

## COMPOSER AND INSTRUMENTALIST SPIRITS: THE MUSIC IN UMBANDA<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** Umbanda is a religion of possession in which spirits are venerated, embodied and disembodied in the midst of music, usually composed of the sound of atabaque (percussion instrument) and singing. Known as sung points, ritual songs are present in cult and in mediums' daily lives, yet little is known about native understanding of them. Through an ethnographic case study, the umbandist conception of music was investigated in an ethnopsychological perspective. The participants were 10 mediums and 6 spirits, which are considered by the field as interlocutor subjects with their own personality. Information was collected and analyzed based on an ethno-psychoanalytic procedure that combines semi-structured interviews and participant observation with an attentive listening to the implicit ones and the discursive repetitions and discussed based on a review of the literature. The data points that sung points help the medium to focus on the umbandist symbolic world, and can be triggers to feelings, sensations and thoughts associated with the spirits they describe. The percussionist mediums said they play under the influence of the spirits who instruct into making organized body movements. It can be concluded that the subject of umbandist musicality is not understood as the person who apparently composes and executes it. The term music can only be used by subordination of the native understanding of ritual use of sonority to an ethnomusicological conception that includes it. The general sense of the use of music in umbanda is to provide mental concentration and therefore understanding its role is crucial for the development of ethnopsychological knowledge about worship.

**Keywords:** Ethnopsychology; umbanda; music.

## ESPÍRITOS COMPOSITORES E INSTRUMENTISTAS: A MÚSICA NA UMBANDA

**RESUMO.** A umbanda é uma religião de possessão em que espíritos são venerados, incorporados e desincorporados em meio a música, geralmente composta pelo som do atabaque (instrumento de percussão) e pelo canto. Conhecidas como pontos-cantados, as canções rituais estão presentes no culto e na vida cotidiana dos médiuns, contudo pouco se sabe sobre a compreensão nativa a seu respeito. Mediante um estudo de caso etnográfico, investigou-se a concepção de música umbandista, numa perspectiva etnopsicológica. Os participantes foram dez médiuns e seis espíritos, uma vez que são considerados pelo campo sujeitos interlocutores com personalidade

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própria. As informações foram coletadas e analisadas com base num procedimento etnopsicanalítico que combina entrevistas semiestruturadas e observação participante com uma escuta atenta aos implícitos e às repetições discursivas e discutidos com base numa revisão da literatura. Encontrou-se que os pontos-cantados ajudam o médium a concentrar-se no mundo simbólico umbandista, podendo ser disparadores de sentimentos, sensações e pensamentos, associados aos espíritos que eles descrevem. Os médiuns percussionistas disseram que tocam sob a influência dos espíritos que os instruem a fazer movimentos corporais organizados. Conclui-se que o sujeito da musicalidade umbandista não é entendido como a pessoa que aparentemente a compõe e a executa. O termo música apenas pode ser usado mediante a subordinação do entendimento nativo do emprego ritual da sonoridade a uma concepção etnomusicológica que a inclui. O sentido geral do uso da música na umbanda é propiciar concentração mental e, portanto, entender seu papel é crucial para o desenvolvimento do conhecimento etnopsicológico a respeito do culto.

**Palavras-chave:** Etnopsicologia; umbanda; música.

## ESPÍRITUS COMPOSITORES E INSTRUMENTISTAS: LA MÚSICA EN LA UMBANDA

**RESUMEN.** La *umbanda* es una religión de posesión en que los espíritus son venerados, incorporados y desincorporados en medio a la música, generalmente compuesta por sonido del atabal (instrumento de percusión) y por el canto. Conocidas como puntos-cantados, las canciones rituales están presentes en culto y en el cotidiano de los médiums, todavía poco se sabe sobre la comprensión nativa a su respecto. Mediante un estudio de caso etnográfico, se investigó la concepción de música *umbandista*, en perspectiva etnopsicológica. Los participantes fueron 10 médiums y 6 espíritus, considerados sujetos interlocutores con personalidad propia. Las informaciones fueron recolectadas y analizadas con base en un procedimiento etnopsicoanalítico que combina entrevistas semiestruturadas y observación participante con una escucha atenta a los implícitos y las repeticiones discursivas y discutidos sobre la base de una revisión de la literatura. Los datos apuntan que los puntos-cantados ayudan al médium a concentrarse en el mundo simbólico *umbandista*, pudiendo ser disparadores de sentimientos, sensaciones y pensamientos, asociados a espíritus que ellos describen. Los médiums percussionistas dijeron que tocan bajo la influencia de los espíritus que los instruyen a hacer movimientos corporales organizados. Se concluye que el sujeto de la musicalidad *umbandista* es entendido como la persona que aparentemente la compone y la ejecuta. El término música sólo puede ser usado mediante la subordinación del entendimiento nativo del empleo ritual de la sonoridad a una concepción etnomusicológica que la incluye. El sentido general del uso de la música en el *umbanda* es propiciar concentración mental y por lo tanto entender su papel es crucial para el desarrollo del conocimiento etnopsicológico acerca del culto.

