Apocalyptica
No 2 / 2024
DOI: 10.17885/heiup.apoc.2024.2.25301

Daniela Beny Polito Moraes
Translated by Bruna Della Torre[1]

Ogum in a Terreiro de Umbanda: Trance Dance as a Pathway for the Transmission of Memory and Knowledge

Abstract: This article proposes to examine the dance of Ogum in trance during *Umbanda* (an Afro-Brazilian religion) rituals as a means of transmitting ancestral memory and knowledge through the body. I contend that, through the dance of an *orixá*, one may access elements constitutive of African mythology which, during the processes of enslavement and diaspora, underwent a systematic epistemic erasure—an erasure that continues to reinforce both racism and religious racism in Brazil.

This article constitutes a development of the doctoral thesis "Ogunhiê!—The Corporeality and Poetics of Ogum in the Terreiro de Umbanda Aldeia dos Orixás in Approximations and Divergences with the Work of the Actor," defended in 2023 within the Graduate Programme in Performing Arts at the Federal University of Bahia (Brazil)—PPGAC/UFBA. Said thesis explored the dance of Ogum in trance within *Umbanda* rituals as a vehicle for the transmission of ancestral memory and knowledge, mediated through the drumming body that sings, dances, and narrates its stories; thereby, broadening our understanding of what constitutes an ancestral narrative. I argue that, through the dance of an *orixá*, it becomes possible to access elements of African mythology which, throughout the processes of enslavement and diaspora, have been subject to epistemic erasure—an erasure that continues to perpetuate both racism and religious racism in my country. Moreover, I locate this tradition within an Afro-Amerindian context, insofar as one of the defining features of colonial violence in Brazil lies in the forced or strategic convergence of cultures—whether as a

1 All English language translations of foreign language texts and quotations were undertaken by the translator.
2 Typically reserved for initiates of the *terreiro*, this is a moment in which many mediums are still becoming familiar with the presence of their spiritual entities and learning to recognise their personal processes for reaching the trance state.

mechanism of domination or as a strategy of survival for enslaved peoples of both African and Indigenous origin. In this article, I engage in dialogue with Brazilian scholars such as Zeca Ligiéro, Leda Maria Martins, Larissa Michele Lara, Denise Zenicola, and Muniz Sodré, all of whom reflect upon corporality from the perspective of the body as crossroads [*encruzilhada*], as it is understood within the shared Afro-religious traditions of Brazil. I invite the reader to approach the traditions and liturgy of *Umbanda*, so that we might come to understand how *terreiros* in Brazil, beyond being sacralised spaces, also constitute sites of resistance and struggle against the enduring structures of coloniality.

While this article is a scholarly work of academia, it nonetheless resonates with other fields of knowledge. I position myself here as someone who inhabits various social roles within the scope of this investigation, and I will thus navigate these positionalities throughout my research. I have worked as a theatre teacher since 2012, I have been an actress for over fifteen years, and I have served as a medium in the Terreiro de Umbanda Aldeia dos Orixás since 2011, alongside my academic training. It is within this *terreiro* that the *giras de desenvolvimento*[2] under investigation take place. At the time of writing, I mark thirteen years since my initiation as a *filha de santo*.

Keywords: Afro-Amerindian performance studies, *Umbanda*, *Ogum*, ancestral narratives, corporality.

The *Terreiro de Umbanda Aldeia Dos Orixás*

Authors such as Ligiéro and Dandara (1998), as well as José Jorge Morais Zacharias (1998), present *Umbanda* as an ecumenical and universalist religion, for it can bring together, within a single ritual framework, traditions derived from *Candomblé* with elements of Popular Catholicism, Kardecist Spiritism,[3] Indigenous *Pajelança*[4] practices, and Eastern Esotericism.[5]

Proceeding from the idea that *Umbanda* emerges from the convergence of these five philosophical and religious referents, part of the present inquiry into the uses of the body in *Umbanda* shall be grounded in *Nagô* philosophy, while also establishing certain convergences with the Bantu tradition: the two principal ethnic groups brought to Brazil, which most forcefully imprint their traits upon Afro-Brazilian religions.

According to the *pai-de-santo*[6] himself, the *Babá* Marco Antonio de Campos, the *Umbanda* practised at the Aldeia dos Orixás is referred to as *Umbanda Branca* ("White Umbanda"), distinct from the form of *Umbanda*

3 Reincarnationist doctrine formulated by Allan Kardec (pseudonym of Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, French writer, 1804–1869), which seeks to explain, from a Christian perspective, the cyclical movement whereby a spirit returns to material existence after the death of its previous body, the intermediate period in which it remains disembodied, and the moral and intellectual progression or regression experienced throughout this process.

4 *Pajelança* refers to a set of practices, rituals, and representations of nature and the body, typical of Amazonian populations, primarily carried out by *pajés* (shamans) for the healing of illnesses and afflictions.

