacerda interpreted the animal as a Robin Hood figure that takes what it needs to survive, rather than perishing of hunger (Lacerda 1966, 8). In this allegorical interpretation, the bird’s self-determination is an example for the rural poor to follow, in defiance of landowning elites. The ‘wicked’ bird is not passive in its misery but steals what it needs to survive. For those opposing the nascent military regime, this response could be seen as a call to action for the oppressed lower class, those who would have benefitted from ousted President João Goulart’s reforms, including a redistribution of land and elimination of sharecropping in rural areas.

The song’s appeal to the plight of the northeasterner was made explicit in the arrangement made for Opinião, which includes a recitation of migration statistics. In performance, over a series of semitone modulations, the singer says, ‘In 1950, more than two million northeasterners lived outside of their places of birth. Ten percent of the population of Ceará emigrated. Thirteen percent of Piauí. More than fifteen percent of Bahia. Seventeen percent of Alagoas’ (Costa, Vianna, and Pontes 1965, 41). In Kruel’s call for censorship, he specifically cited these statistics as one of the show’s subversive elements. But why would this publicly available information be subversive? The singers did not explicate; they merely recited them. Are these
migrants the victims of hunger and poverty? Or are they *carcarás* taking matters into their own hands by descending on the larger cities *en masse*?

The answer to these questions becomes clearer when audience members describe the importance of Bethânia’s performance to the song’s reputation as ‘an iconic song of protest’:

> If there was a song describing the miserable conditions in the Northeast with the droughts … that song, in some sense, may have been co-opted, by Bethânia, by Nara, and these people into a more political thing. I don’t know the details, but obviously in the delivery, when I saw shows with ‘Carcará,’ it was sort of in your face that it was a political song. (Neuhaus 2016)

Without denying the importance of the lyrics, he points to the delivery of the song as a crucial factor in reading it as protest and highlights Nara’s and Bethânia’s roles in this process.

Nara sang ‘Carcará’ for about six weeks, contributing more to the song’s political message with her promotional activities for the show than her work on stage. In interviews, she consistently reiterated the political orientation of *Opinião*, which marked her as a performer of protest music (Boal and Leão 1963). Nara’s publicity campaign for the show was crucial to its success. She was by far the most famous member of the original cast and, rather than promoting *Opinião* as entertainment, she focused on educating the public about the show’s politics, as well as her own shift away from the middle-class genre of Bossa Nova, in which she had been educated and found her initial fame, towards a new, engaged, musical style that would eventually be called MPB (Whelden 2019). Despite her willingness to defend the show’s politics, both in the press and on stage—famously, Nara argued with audience members during the show about politics and social issues—the authorities did not intervene to censor *Opinião* during her tenure.

A comparison of footage of Bethânia and Nara Leão’s versions of the song reveals how Bethânia’s emotive performance imbued the song with additional power. In performance, Nara is dry and faithful to the song as written. She sings in straight sixteenth notes, closely matching the rhythm of the accompaniment, neither dragging nor rushing. She doesn’t project her voice, and, at times, nearly whispers. She also sings the entire song while barely moving. Nara’s performance choices are legible as aesthetic traces of Bossa Nova, a genre known for vocals delivered flatly at a near whisper with little vibrato. Unlike its parent genre samba, Bossa Nova is also not primarily a dance genre—despite efforts to promote it as such

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4 Maria Bethânia’s performance was captured for Paulo César Saraceni’s 1966 film *O Desafio*. I am grateful to Antônio Venancio, who provided the footage of Nara Leão’s performance.
internationally (Goldschmitt 2019)—a factor in keeping with Nara’s stillness. Whether explained, then, as a trace of her aesthetic education in Bossa Nova, or, as I have argued elsewhere, a choice that removed her expressive voice in favor of the message of her composer-collaborators, her performance of ‘Carcará’ did little to move the audience vis-à-vis its messaging (Whelden 2019, 248-250).