**Palabras clave:** Etnopsicología; *umbanda*; música.

## Introduction

Umbanda is a religion of possession in which spirits are embodied by mediums, with the aim of helping their practitioners. Continuing with an indication initially formulated by Firth (1967), Crapanzano (1977) understands possession as a collectively shared language, which enables people who use it to articulate, communicate, and elaborate experiences and situations of everyday life. In this cult of possession, as is not uncommon in this type of religious practice (Rouget, 1985), this language is accompanied by corporal and musical practices present from the beginning to the end of the ceremonies, systematizing and organizing them.

In Umbanda, music is not a mere ritual ornament, it is full of important and fundamental meanings for the practitioners of this religion. But what are we calling music? There are numerous discussions in the field of musicology, more specifically ethnomusicology, which according to Araújo, Paz & Cambria (2008) is the study of music in the culture in which it is inserted. The complexity of the subject lies in the fact that each individual or social group has different ways of making sense of what they or others regard as music (Blacking, 2007).

For Nettl (1983), there are as many concepts of music as societies. Each cultural group has its own definitions of what music is and even within the same culture, what is considered music for one person may not be for another. According to the same author, many societies do not have the word music in their language, which makes an overall definition even more complex.

According to Merriam (1964), music is an exclusively human phenomenon, made by people to other people, so it only exists in terms of social interaction. For him, music cannot be defined as sound only, since it involves human behavior, and its particular organization involves an agreement between people who decide what music can and cannot be.

Seeger (2008) agrees with Merriam, and for him a definition of music must include sounds and human beings. For Blacking (1973), music is a set of sounds organized by man. Seeger (2008) says that music is a form of communication, such as language and dance for example, however, it presents a particularity, because different communities will have their own ideas of what kind of sound is considered music.

Another author who thinks in this way is Oliveira Pinto (2001), when saying that music is rarely limited to a sound organization over a certain period of time. It is understood beyond its aesthetic characteristics, seen mainly as a form of communication, which in a manner similar to any type of language has its own codes. He also says that music is universal, it is present in all the societies of the world, through it occurs the manifestation of beliefs and identities and at the same time it is singular, because when presented outside its cultural context, it makes its understanding difficult.

Blacking (2007, p. 205) also agrees with the above definitions, saying that “[...] the essence of musical doing and understanding is the human acts of making sense of musical symbols through composition, performance and listening [...]”, in which the meanings of the musical signs are culturally limited. And the author goes on to say that music is a human capacity, a basic mode of thinking, “[...] an innate specific background of cognitive and sensory capabilities [...]” that individuals are inclined to use in their communication and in the production of sense of the environment.

A general definition is found in Seeger (1977), who says that music can be anything proposed or accepted as music. Despite the difficulty of delimiting the term ‘music’, there is no impediment to conducting ethnomusicological research in a structured way, since there

is no need for a crystallized definition, since according to Nettl (1983), the focus of study of ethnomusicology are culture-specific definitions of what music is.

In parallel with the proposal of ethnomusicology, the proposal of ethnopsychology, field which includes this study, is also to find specific concepts and definitions of each culture about the cultural meanings given to their experiences, but not restricted to music and rather seeking understand the worldview of the native within its own terms (Lutz, 1985).

For Rouget (1985), in the context of trance, the word music is used to mean any organized sound linked to this phenomenon, and cannot be reduced to language. Music is seen as a practice, exhibiting a wide variety of aspects, from discrete sound to deafening triggering of a group of drums.

It is a fact that the word music is not used in umbanda, and is commonly referred to as sung point, defined by Carvalho (1997, p. 96) as “[...] little songs, loaded with ritual value, at the moment they were generated in the specific context of a religious tradition, defined in generic terms as Afro-Brazilian cults”. Little is known about the role of the songs sung in the cult, which for the purpose of this study and following a tradition of literature will be considered as music in umbanda.