5 Eastern Esotericism refers to a broad range of spiritual, philosophical, and mystical traditions originating in the East, particularly from India, China, Japan, and other Asian regions. These traditions often draw on ancient teachings, spiritual practices, and philosophies aimed at understanding the ultimate nature of reality, the purpose of human existence, and spiritual development.

6 Pai de santo (or Babalorixá) is the Umbanda priest responsible for the spiritual care of initiates in the terreiro.

developed in the city of Maceió, which many designate as *Umbanda Traçada* or *Umbanda Nagô* which is a reference to the strong Yoruba influence in its religious procedures. Another salient difference concerns what may be rendered public within our religious practices, since we do not hold public festivities.

Despite the absence of a unified philosophy in *Umbanda*, when addressing the use of the body within this religious context, I find ample resonance with both *Nagô* and Bantu philosophical traditions, particularly in their conception of the body as the principal mediator of communication and of teaching–learning processes. This absence of public *gira* sessions akin to the *Xirês* of *Candomblé* does not imply an absence of spirit manifestation during trance states; rather, it is in procedures directed toward the development of the *médiuns girantes* (spinning mediums) that entities carry out their spiritual and material tasks. These include attending to those who seek the house in order to consult with the guides and entities who manifest therein.

The Presence of *Ogum* In the Researcher's Action

Amongst the many faces and versions of the ancestral narratives of the *orixá* and/or *caboclo Ogum*, the majority describe *Ogum* as a solitary hero who, although in close proximity to his brothers *Exu*[7] and *Oxóssi*[8] and to his mother *Iemanjá*,[9] finds, in the solitude of his forge, peace, silence, and strength. In numerous *itans*,[10] *zuelas*,[11] and sacred songs (*pontos cantados*) of *Umbanda*, he is portrayed as a kind of hermit who, after imparting to humankind the secrets of agriculture, hunting, fishing, forging, and war, sets off upon the road and wanders alone.

Regarding the psyche of the children of *Ogum*, Mário César Barcellos (2010) asserts that "given the characteristics of this *orixá*, we see that his children are valiant and fearless individuals, ever in pursuit of new objectives, new paths. They are perspicacious, objective, and courageous persons" (16). Furthermore, when dealing specifically with *Ogum Megê*, he enumerates both the positive and negative traits of the children of this particular quality of *Ogum*, pointing out the following characteristics:

> **Positive side** – Those governed by this *orixá* possess unparalleled bravery. Dedicated and courageous, they are generally individuals who strive with great diligence to attain their goals. [...]
> **Negative side** – Voracious, greedy, and overbearing, the children of

7 "For Candomblé theorists, *Exu* is the *trickster*, the bearer of vital energy, the intermediary between the deities and human beings" (Gomes Dos Anjos 2006, 17).
8 A hunter *orixá* who lives in the forests, the younger brother of *Ogum* and *Exu*.
9 "Iemanjá is the lady of the great waters, mother of the gods, of humans and of fish, the one who governs emotional balance and madness[.] [...] She is one of the primordial mothers and appears in many myths concerning the creation of the world" (Prandi 2001, 22).
10 A body of *Yoruba* legends that recount the 'H/histories' of the *Orixás*.
11 Synonym of rhymes.

> *Ogum Xoroquê* do not hesitate to sever the necks of their enemies. They do not forgive faults, not even their own, and go so far as to engage in self-flagellation for a mistake or error committed. They are shrewd in weaving and creating polemics, are oftentimes confused, yet always act in the open. They attack head-on, with a singular charge that invariably yields positive results (for themselves). Hence the self-punishment when they fail. They are harsh and extremely demanding, and their preferred point of attack is the heart. Impetuous and cruel, they bow before no one. They project an appearance of great power and grandeur, even if they do not, in fact, possess it (Barcellos 2010, 17).

Proportionately speaking, I cannot deny that I recognise myself—both in the positive and in the negative aspects—within this description of the psyche of *Ogum*'s children. As part of my process of self-knowledge, I have come to perceive that this life-pulse, which is *Ogum*, when properly directed, enables me to attain my objectives; which, in the case of an academic career, translates into the expansion of my fields of research. I find myself aligned with the archetype of *Ogum* in the desire to learn and to share what has been learned, thus dividing with my "tribe" that which I have seen, experienced, and come to know.