In contrast, attendees described Bethânia’s interpretation in emotional terms. One audience member who saw both performers told me that when Bethânia sang the song, people were so bowled over that they ‘became catatonic’ (Moraes 2016). Filmmaker Eduardo Escorel told me, ‘I think that [the song’s politics] only became obvious when Bethânia appeared. Because, while Nara was singing, I think that everyone thought it was great. But the force that Bethânia brought, the dramatic weight that she brought, that established a contrast’ (Escorel 2017). One journalist wrote at the time that her performance ‘proved that the success of ‘Carcará’ was more due to the singer than the song itself’ (Machado 1965, 2). Sérgio Cabral remembered one friend saying, ‘The song’s lyrics are not at all subversive. But, if I was of the political police, I would arrest Maria Bethânia’ (Pilcher cited in Cabral 2001, 94).

The audience for Bethânia’s performance remembers this dynamic performance for its emotional impact on them. Michalski noted that ‘her interpretation of ‘Carcará’ … profoundly moves the spectator’ (Michalski 1965, 4). The Jornal dos Sports published the following appeal just before the show closed in Rio:

If you haven’t heard Maria Bethânia singing ‘Carcará,’ don’t stay there reading the paper. No. … Don’t think that we are being cute. The [theater] has been full, every night. And with only one week remaining, it is very possible that you will not be able to find a seat. And the baiana is seriously good. … When we listen to her sing ‘Carcará,’ we feel something. (‘Carcará’ 1965, 5)

Bethânia’s great intervention comes from her ability to evoke an emotional response from her audience as a performer by projecting her voice throughout the theater, taking liberties with the melody’s rhythms, and incorporating sharp and defined movements throughout her interpretation. Bethânia sings the song higher than Leão, which allows her to belt the high notes. In contrast to Leão’s whisper, Bethânia roars. As Paulo told me, ‘Because the range of the voice of Bethânia is much more expressive. … She made that into a crescendo … to energize people. … Because Nara was much more low key, her voice range was more limited. … I don’t think she was able to produce that dramatic effect’ (Neuhaus 2016).

Unlike Leão’s rhythmically precise interpretation, Bethânia sings behind the beat and stretches her notes, pushing against, rather than following, the
accompaniment. She sings each section differently, marking an affective range between mourning, admiration, and outrage. Her interpretation begins as a lament, but by the end of the verse, she sings with audible disgust. On the drawn out ‘carcara,’ she doesn’t leap into her head voice like Leão, but stays in a comfortable register, drawing the syllables out in appreciation (0:41-0:42). At each chorus, she is more forceful (1:11-1:20), only returning to the initial mournful tone at the end of the song (1:51). Then, over a modulation, as she enumerates the masses who have migrated from the Northeast, her tone transforms from matter of fact to matter of life and death (1:55-2:15).

One issue that audiences frequently highlighted in discussing both Leão and Bethânia is their intonation, a factor that may have contributed to the affective power of the performances. Though columnist Sérgio Bittencourt railed against Leão’s intonation in his newspaper column (Bittencourt 1964a, 3; 1964b, 6; 1964c, 2), many of the people whom I interviewed praised her intonation (Costa 2017; Escorel 2017). Indeed, Leão sings with decent intonation, though she throws away some of the lower notes and has trouble on longer held pitches. It’s pretty, but careful. Bethânia, on the other hand, was noted for singing out of tune, but not critiqued along these lines. Instead, people understood her lack of intonation as a consequence of her expressiveness (Escorel 2017). Writer Ferreira Gullar, a member of the Opinião production team, wrote some years later that Bethânia’s status as an ‘exceptional performer’ came from her ability not to sing ‘correctly,’ but in her ability to sing with the ‘heat of life’ (Gullar 1968). These interpretations that Bethânia injected so much emotion into her singing that she couldn’t stay in tune.