Some authors discuss this. Queiroz (2015), for example, says that ritual music is a way of establishing contact between the human and the supernatural, especially at the moment of embodiment and is also used to make prayers, for purification, to express faith, being fundamental in religion. Conceição da Silva (2016) also brings the musicality as a contact with the sacred and says that the songs are full of senses and meanings of the cult, being an important element for the formation of the umbandist identity. Pereira (2012) also says that the sung points are part of the constitution of the identity of the religious and shows that these songs are a way for the spirits to teach and advice, exemplified by the speech of a medium who upon receiving a link from the daughter saying that she had cancer, reported that she felt at that moment that her *preta velha* (umbanda type of spirit, conceived as a deceased enslaved elderly black woman) was reciting to her a song that told her to hope and that she would help the daughter through her *mandinga* (spell) to overcome the disease. Silva Júnior (2013) and Godoy (2012) say that the spirits come to the temple through music that describes and announces them. Bairrão (2012) says that umbandist music accurately encodes a wide variety of spiritual nuances, invoking and indicating their actions and states that some mediums say that the lyrics are more important to the trance and others that the rhythm of the song is the crucial. The study by Graminha and Bairrão (2009) exemplifies it, when it is said that if a sung point brings words like balance and waves, it is associated with sailors (one of the classes of spirits). The article by Nascimento, Souza and Trindade (2001) characterizes another class of spirits, Eshu and pombas-giras (female Eshus), through their sung points, showing that words like ritual offering, magic, street, night, cemetery are associated with them. Gomes (2013), Macedo (2015) and Nascimento (2017) also use sung points as a data source to investigate Umbandist ritual senses.

According to Bairrão (2012), in a first moment the mediums have sensations, feelings and thoughts related to the spirit guide to which the music refers, indicating the presence of the sacred. As the concentration increases, these effects intensify and are manifested bodily. For the same author, the symbolic world of the spirits worshiped in umbanda refers mainly to natural scenarios that are described in the sung points, which operate as metaphors of the sacred. The sea, the rivers, the wind, the concrete forests are like metonymies of the sacred, because they are the visible part of the symbolic world of the spirits. The role of the ritual songs in the temple would be to bring these natural scenes to the imagination of the medium, contributing to their concentration.

In general terms, it is undeniable that music occupies a very important place in the language of Umbandist possession, particularly providing a corporal and dramatic articulation and interpretation of its symbolism (Barbosa & Bairrão, 2008), but the form and importance of this process in the course of ritual and especially the native understanding of its relevance are still poorly understood (Dias & Bairrão, 2013).

As the use of sung points accompanied by claps or drums and punctuating ritual performances is practically universal in umbanda, little knowledge about their native uses and senses compromises a better understanding of the cult, including in regard to its psychological reach and social relevance.

This article aims to contribute to fill this gap. The goal of this study is to investigate what music in umbanda is for umbandists by means of their ritual use in the form of sung points, seeking to understand what such an understanding says about its psychological ethnotheory.

## Method

### Theoretical methodological design

This is a qualitative research using the ethnographic case study method. It was carried out in an umbanda temple, located in the city of Sertãozinho, interior of São Paulo.

This temple was chosen because it is one of the oldest in the region, widely recognized among its peers for the quality of its musical performances and for the traditionality of its Umbandist practice.

### Participants

The research participants were the priest and priestess of the umbanda temple and eight other mediums, five of whom have the main function of incorporating spirits to give the pass (bless) and three to play atabaque (percussion instrument), this function is called drum player or percussionist. In addition to these, six spirits incorporated by the mediums were also interviewed, since they are considered by the field as interlocutor subjects with their own personality, differing from the embodied individual. The spirits interviewed were those present at the public ceremonies, on Wednesdays, guides known as *pretos velhos* (spirits of enslaved elderly Africans or descendants), and on Fridays, the so-called state of Bahia people spirits. The names of the mediums interviewed were replaced by the initial letter of their names in order to preserve their identification.

The criterion of selection of participants was neither random nor a priori. Participants included were those nominated by the leaders of the temple to the extent and in the time in which the research progress freely associated them with the production of their testimonies. That is, it was not based on a random sample, but the research time was allowed to elicit the production and maturation of the individual statements.

The guarantee of this procedure is given by the quality and density of the umbanda practiced, which allows us, to use a musical metaphor, to understand each of these testimonies as an instrument of an orchestra that in its entirety is composed in a collective statement.

Given the nature of the research, which requires exemplarity and verticality, it was decided to study a collective case of a single umbanda house. It was intended to listen to

the umbandist subject in the quality of irreducible to one, some or many empirical individuals, understanding that these, insofar as they are representative of the cult, are crossed by the enunciation of the cult in first person, being this the real and fundamental collaborator (Bairrão, 2003).