Given that one of the foundations of this investigation is autoethnography, I bring to the fore a perspective of how it may be situated within the field of cultural anthropology and narrative ethnography, while also recognising its apt adaptation to research conducted within the domain of the arts and studies of cultural performances. According to the anthropologist Deborah E. Reed-Danahay (1997):

> Autoethnography stands at the intersection of three genres of writing which are becoming increasingly visible: (1) "native anthropology", in which people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group; (2) "ethnic autobiography", personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups; and (3) "autobiographical ethnography", in which anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing. Anthropologists are increasingly explicit in their exploration of links between their own autobiographies and their ethnographic practices (Okely and Callaway 1992). [...] At the same time, "natives" are increasingly telling their own stories and have become ethnographers of their own cultures. Practitioners of ethnography have become increasingly aware of the politics of representation and of the power relations inherent in traditional ethnographic accounts. (2)

And she further states:

> autoethnography is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography. Autoethnography can be done by either an anthropologist who is doing "home" or "native" ethnography or by a non-anthropologist/ethnographer. It can also be done by an autobiographer who places the story of his or her life within a story of the social context in which it occurs (9).

Amongst these three genres presented by Reed-Danahay, I consider that my research aligns with the mode of autobiographical ethnography; primarily because I understand that, in developing it, I not only insert a perspective grounded in personal experience, but also adopt a political stance in addressing these first-person accounts, thereby enabling me to narrate both my own story and that of my peers.

Ancestrality: How/Where I Recognise Myself

From the perspective of the body as mediator of the teaching–learning process, I bring into the discussion Professor Leda Maria Martins (1997), who points out that:

> The Africans forcibly transplanted to the Americas through the Black Diaspora had their body and their *corpus* deterritorialised. Torn from their familial *domus*, this body—both individual and collective—found itself occupied by the emblems and codes of the European, who seized it as master, inscribing upon it his linguistic, philosophical, religious, cultural codes, his worldview [...] [.] This gaze, sustained by an ethnocentric and Eurocentric vision, disregarded the history, civilisations, and cultures of Africa—cultures predominantly oral and thus unjustly dismissed—despised their rich oral textuality, sought to invalidate their pantheons, cosmologies, theogonies, and imposed as absolute truth a new set of symbolic operators, a foreign and totalising *modus* of thinking, interpreting, organising—a new worldview[.] [...] Alongside our ancestors came their divinities, their singular and diverse worldviews, their linguistic, artistic, ethnic, technical, religious, cultural alterities, their differing modes of social organisation and symbolic construction of reality. Black cultures infused the American territories with their constitutive modes, evidencing the intersections between oral African

> traditions and all other symbolic systems and codes, written and/or oral, with which they came into contact. And it is through these crossroads that Afro-Brazilian identity is also woven—in a vital and mobile process—an identity that may be thought of as fabric and as texture, in which the mnemonic utterances and gestures of African oral archives, through the dynamic process of interaction with the other, are continuously transformed and reactivated in new and differentiated rituals of language and expression, choreographing Black singularity and alterity (Martins 1997, 24–26).

Martins understands that Afro-descendant corporeal practices undergo a process of knowledge transmission that does not depend on written record and is, for that reason, considered oral and non-scriptural. Nonetheless, such practices are imbued with an inscription: a *graphia* impressed upon bodies through knowledge and praxis, as well as through orality; once again, evidencing the holistic sense of the body and the individual who sings/tells/dances/drums.

It is important to emphasise here the use of the term *oralitura* rather than mere *orality*, thereby granting speech a broader meaning and encompassing within it the body and gesture. According to Martins (2020):

> The signifier *oralitura*, as I present it, does not refer invocatively to the repertoire of forms and cultural procedures of the verbal tradition, but rather, significantly, to that which in its performance signals the presence of a residual, stylistic, mnemonic trace—culturally constitutive, inscribed in the *graphia* of the moving body and in vocality. [...] *Oralitura* pertains to the realm of performance, it is its anchor; a *graphia*, a language, whether delineated in the performative script of the word or in the volutes of the body (77).

The notion of *oralitura* brings to mind the terms used within the liturgy of *Umbanda*, where one encounters *pontos cantados* (sung points) and *pontos riscados* (inscribed points). To these I would add yet another category, which I term the *ponto dançado* (danced point); that is, the very choreography danced by the entity in embodiment. Thus, I propose that these three forms of enacting the *pontos*—sung, inscribed, and danced—constitute the foundational *oralitura* of the Terreiro de Umbanda Aldeia dos Orixás.

The Body and Trance as A Site of Research

Drawing upon the understanding of body and performance as proposed by Martins and Ligiéro, and also from Richard Schechner's Performance Theory—which shall be addressed further below—I emphasise that the *Nagô* worldview conceives of the body as a microcosm. According to Dr Monique Augras (2008):

> The human body is itself a microcosm. The feet are supported by the concrete, by the clay from which one came, and to which one shall return—the very earth trodden by one's ancestors and to which they have returned. The right foot corresponds to the inheritance of the male ancestors, and the left foot to that of the female. The hands, right and left, act upon the world and transform it. The head, which reproduces the four dimensions of space, contains at the intersection of the cardinal points the centre of individuality—*ori-inu*—the manifestation of the sacred double, which derives from divine substance, to which the gods themselves are subject (61).