Bethânia’s movements also contribute to the emotional weight of her performance. During the rubato section that introduces the verse, she glares at her audience, hands on her hips (0:25). On dramatic syllables, she jerks her head violently to the side (0:30-0:31), ‘just like a carcara’ (Picanco 2017). Later, she leans her head back and closes her eyes, appreciating the magnificent bird. Her eyes dart from one audience member to another as her tone turns to pleading. During the statistical recitation that closes the song, she stands stock still, in military posture (1:55-2:15). She turns to her left as if ordered by an officer (2:16). At the song’s end, Bethânia’s dramatic performance style shifts the meaning of the lyrics. She leans forward into the crowd in anger and shouts the final words of the song, transforming the lyric from the indicative to the imperative (2:23). She no longer recounts the carcara’s actions, but calls the audience to action: catch, kill, and eat.

Bethânia’s performance was captured by filmmaker Paulo César Saraceni and included in his 1966 film O Desafio. The performance can be seen at José Junior. 2020. ‘Maria Bethania – Carcará (1965) | Opinião – HD.’ YouTube. 31 May 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73Ptd0KdH30. Timestamps included here reference this video. In addition, I am grateful Cecília Boal and the Instituto Augusto Boal for making the unreleased amateur recording of Bethânia’s performance in Opinião available to me.
Although this performance can be read through a number of affective lenses, this finale evokes anger, an emotion that social theorists agree is especially important in constituting political action, generally, and protest, specifically (Holmes 2004b; Lyman 2004; Flam 2004; Scott 1990; Kessler and Hollbach 2005). In reacting to perceived injustice with anger, individual sufferers can overcome a feeling of isolation and rally others to their cause. Shared, hidden feelings become moments when subordinated people recognize that other citizens feel the same way. In Opinião, the common recognition of the shared feeling of anger is the moment when the show moves from being a release valve to being a potentially dangerous political formation capable of critiquing the government. The way Bethânia achieves this in performance is perhaps best summed up by João do Vale when he compared her to Nara Leão: ‘Nara sings, Bethânia fights’ (Vale cited in Antônio 1965, 3). And though, like many social expressions of anger (Jasper 2006, 22), Bethânia’s expression is a performance, one that she replicated daily for Opinião’s audiences, this evidently did not diminish its sincerity or power. The fact that anger was not the sole emotion that she communicated may also have contributed to the potential of this performance. As Sabucedo and Vilas have shown, while anger can spur political participation, it is better sustained when balanced by positive feelings, such as hope (Sabucedo and Vilas 2014).

Bethânia’s emotionally charged performance also sheds light on the negative government attention the show attracted at this moment. Because angry speech attracts unwanted attention (and repressive retribution from the state), in many situations subordinated people adopt ‘ambivalent, satirical and carnivalesque forms’ as a way to speak to and protest injustice (Flam 2004, 171). The participants in Opinião offered ambivalence about the show’s relationship to the military government in its stated intents, satirized the regime’s fears of a communist Brazil with joking asides, and packaged many of these messages in a signifier of carnival—samba. The performers toed the line expertly, until they crossed it when Bethânia’s performances helped engender a community of feeling.

States in dissolution or formation—‘insecure states’—require even more emotional investment from the polity to attain legitimacy than more established ones. In 1965, the Brazilian state could be seen as both in dissolution (the democratic state) and formation (the authoritarian state), meaning that the emotional investment of its people was crucial in establishing and maintaining stability for the military regime. Kruel’s call for Opinião’s censorship on the basis that the show was ‘subversive’ corresponds with the actions of many insecure states when faced with emotion-driven social movements, particularly ones(predicated on an expression of anger. Regimes predicated on discourses of law and order tend to seek to repress angry speech, often using the justification that such speech may lead to violence (Holmes 2004b, 127; Lyman 2004, 134).