### **Data collection procedure**

Regarding the groups of participants involved (percussionists, mediums and spirits), semi-structured interviews were applied for data collection, which were recorded and transcribed. The theme has always been the use of sung points, what they serve, in what context and how they are experienced by worship participants. The categories of analysis were established by listening to the implicit elements in the construction of the participants' reasoning and in dialogue with them (Bairrão, 2015). Often the answers came in the form of examples, and the elaboration effort of the participants was visible, and they realized aspects of their experience that they had often not stopped to think about. Audio recordings of ritual songs and their transcriptions were also made, as well as participant observation, notes in the field book and informal conversations.

When talking about umbanda, it is important to emphasize that it is not restricted to religious ceremonies only, being present in the daily life of its practitioners when, for example, they take baths with herbs and practice charity. With ritual sounds the same happens, they are in festive gatherings, they are used in conjunction with the burning of herbs for smoking the houses or the workplace and are thought or sung when the mediums feel they need guidance from their guides.

In the ritual, the music stands out even more, since it has a marked presence from the beginning to the end of the public and private ceremonies. It is sung to open the works and greet the orishas and spirit guides, to smoke the umbanda temple, precedes all the moments and embodiment and disembodiment and finalizes the meetings. It demarcates when a stage begins and ends by organizing the ritual structure.

### **Data analysis procedure**

The data analysis procedure was based on the ethnopschoanalytic approach (Godoy & Bairrão, 2014), which requires a position of estrangement from the researcher in relation to what he/she hears, thinks, feels and observes when in contact with another culture. According to Bairrão (2017), it is essential that the ethnopsychologist let him/herself be led by the field to understand the cultural meanings attributed to symbols, words, gestures, songs, in general, to what is repeated, otherwise the risk of projecting the data with preconceptions of the researcher.

Thus, after a look of estrangement and alterity in relation to the data, it was sought to understand them through the repetitions in the discourse, enabling the most consistent opinions of the group to be drawn. This arduous and artisanal work, in a careful and participatory interaction, allowed the mapping of native understandings about music, giving voice to an Umbanda ethno-theory. Finally, these data were analyzed and discussed based on a review of the literature on umbanda and ethnomusicology.

## Ethical considerations

The usual and pertinent ethical care was taken in researches with Afro-Brazilian cults and in the field of ethnopsychology. The interviews were recorded after due clarification on the research and by signing an Informed Consent Form, once the research proposal was approved by a Research Ethics Committee.

## Results and discussion

### The place of music in the life of Umbandist mediums

The place of music in the life of mediums is analyzed with focus on the processes experienced by them when they sing, think, or hear a sung point. For organizational purposes, such experiences are divided between those that occurred inside and those that occurred outside the temple.

### The place of umbanda music in experiences outside the ritual

The sung points are very present in the life of the mediums outside the temple. Many people say that they sing or think of sung points to pray for someone instead of a prayer, when they feel the need for guidance, to smoke or purify their own home or place of work, and even for the simple pleasure of singing, playing and listening.

For example, V. says that sings sung points when he is happy or when he is in need, and E. says that he sings when something in his life is going wrong or when he is going through a difficult situation because his day gets better. A very interesting fact brought by E. was that the sung points arise in his mind spontaneously, without him having thought. He says that commonly when he is going through a difficult time he sings, but it is not a sung point he has chosen, it is a point that simply pops up in his head, as a ready message, he understands that point is a warning advice.

Therefore, the sung points outside the umbanda temple are interpreted as a message from the spirit guide, suggesting which way to go, or that such a situation is dangerous. This corroborates with Pereira (2012), who understands the sung points as teachings or advice for mediums. Each ritual music will bring a message related to the spirit it describes. One point of Oshosi's indian spirits might be intuiting the medium to be more serious, to pay more attention to certain situations, to be more rigid. A point of the exú spirit can alert the medium about a bad situation, trying to tell him to be smarter, more suspicious. This confirms Bairrão (2012), who claim that ritual songs encode precisely numerous classes of spirits, calling them to ritual and indicating their actions.

Another use of the sung points outside the umbanda temple is to clean the environment and the medium itself. The cleansing of the environment is a removal or elimination of 'bad' spirits (commonly referred to as obsessive spirits, they are spirits that are trapped on Earth because they often have addictions such as alcoholism, smoking, or unfinished business, having feelings of anger, hurt, and revenge, using the mediums to satisfy their needs) of the place. Personal purification, however, is understood as a transformation of feelings, sensations and thoughts, sad, negative, depreciated to others more positive like tranquility, motivation, love and animation. S. and U. say that they sing to smoke their houses regularly (cleaning the environment) and when singing feel more concentrated in the task they are doing and more connected with their guides, this

connection with the sacred is what allows the cleaning of the medium, for they say that they are not alone, which creates tranquility and a sense of welcome and protection.