Containing within itself a universe, the dwelling place of an individual god and a unique person, the body is both one's entire ancestry and oneself, as explained by Muniz Sodré (2017) in relation to the African *arché*. From both the Bantu and the *Nagô* perspectives, to be a child of an *orixá* is also to be a small part of that *orixá*. If the *orixá* is nature, and nature is a god, then every child of an *orixá* also carries a particle of its divinity. In practice, I understand this to mean that the individual manifests in their personality traces of the archetype of the *orixá* who guides them.

Concerning trance, upon accessing the Instagram profile of the *pai-de-santo,* who has a master's in religious studies, Professor David Dias,[12] I encountered a post in which he states: "In the *terreiro de Umbanda*, trance is nothing more than an ancestral reunion, making incorporation the possibility of a past/future never seen before" (posted on 19 August 2022). In a single sentence, *Pai* David succinctly expresses the experience of trance within the *terreiros*, and this observation calls to mind the assertions of Leda Martins and Schechner concerning temporality.

The stages present in the religious procedures of initiation and their points of convergence with the seven phases of performance proposed by Richard Schechner (2012) may be brought into dialogue and summarised as follows:

12 David Dias is also the creator of the Umbanda EAD platform, Aruanda Studios, and the podcast *Atina pra Isso*.

PERFORMANCE PHASES		DEVELOPMENTAL PROCEDURE IN UMBANDA
RITES OF SEPARATION PRELIMINARY PHASE	1st Phase: Training; 2nd Phase: Workshops; 3rd Phase: Rehearsals	Ritual drumming of the sung points
	4th Phase: Warm-up or immediate preparation	Initiation of trance
LIMINAL PHASE TRANSITION	5th Phase: Performance (itself)	Entity dancing (medium in trance)
POST-LIMINAL PHASE INCORPORATION	6th Phase: Cooling down	End of trance, return to the medium's ordinary consciousness
	7th Phase: Debriefing	Circle discussion with the *pai-de-santo* and the mediums

Source: Author's elaboration (2022)

In the table above, I also note the subdivision of these phases into preliminary, liminal, and post-liminal. It is worth recalling Schechner (2011b) here who notes:

> Observing the total sequence of the seven-phase performance, I find a pattern analogous to initiatory rites. Performance involves a separation, a transition, and an incorporation (Van Gennep [1908] 1960). Each of these phases is carefully marked. In initiations, individuals are permanently transformed, whereas in most performances the transformations are temporary (transportations). As in initiations, performances "make" a person become another. Differently from initiations, performances generally ensure that the performer regains their self. (Schechner 2011b, 226)

Although a performance comprises seven phases, generally only the phase of the performance proper occurs before an audience. Another important point is that each type of performance may lend greater or lesser importance to each of these phases and it is the researcher's perspective upon the observed phenomenon that determines which phase merits attention. Precisely because, I concur, these seven phases comprise the larger system that enables the performance to exist, I strive to observe and analyse each of them, as I perceive within them a causal chain, wherein one element leads to another ensuring that the medium is able to traverse, safely, from the ordinary state to the extraordinary and back again.

To better understand the *giras de desenvolvimento* and their relation to the notion of corporality in Afro-Amerindian religious traditions, it is most productive to think in terms of the expression "sing–dance–drum" (*cantar–dançar–batucar*) as presented by the Congolese philosopher Bunseki K. Kia Fu-Kiau, as cited by Ligiéro (2011, 134). This expression, grounded in Bantu-origin cultures of Sub-Saharan Africa, highlights the totality of artistic–cultural performance, placing the three actions on equal footing, with none taking precedence over the others.

Although I understand that these three verbs are enunciated in equivalence, I propose the addition of yet another: "to tell"; thereby suggesting *to tell/sing/dance/drum*. I include this verb in a subjective register, reflecting the presence of the individual in that environment, as pointed out by Larissa Michele Lara (2008), who affirms that "this body, marked by discrimination, stereotypes, joy, laughter, and prayer, preserves the memory of freedom and of slavery, and represents the very foundation of the construction of ethno-racial identities" (49) as such, the body, taken as materiality, already narrates a story or trajectory within that space.

Expanding the discussion and adopting a broader perspective—recognising that dance within the artistic domain is precisely an echo of that which takes place in the sacred domain—I turn once more to Sodré (2017), who affirms:

> Mediumistic trance [...] entails a somatic hyper-expressivity, ritually displayed. For this reason, a discerning ethnology eschews psychiatric comparisons, showing that, within African cults, the hyper-expressivity of a cathartic nature is collectively encouraged and stimulated from childhood, and involves, contrary to hysterical conversion, both the mediation of possible individual psychic conflicts and essential communication with the supra-rational dimension desired by the group (122).