In the end, neither Kruel’s attempts to censor Opinião nor the community of feeling that formed during Bethânia’s tenure endured. His call for censorship came too late; the single of ‘Carcará’ was already being sold in record numbers. Meanwhile, the show completed its shows in São Paulo, traveled south to Porto Alegre for a two-
week run, and closed. Though *Opinião* was filmed for television, producers elected not to air it, citing technical problems. Reporting on the cancelled program cites one military officer who ‘informally’ claimed that the military had not censored the broadcast (‘TV da Bahia Tira do Ar *Opinião*’ 1965). After leaving *Opinião*, Bethânia stopped performing ‘Carrara’ in an attempt to carve out a career not overshadowed by a single song (Bressane and Escorel 2007; Veloso 2003b). This choice illustrates the momentary and a-structural nature of communities of feeling. They exist as collective expressions of emotional energy and may prefigure more sustained social movements with defined ideologies. Indeed, many audience members would take part in the musically driven protests that characterized the emergent genre of MPB (*Música Popular Brasileira*) and the televised song festivals of the mid-1960s (Napolitano 2001; Mello 2003; Mello 2017). Similarly, Kruel’s attempt to censor the show prefigured the military government’s responses to these MPB artists, who endured scrutiny and repression, as well as torture, imprisonment, and exile. Bethânia’s tenure in *Opinião* showed the potential for political movements originating in the cultural realm. It may have even awoken the regime to the mobilizing potential of an emotionally charged musical performance.

**Maria Bethânia Guerilla Warrior**

Despite her decision to stop performing ‘Carcará,’ Bethânia did not escape the hard-line stance that the military government would take on so-called subversive art-making in later years. In 1968, journalist and poet Reynaldo Jardim (2011) published a lengthy concrete poem titled *Maria Bethânia Guerreira Guerrilha* (*Maria Bethânia Guerilla Warrior*), in which he describes the singer like this:

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she is the salt of the morning

warrior
she is the seagull on the beach

guerrilla
she is the grenade in the hand

warrior
she is Bethânia
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The publication was not only banned by the military government but precipitated the detention and questioning Bethânia herself. Bethânia recalled, ‘Two o’clock in the morning, they invaded my home. … They took me … to a barracks. I was interrogated until sunrise. … They wanted to know why I caused this book—why he wrote this book for me’ (Bethânia cited in Coimbra 2017). Jardim recalled that the homage originated with her ‘singing ‘Carrara,’ the audience becoming frenzyed’ (Jardim 2011, 13). His words are similar to those of another audience member with
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whom I spoke: ‘she wasn’t afraid at all. The shout of ‘Carcará.’ The enormous voice that echoed. … It was the figure of a guerilla’ (Moraes 2016). These readings of Bethânia’s performance evidence the power of emotion in engendering a political community. Audiences were stirred by her performances.

This episode in Bethânia’s career illustrates how musical performance can serve to catalyze political community through its emotional intensity. It shows that music-making’s role in politics goes beyond serving as a vehicle for persuasive lyrics, proliferating symbolic traditional forms, and organizing collective singing. Not only is feeling an intrinsic part of all these functions, Bethânia demonstrates that political community is possible through performance. In the case of Opinião and, in particular, songs like ‘Carcará,’ much ink has been spilled identifying the political commentary hidden in lyrical double meanings. Despite the importance of critical scholarship focused on lyrics, it can exclude certain people, including those performers who are not, themselves, composers. For most of the twentieth century in Brazilian popular music, that meant most women musicians, as women rarely were included among the composing ranks. For this reason, narrowing our focus to issues of performance and its connection to affect has the potential to draw attention to underheard voices and understudied figures in politically oriented music making. Given the lack of attention placed on performance and affect within Brazilian music of this time, there is a relative dearth of contemporary discussion of Bethânia’s interventions, to the point that she herself never clarified the meaning of these performances for her. However, one hint that Bethânia gave came in an interview published just before Opinião closed in Rio. In response to a question about the political situation, she said, ‘I felt in Rio a certain fear in people’s faces, and carnaval left me very depressed, because the people were sad’ (Bethânia cited in Estevão 1965, 3). It is telling that she turned to emotion when asked about politics. For so many in her audience, they were the same thing.

Author Bio

Schuyler Whelden is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Music and the Latin American, Latinx and Caribbean Studies Program at the College of the Holy Cross. His research focuses on popular music and protest in Brazil, examining political engagement by musicians through performative and non-performative means. He holds a PhD in Musicology from the University of Califórnia, Los Angeles. His research has been published in Music & Politics and The Oxford Handbook of Timbre. He is co-creator of the educational podcast Massa: Brazilian Music & Culture.

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