## Public rituals and music

Following are some statements of the mediums and spirits interviewed about the use and understanding of music in Umbanda:

[...] the music sends you to the sayings of the point, it brings you the energy, it's as if you have called someone and that someone would listen to you through you call him by name. As not every guide speaks his name to the medium and not every guide and not every medium knows the name of the guide, at the time you want, for example, Indian spirit what you will call you pull the point that talks about Ogun and this is referred to that, that the guides come and that you incorporate the spirits from the phalange of Ogun [...] (M.).

In the same vein, a *preto velho* said that each song helps in embodying the specific entity it refers to. A state of Bahia people spiritstated that the music serves to call the guides to work, that it brings joy and also helps the spirits to approach their horses (mediums). E. reports that music attracts spirit guides, because when one sings, the mediums' energy equals that of the spirits they will embody. In turn, another *preto velho* said that with each beat of the atabaque the guides are getting closer to the mediums. These statements are in line with the researches of Silva Júnior (2013) and Godoy (2012) who say that the sung points describe the spirits and announce their arrival in the umbanda temple.

R., S., T. and V. say that ritual music assists the process of concentration or focus:

[...] the main instrument there for incorporation is atabaque, because the sound of the atabaque turns off any other sound ... that can disperse the person. If she is playing atabaque, the person forgets what is happening out there ... when we surrender to the atabaque and close our eyes there and listen to the music the embodiment is much faster (R.).

Music facilitates the trance process, it's kind of hypnotic, if you close your eyes when it's up there in the front [...] Friday I had an incredible experience with the atabaque. I let it flow, I closed my eyes and let it flow I got out of the body. It got into my head and I just heard it. It had a point being sung, there were people on the consultant, but it came into my head in a way that was me and the atabaque, it was me and the atabaque. And that is as if it were a mantra, something that takes you on another wave, it's a sound wave and it allows you this unfolding, that exit that gives to trance. I had to recover myself, to have me policed, because I do not know where I was going to. I was very off with the sound of the atabaque [...] the atabaque specifically for me is what allows this phase of the trance, the noise of it continued, the rhythmic beat, you are entering a process of disconnection, it helps you to turn off. When you start singing you concentrate in that song, at that point, in that atabaque sound. Everything that is outside, that could get in the way, you forget. I think it's a type, not a type, I'm absolutely sure it's a means of concentration. Then you start disconnecting, the atabaque is the first thing they hit at the beginning of the work, they begin to pull the lines, begin the songs and there goes tuning the medium to that process, it is where it disconnects you from the outside (S.).

I miss the atabaque if it is sung without it. The beat for me is very important. I concentrate better only with the atabaque in the background than with the song. The song directs our mind to where we have to go, for whom has to come, the song is the focus. The atabaque is synchrony, elevation, it elevates me (T.).

V. says that the embodiment of spirits occurs along with the ritual songs, but that the sound of the atabaque is very important, having the role of accelerating the embodiment. He says that the guide's call with the atabaque is stronger than if there is only the song.



Another spirit of the phalange of state of Bahia people spirit says that music integrates the medium with the guide that he will embody by establishing a harmony between them.

The data bring concentration or focus as a very important process for an approach of the medium with the sacred. The Umbanda priestess always said 'firm your head', that is, concentrate, leave the parallel thoughts aside. The mediums report that they sometimes arrive at the temple worried, thinking about some external event that does not have connection with the ritual, feeling difficulty of concentration, however one of the effects of the ritual music is precisely to help them to come in contact with the umbandist symbolic world. Singing specifically helps the medium to focus on the spirit he will embody, giving descriptions about him, while the role of the atabaque is to prevent outside sounds from interfering with the process, since the height of the beat prevents the person from hearing parallel conversations or sounds that may distract him/her. In this sense, there is no way to solve the dilemma presented by Bairrão (2012): is the song or rhythm of music more important for incorporation? Both have complementary functions and together are more effective than separate.

The medium T. and the medium W. have speeches that help to think what concentration is for the umbandists, T. says: "When you hear a bass sound the sensation I have is to vibrate at the same frequency as a beat, I have to try to match myself to that frequency, basically get into the song".