This cathartic hyper-expressivity and the maintenance of the group's psychic equilibrium also occur in *Umbanda* and may be perceived in the reactions of both the house's religious practitioners and those who seek assistance in the *giras*, evident in the sentiments of gratitude and emotion experienced by all involved, especially in cases of healing procedures, whether of a spiritual nature or related to issues of health.

I bring Michelle L. Lara (2008) into the discussion about the importance of dance in Afro-Amerindian religions because, according to said researcher,

> the fact that dance is chosen as the means through which communication between humans and the divine takes place in its unity can be explained by the fact that it brings together a bit of everything (sports, fighting, play, games), and beyond all that, it is a manifestation capable of leading men and women to the fullest expression of their corporality, of their desires, of their need for magical, human, and transhuman communication. [...] The energy that takes hold of the sons and daughters of the saints could not withstand stillness, as it constitutes movement itself—the need to experience the human through trance, through the expression of corporality (109).

The above quotation directly dialogues with what Sodré (2017) proposes when he points out that the cosmological principles of the *Orixás*, from a philosophical point of view, are liturgically actualized as incorporeal; that is, they are corporeally appropriated by the initiates, which is part of the dynamics of ritual practice. This becomes an empirical experience made possible by the lived experience in the *terreiro*, rather than merely intellectual suppositions. The body becomes the medium and the place where communication is established between the transcendental plane and the material plane.

What can be observed is that, regardless of where the body is situated in the religious field—whether African or Afro-diasporic—it acts as a mediator between divinity and humanity through its capacity for expression and modes of use. This place of liminality between the medium and the incorporated entity positions the rotating medium as the crossroads where transits occur between planes and where communication and generational knowledge transmission are mediated. This intergenerational relationship can thus be understood from three perspectives: a micro perspective, relating the medium to their elders (priests/priestesses); a macro perspective, relating the medium to their almost immemorial ancestry (referring to their bloodline ancestors); and, finally, a perspective related to their spiritual ancestry (referring to their Orixás/entities).

I emphasize here that the rotating medium exists independently of being in trance, but their state as a performer-medium occurs when they coexist with the entity within the same body. This proposal of the term *performer-medium* as a state during trance is based on one of the points of contact between performance anthropology and theatre, as argued by Schechner (2011b), who states that during a performance the performer undergoes a transformation in their being and/or consciousness, becoming "not me," but also "not not me."

According to the researcher Grasielle Aires da Costa

> Schechner explains that, in situations of ritual and/or performance, individuals take on a liminal attribute, and in this marginal state they are simultaneously the "not me"—a direct negation of the self–and the "not not me"—a state in which, through double negation, the self is re-assumed. Based on this binary personality and depending on the individual's relationship with the ritual act—whether they are a shaman performing it or an initiate aspiring to a certain social status, for example—a transformation occurs in which the individual takes on a new personality (2013, 53).

I also emphasize that, by working with the idea of the body as a crossroads, I am not operating within a binary system of either *one thing or another*, but rather from a perspective of both *one thing and another*, without separation between body and mind, medium and entity.

Although I introduce the notion of the performer-medium from an anthropological perspective, this intersection between medium and entity/*orixá* is understood within the *terreiros* in a natural way, without necessarily being given a specific name for either this altered state of consciousness or this type of performance. As Zenicola (2014) stresses:

> Cossard raises the discussion about the absence of a rupture between the devotee and the assumed entity: it is not a matter of leaving oneself—there is, then, a space between the human and their god, affirming that the other, the other side that appears in trance in the form of a god, in this interplay between god and nature—is, in fact, also part of the self, associated with the idea of metamorphosis: the self that transforms into the other (61).

This observation is based on a reflection made by the *Ialorixá* and author of the book *Awô—O mistério dos Orixás*, Giselle Cossard, who proposes the idea of an alternation regarding which consciousness takes over the physical body. She argues that even in the absence of mediumistic trance, the presence of the *Orixá* is constant within the medium, even influencing their life. In that regard, the author adds:

> In this way, two states of consciousness would exist. At times, one takes control, and although the individual may appear to be transforming during such a shift, they are, in fact, merely undergoing a switch—an alternation. What is presented here is not the idea of transformation, but rather of metamorphosis, as cited by Augras. The *barravento* is not about incorporation, but about trance, which reveals another face—

> equally the individual's own, though hidden—latent since birth, like an innate talent, a gift developed both from the outside and from within. It is the disciplined, constant, and methodical training and development of another self, which in controlled and specific moments expands and takes over the individual's primary self. Trance, in a recurring expression of *candomblé*, is about "making" the head, allowing another character or state to emerge, experiencing a distinct form of consciousness (Zenicola 2014, 61).

In bringing all these contributions from Zenicola into dialogue with the texts presented by Cossard and Augras—a psychologist and researcher of religions and author of the book *O Duplo e a Metamorfose* (2008)—each offering her own perspective, I understand that, contrary to what is commonly assumed, incorporation is not the intersection with a being external to the medium; on the contrary, it is the blossoming of something that already resides within[13].

To construct the image of the intersection between medium and entity—portraying the performer-medium—beyond all the arguments grounded in Zenicola's thought, I also draw on Schechner's proposition (2011a), in which he points out that during a performance, transport and transformation occur—just as in a *gira de desenvolvimento*. According to Schechner, every performance begins and ends more or less in the same place, but for this to happen safely, it is necessary to follow a sequence of 'procedures,' which are the seven phases of performance: training, workshops, rehearsals, warm-up or immediate pre-performance preparation, the performance itself, cooling down, and reflection.

Schechner (2011a) proposes that the individual, in their everyday life, prepares to cross the line between the ordinary and the performative, becoming the subject-in-performance who, at the end of the performance, prepares to return to their condition as an everyday subject. However, both through Schechner's observations and from following the formative process within the *terreiro*, I observe that the series of transitions occurring during the *giras de desenvolvimento* results in a definitive transformation. It is important to clarify that, when speaking of a definitive transformation within the *terreiro*, I am referring to a change in status, meaning the medium becomes more experienced and may come to occupy a role within the hierarchy of the *terreiro*.

Still within this perspective of transport and transformation in the *giras de desenvolvimento*, it is important to bring into the discussion the presence of the audience, even if it consists of the *filhos-de-santo* from the same house. The presence of these individuals, who do not enter

13 It is important to note here that *incorporation*—as spelled by the author—should not be understood as the trance state. The term refers instead to a transformation that has occurred and a new status that has become permanently incorporated into the individual.

trance but are part of the community, are also transported during the performance and transformed by the aesthetic experience. In some way, they also serve as witnesses to the process of status change experienced by the rotating mediums.

Beyond the transformation of being and/or consciousness, or the full observation of the performance sequence (Schechner 2011b), other points of contact between anthropological and theatrical thought can be exemplified and discussed through the observation of *giras de desenvolvimento* in *Umbanda*. Although my focus is on the performer, I cannot deny that their action also depends directly on interaction with the audience. It is through and with the audience that one can, for instance, perceive the intensity of a performance or its effectiveness. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the audience serves as a witness to the transits and transformations of these performers.

Beyond the concepts of Transformation and Transport, Schechner (2012) proposes that performance is something never done for the first time, and that the knowledge inherent to it is embodied and transmitted. In the author's words,

> restored behavior is the main characteristic of performance[.] [...] *Performers* engage with these sequences of behaviour by recovering them, recalling them, or even inventing them. Then, they re-behave according to these sequences—whether being absorbed by them (playing the role, entering trance) or existing alongside them[.] [...] The work of restoration occurs during rehearsals and/or during the transmission of behaviour from master to student. The most appropriate way to establish a connection between aesthetic performance and ritual performance is through an understanding of what happens during training, rehearsals, and workshops[.] [...] Restored behaviour is symbolic and reflective: it is not empty, but full of polysemy. ([...] Symbolic and reflective behaviour is the same as theatricalizing social, religious, aesthetic, medical, and educational processes. Performance means: never for the first time. It means from the second to the nth time. Performance is 'twice-behaved behaviour' (Schechner 2012, 244).

Before delving deeper into the analysis of how behaviour restoration takes place, I would like to emphasize that, when thinking of *Ogum* as a mythical being, it is important to remember that for the *Yoruba*, the archetype of *Ogum* has a historical origin: he is both a divinity and an ancestor, without a separation between who the man *Ogum* was and the *Orixá Ogum*.

From this perspective, based on the dance/dramaturgy of *Ogum*, during the *giras de desenvolvimento*, before trance occurs, as the *filhos-de-santo* become familiar with the energy of the entity, there is a brief "journey" to a nonexistent past—nonexistent because it is mythical, yet one that carries a bodily repertoire which, in trance, is incorporated and becomes a restored nonexistent event—whether or not there is an audience, in the specific case of the *giras de desenvolvimento*.

We can consider that this "journey" unfolds in the following way: (1) the medium is almost in trance; (2) the performer-medium accesses the possible events of a historical *Ogum* (such as when he is guarding, for example); (3) the performer-medium accesses the improbable events of a mythical *Ogum* (such as when he strikes the ground with his fist and opens the earth); (4) the performer-medium embodies this mythical-historical dramaturgy through dance. These are suppositions, since both the historical and the mythical *Ogum* exist in an immemorial past, but one that still choreographically exists whenever his behaviour is restored or recreated. This process of "journeying" and reconnecting with ancestral mythical and historical narratives can be understood as a spiral.

In short, it would be almost as if restored behaviour enabled a form of time travel, yet it undergoes alterations, since the very act of restoration allows for the recreation of that which has either been lost to time and memory or is no longer socially acceptable. In the case of the *Terreiro de Umbanda Aldeia dos Orixás*, my impression is that, through trance, the entity is able to access in the medium an ancestral memory that contains a corporeal encoding which, in an ordinary state of consciousness, remains 'dormant.'