W. describes the focusing process as follows:

Many times I have to hold on to not embody, because the energy is very high, I'm playing there and depending on the line that pulls, it's the lines that have more affinity with my matter, I have to hold it, then I start to dance, I get carried away by the wills of my guides and orixás, I start to play, I dance. I do not usually look at the atabaque, sometimes I stand there looking sort of hallucinating, seeing woods, imagining woods, I totally lose myself out of my own cycle.

It can be said that the process of concentration is not only mental but also corporeal. The mediums try to focus on the spirit they will embody through dances, a posture and specific gestures that resemble the symbolism of the guide, using the body also to focus. Mental and bodily concentration are in the same continuum, the greater the focus of the medium, the more he/she feels the presence of the spirit, which in a certain moment manifests itself in his/her body.

When the medium is sufficiently focused, he/she begins to feel the presence (fluids, energy) of the spirit as words are emitted which symbolize it in the sung points, through feelings, bodily sensations and thoughts. For example, when singing ritual songs of water Orishas one can feel welcome, corporal lightness and much calm; in turn, in the case of point of Ogum, one can feel energy to fight for a goal, strength, claw, stiffness.

In general, singing about waterfalls and rivers is to be in the presence of Oxum; about woods and arrows, in the presence of Oxossi; when speaking of quarries and justice, Xangô; about winning demands, war, sword, Ogum; on salt water and maternity, Iemanjá; in turn, the words peace, dove, mountains, make present Oxalá; storms and winds, Iansã.

Another question brought up in the speech of W. was that playing becomes easier when he identifies more with the spirit that music refers to, for he feels stronger the presence of the guide. Other mediums also commented that embodiment is greatly facilitated when they identify with the symbolic world surrounding the spirit. It is concluded that the more the symbolic world of the spirit comes close to the identity of the medium, the easier it is to embody it, since some of its characteristics are already part of who the medium is.

A *preto velho* said that he is embodied with the drum (atabaque) or without the drum, but that the sound helps the mediums and the consultant to 'concentrate' the mind. Another

*preto velho*, called Negro Velho de Aruanda, said that “[...] music is the force that causes man’s heart to rise to find the other world, it is the link that binds man’s strength to divine strength, without music work would be fulfilled, but hard”. In the same sense, U. says that the sung-point “[...] is a source of total connection between the medium and the guide”. Thus, it is understood that music assists the mediums to concentrate and that without it, it’s possible to have a contact with the sacred, yet with great difficulty and effort. This is in line with the studies of Conceição da Silva (2016), Godoy (2012), Queiroz (2015) and Silva Júnior (2013), who have said that music is a call for guides, establishing contact between human and divine, but this research details how music establishes such contact, which is through concentration, an aspect that had not been approached by these authors.

Speech of *preto velho* brings music as a focus not only to mediums, but also to the consultant. The community understands that ritual consists of a mediumistic chain, that is, a set of mediums focused on the same task. If one distracts, one runs the risk of weakening the current, distracting other mediums. The same thought applies to the people of the consultant, the more concentrated and in tune with the symbolism of the spirits they are, the stronger the cult.

To talk about his feelings about sung points and embodiment, E. makes an analogy of music with natural settings. In his words:

[...] I was already in the waterfall, because the energy, you are with nature on your side, you are inserted in nature, you understood, you are in their environment, then the energy is much greater, in these cases, the song has, but it does not exercise as much influence as if you were in nature, let’s say so, you understood, because obvious, you are in the force of nature, you have nothing to say.

It is interpreted that natural scenarios are like metonymies of the spirits, are the visible part of them and music is like a metaphor that tries to represent these natural scenarios (symbolism of the spirit), which makes possible the manifestation of the sacred in the temple. Yet, even in the waterfall, in the sea, in the woods, in the mountains, in the midst of the concrete symbolic world concerning orixás, music has its purpose, which is to make a connection between the medium and the environment, through concentration, enabling the medium to be able to feel and think like the spirit.

The moment of completion of the embodiment of the guide that bless is very delicate, because for the community spirits that were influencing others in a negative way are circulating in the temple, so it is necessary that the medium is focused at the moment of disembodiment, otherwise he can be incorporated by one of these ‘bad’ spirits. Thus, the sungpoint prepares them for disembodiment, aiding the concentration on the symbolism of the guide that is in their bodies.

In addition to the embodiment and disembodiment, in the ritual, the sung points have the purpose of purifying or cleaning the environment and the bodies of the mediums. At the beginning in the ritual are sung points for Oshala, Oshun, Oshosi, Ogun, Oya, Yemaja, Shango and Eshus. In addition to having the effect of arousing good and motivating sensations, feelings and thoughts in the mediums, these songs also put spirits that hold negative energy away from the temple, doing a cleaning of the environment. W. brings a speech that exemplifies the purification made through ritual sounds: “[...] when I am in the atabaque, I simply go out and often when negative thoughts come or something I did in the day, I mentalize in the woods and I finish forgetting [...]” Some people of the consultant also arrive at the temple under the influence of obsessive spirits, but they can get rid of them if at the moment in which they are sung the points of cleaning to be able to concentrate and to connect with the symbolism of the spirits that the music describes.