Ogum And His Relation to Humanity: The Body as Mediator and The Divinity that Dances

To present *Ogum's* dances in a logic that transcends the Eurocentric understanding of dance and/or theatre, I once again invoke Leda Maria Martins (2020), who states:

> To dance is to perform, to inscribe. Ritual performance is, therefore, an act of inscription. In cultures that are predominantly oral and gestural—such as African and Indigenous cultures, for instance—the body is, par excellence, the locus of memory, the body in performance, the body that is performance. As such, this body/*corpus* does not merely repeat

> a habit; it also institutes, interprets, and revises the reenacted act. [...] The body, in these traditions, is not merely an extension of a knowledge reiterated, nor an archive of static crystallisation. It is, rather, the site of a knowledge in continuous motion—a formal recreation, a revision, and a perennial transformation of the cultural *corpus* (78).

I have observed, then, three faces of this god/hero: the Blacksmith, the Warrior, and the Pathfinder. I understand these three "versions" of *Ogum* as referring to distinct archetypes yet always orbiting a stereotyped model of masculinity that has recurred since the earliest civilisations. As previously mentioned, I observed the *giras de desenvolvimento* of *Ogum* in order to identify the codes of his dance, seeking to analyse the dialogue established between the gestural vocabulary of choreography, *orikis*, and the *pontos cantados*. According to Jorge Sabino and Raul Lody (2011):

> *Ogum's* dances express his dynamic essence and technological advancement [...] *Ogum* moves swiftly, undertaking continuous trajectories, as if hurriedly walking or running towards a hunt or a material to be retrieved[.] [...] A common image frequently seen in the dances of this *orixá* is of *Ogum* emerging from the forest with a machete, forging paths, opening trails, and reinforcing his identity as a pathfinder. Some dances simulate combat with blades, narrating through choreography the warrior character of the *orixá*[.] [...] An agile behaviour, full of quick impulses, renders Ogum's dances vigorous and overtly masculine, as each gesture—every circular body movement, every jump and roll across the floor, among others—manifests virile force and a visibly sexualised projection of macho virility. *Ogum's* hurried pace is fundamental to understanding the choreographic concept required for his dance. Maintaining an upright posture—a military stance, akin to that of a soldier in formation—Ogum begins his walk with open palms, representing the blades of white weapons, stepping firmly and resolutely towards the future[.] [...] The two open hands, with fingers joined, alternate movement like blades, at times upwards, at times downwards; the left hand acts as shield and the right as blade. All takes place with the body in motion, oriented forward, creating choreographic patterns in continuous trajectories, forming circles and straight lines—sequences repeated successively (129–131).

When I observe the body of the medium in trance, dancing their *orixá*/*entity*, I perceive the materialisation of these gestures in a figurative sense, assuming, indeed, a different signification. For although an action during

trance may suggest battle, as in *Ogum's* dances, there is, in fact, no physical combat occurring in the space. Nevertheless, initiates may interpret such a scene as an invisible battle wherein the divinity, incorporated in the medium, would (supposedly) be waging war against some unseen and subjective adversary—illness, sorrow, poverty, or negative energies. For adherents of *Umbanda*, the medium's body is the mediating "instrument" between the spiritual and material planes, affording not only the transmission of ancestral knowledge but also the transformation of the invisible and intangible into something visible and palpable.

There is a fact that must be taken into account when considering the relationship between the *orixá/entity* and the mediums: this invisible and immaterial being only "exists" on earth when it manifests in corporeal form; in other words, through incorporation. Thus, its 'existence' on the material plane is conditional upon the medium's trance state; without incorporation, the *orixá/entity* would remain mere mythology.

A Terreiro and its "*Ogums*"

Before initiating the description of how the teaching–learning process unfolds and how each *terreiro* medium appropriates their relationship with the *orixás/entities*, I would like to propose a shared reflection on lived experience, particularly for readers who, whether Brazilian or not, are familiar with religious communities that provide some form of support to their constituencies. *Umbanda terreiros* in Brazil often reach social strata that are underserved by public policies; especially those related to health care promoted by the state. During the COVID-19 pandemic, throughout 2020 and 2021, the *Terreiro de Umbanda Aldeia dos Orixás* rendered a fundamental service to our internal community, as well as to other *terreiros* in the city of Maceió, by distributing food parcels and hygiene kits, thereby mitigating the impact of social isolation on people who, in most cases, work in the informal economy.

Beyond this support offered to the external community, as a researcher I must also acknowledge that my own identification as a Black woman was born through my initiation in this *terreiro*. In Brazil—as in certain other countries—racial categorisation is tethered to phenotype, and this exposes colonial wounds through the phenomenon of colourism, which is often wielded as a tool to undermine cohesion within the Black Brazilian community. According to the most recent census conducted by the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) in 2022, 55.80% of the Brazilian population identifies as Black; of this, only 10.2% identify as *preta*

(Black), while 45.3% identify as *parda* (Brown or mixed-race), a category into which I fall.