When many people arrive at the temple thinking negatively and feeling sadness, hurt, anger, it is necessary to sing specific songs for purification. M. describes these days as follows: "The day you realize that the center is with negative, heavy energy, you realize that even the atabaque is uncontrolled in the hand of the atabaque players and that the song does not come out with that soft sound, always someone is out of tune[...]". In this way, songs can be sung for Eres (children) who bring joy, for the cowboy spirits, who cleanse any spirit that may be causing suffering in someone, sailors who bring the lull, reception and strength that comes from the waters, etc.

In agreement with the studies of Bairrão (2012), Graminha and Bairrão (2009), Gomes (2013), Nascimento, Souza and Trindade (2001), Nascimento (2017) and Macedo (2015), it was observed that the ritual sounds are wrapped with cultural meanings that identify the spirit they describe, being rich sources of data to study the umbandist symbolic world.

Nevertheless, the statements obtained were crossed by a tension between the use or not use or more precisely the need or not to resort to the sung points for ritual concentration effect. For some mediums and in some circumstances, this facilitates concentration and for others or at times it seems to introduce unnecessary mediation. To this divergence may not be strange a certain tension that crosses the cult between a more African pole in the cult, that values the sensoriality and the dramatization, and another one closer to a Kardecist horizon, that privileges the aesthetic simplicity. Also, undeniably, music, as some testimonials have a role in harmonizing and unifying the concentration of the collective at every moment of the rite and their absence could be associated with moments of isolated practice. But even in these, as seen in the results, the memory or evocation of a song can be understood as a form of harmony or a vehicle of communication with a spirit and of receiving some spiritual message. It was not possible in the context of this study to clarify this question exhaustively, but enough was obtained to indicate the need for future studies aimed at clarifying these nuances.

What is certain is that it is no use for the medium to be in the midst of the effect of the images and mentions of natural scenes evoked by the songs of the spirits if he has no concentration. Music always aims to connect through the mind and body the medium and its senses with meaning in the worship of those.

The data corroborate Oliveira Pinto (2001), Blacking (2007) and Seeger (2008) when they say that music is a form of communication that has its own codes, and the meanings of musical signs are culturally limited. In general terms, it is difficult to define exactly what music communicates in umbanda, because the interpretation of the message that it passes is an individual process. Each medium will understand a sung point according to what makes sense to him, but such an interpretation is limited to the logic of a culture language learned collectively.

### **Musician, master and composer spirits in umbanda**

When asked R., who is Ogã (medium responsible for playing the atabaque), if he had any influence when he played, he replied:

I have, I have, if I say that it is I who am doing everything there, that I can get into the rhythm alone, it is a lie, something helps me there so I do not make a mistake, to be patient, to be calm. Because I am very complicated, nervous, so I have to learn to control myself a little more and put in the head that no one is equal to anyone, I am a person who want the right things in there, so if I do it right I want the person to do it, that's my mistake, the person does not sing and it annoys a lot, so I mean, in that part

I'm annoyed I'm probably going to get out of the rhythm there because I get very worried about others and sometimes I forget about it, then some entity helps me not to get out of the rhythm, to keep playing, to forget at the moment there, then yes, the time that I end up playing, that thought comes back. Why do not they sing? But at the moment that I'm playing I forget the world, me and the atabaque are there and the person who is by my side.

V. says that he had never played atabaque in his life until he started attending the temple, never trained how to play the instrument and cannot play outside the ritual. He says that he tried to sing and play outside the temple, but that he cannot play. He even says that every time he gets to the temple he feels an anxiety and thinks: will I be able to play it? But in the temple he always succeeds and says that he does a good job, which is as if something intuited him to make the right moves in that environment.

W. says:

[...] when I'm there I feel good, I concentrate on the atabaque, the songs, the fluids that come in the moment, so every time I get there like all other mediums we lift our thoughts to God and forget everything that happens in our daily lives, our personal, family problems [...] When I start to play the atabaque, the moment I concentrate my thoughts on Ogã of the atabaque, I let the atabaque take me, because in fact it is not you just to beat and think that you dominate the atabaque, because in fact it is the opposite, you have to see if atabaque accepts you to see what that energy is, you feel the energy, because the work as a whole depends, in my way of thinking, depends on fluids of the atabaque, the way you will play the atabaque, then sometimes you arrive there and it seems that the work is not cool, it seems that this is, is that, but everything has a concentration, you have to arrive in advance in the temple, forget everything, mentalize in your guides, your orixás, ask for protection, ask for the license to be doing it, as everyone does in the set, but you have to be an individualist there at that moment, talk with your guides, with your orixás, myself, how I'm going to play the atabaque I ask that the Ogã of the atabaque guide me, I start to play there and I lose myself, I leave outside, something that I cannot find the words because I really wander away in what I do, because in fact I tell my friends it's not me, I'm just an instrument used for this and the atabaque, the songs if you do not have a concentration, if you do not concentrate your thoughts and have concentration on what is doing the whole work itself will not flow.

All these statements say that the true musicians of the ritual are the spirits, because they are the ones who know how to play. The body of the medium is an instrument controlled by the spirits. The guides dictate the movements, show how the beat is made. However, in order to attain such a level of spiritual influence, much preparation is required, as do the mediums of embodiment, the Ogãs also need concentration.

The words of W. suggest that the atabaque must accept the medium to perform the playing function. R. says that the umbanda priest “[...] explained that it is not the people who choose to play atabaque, it is the atabaque who chooses us, so it is not anyone who plays the atabaque [...]”. And U. says that she gets nervous when she tries to play the atabaque, because she cannot, she feels she is invading a space that is not hers. That is, the spirits choose who the musicians will be, it is necessary to have a specific mediumship to perform such a function.

Finally, the data indicate that the spirits are the composers of many sung points, because the first songs sung in the temple were dreamed by the deceased umbanda priestess, who wrote them down and later sang them in the temple. For the community it was the spirits who recited such songs to the priestess of the ritual, being the composers of these sung points. This is in line with the research data of Pereira (2012), which brought the example of a medium who said that the spirit of a *preta velha* created a sung point to comfort the woman who had just discovered that the daughter had cancer.

In this sense, the conception of ethnomusicological music that according to Blacking (1973) is defined as a set of sounds organized by men, in accordance with Merriam (1964),

it is an exclusively human phenomenon and for Seeger (2008) a definition of music must include sounds and human beings, does not embrace the umbandist conception of music.

There was in fact a persistence and repetition of the statements in the direction to affirm that the music is produced and driven by an alterity alien to its authorship and to an execution based on a competence of the human individuality, which only participates as the mediator between that instance alien to individual consciences and the public spectacle and ritual sense.

## Final considerations

This study sought to contribute to an understanding of the conception of music in umbanda, according to the umbandists. Firstly, it should be noted that the word music is not used in religion, when asked both spirits and mediums about music, the words used to answer the questions were *sung point*, *toque*, *atabaque* and *batuque*, all this refers at the same time to the cults, to the spiritual sessions, but also to the percussion that accompanies them. The second is a metonymy of the first.

In studying the meanings and uses of music in umbanda, inevitably, the life and behavior of the people and other spirit agents present in the cult are also at stake, so the study of the theme contributed to the deepening of ethnopsychological knowledge about Afro-Brazilian cult communities contributing to this field of psychological knowledge. However, there is still much to be discovered and investigated in this respect, and studies are required to deepen this research and it is desirable that other methodological models can be tested.

In this respect, one limitation of the present study is the fact that it has privileged a verbal approach of the phenomenon in question, probably useful but insufficient to access the peculiarly umbandist experience and properly sensory and artistic of the *sung point*. To overcome this barrier is a challenge for the ethnopsychological research with Afro-Brazilian cults that is established in line with the need to take seriously African epistemologies that shift the cognition of abstract thought to aesthetic performance, the same ones that base the practice of possession and which probably in the form of a kind of collective and unconscious cultural memory are still present in umbanda.

It has been seen that music is a ubiquitous component in the language of umbandist possession, its main function being concentration, which in the case of umbanda is both corporeal and mental. *Sung points*, gestures, body posture and dance help the mediums to focus on the symbolic world of the spirit they describe and the sound of the *atabaque* prevents them from paying attention to other sounds they can disperse. Thus, understanding the music in umbanda presupposes a better understanding of what mental concentration means, and this articulation justifies and shows the relevance of an ethnopsychological approach to music for its study in the umbanda context.

Further, umbandist ethnotheory, literally, does not endorse the conception of music presented in the ethnomusicological literature, which understands it as an exclusively human phenomenon. In umbanda, spirits are interpreted as the true musicians and composers of ritual sounds.

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