Although I have always been read socially as "morena" (brown), I was invariably too white to be Black, and too Black to be white. Even as I suffered episodes of racism from a young age—which I was then unable to name—my awareness of Blackness was only awakened through contact with the elements that constitute, above all, the corporeality present in a *terreiro* of Umbanda. Here I refer to various elements: music, visuality, dance, the dramaturgy expressed in trance choreography, the liturgy of the rituals, and the narrative structure of the *pontos cantados*. This ensemble of foundational elements forms the basis of resistance against coloniality within the *terreiros*. Though *Umbanda* still engages in the syncretism of sacred elements with Christian referents—for instance venerating *Ogum* before an image of the Catholic Saint George—at the *Aldeia dos Orixás* we are engaged in a process of *empretecimento* (Blackening) our symbolic references, precisely out of a concern to welcome those who identify as Black within our *terreiro*.

Having offered this 'prologue,' I now share the pedagogical procedure by which an *orixá/entity* is taught and learnt within the *Terreiro de Umbanda Aldeia dos Orixás*. What is first taught to newly arrived *filhos e filhas-de-santo* is the act of *SARAVAR*, which serves as the foundational movement for the dance of entities. The action consists in shifting the body's weight from one leg to the other, with a slight inclination of the torso in the direction of the leg that slides backwards behind the other. Simultaneously, the bent elbows are pushed backwards in synchrony with the sliding leg; as the leg returns, the elbow resumes its position beside the torso and the hands meet at chest height, just in front of it.

In the case of *Ogum's* dance, what I have observed during the *giras de desenvolvimento* is that, upon incorporation, the principal concern of the *irmãos-de-santo* (siblings/saint/devotee) assisting the medium is to ensure that the movements of the entity do not injure the medium in trance. Thus far, I have neither witnessed nor heard of any *Ogum* having to be taught how to dance. It is as if, at the moment of trance, the entity already brings forth an ancestral memory of the bodily coding of its dance. However, as the newly initiated medium is still unaccustomed to that energy and those movements, their dance may initially appear somewhat clumsy, gradually refining and becoming more precise over time.

In addition to my own experience of trance, I bring observations of the corporeal coding of *Ogum's* dance as manifested through other *Umbanda* initiates belonging to the same *terreiro*. In order to preserve the identities

of these individuals, I shall refer to some of them using fictitious names, accompanied by a brief descriptive profile:

- ***Babá* Marco Antonio**: Black man, aged between 49 and 52, cultural producer and theatre director. Son of *Ogum de Lei*. A practitioner of *Umbanda* since the 1990s and initiated as a *pai-de-santo* in 1998.
- **Júlia**: White woman, aged between 28 and 32, office worker. Half her kneecap is missing as the result of a motorbike accident. Prior to joining the *Terreiro de Umbanda Aldeia dos Orixás*, she had attended a Candomblé *terreiro*, where she was in the process of becoming an *abiã*[14] *for Iaô*.[15] Daughter of *Ogum de Ronda*. Member of the *terreiro* since 2016, initiated in 2018.
- **Moira**: Mixed-race woman (*parda*), aged between 30 and 34, singer. Daughter of *Ogum Xoroquê*. Frequenting the *terreiro* since 2011 and initiated in 2018; currently on leave from the terreiro.
- **Lucas**: Mixed-race man (*pardo*), aged between 36 and 40, office worker. Before becoming a *filho-de-santo* at the *Aldeia dos Orixás*, he participated in Kardecist spiritist groups. Son of *Ogum Beira-Mar*. Member of the *terreiro* since 2016, initiated in 2018.
- **Daniela (myself)** – Mixed-race woman (*parda*), aged between 35 and 39, teacher. I suffer from a permanent muscular contracture of the back due to a domestic accident, causing disc dehydration with a slight bulging between the L4 and L5 vertebrae, and pronated foot posture (diagnosed in 2022), along with recurrent tendinitis in hands and elbows. Daughter of *Ogum Megê*.

Each person was interviewed at a different moment and separately, but all *Mediums-girantes* gave in-person interviews in early 2020. Five base questions were asked:

1. How do you feel the presence of Ogum in your life? Does it affect your mood and temperament? In what ways?
2. Corporally, what do you feel prior to incorporating Ogum?
3. Are you able to recall what the entity (*Ogum*) does while you are in trance?
4. Can you describe how he dances or moves through space?
5. What do you feel in your body when the trance ends?

It is also important to consider that each medium interviewed demonstrates a different level of consciousness during incorporation. As such, three categories may be posited: conscious, semi-conscious, and unconscious.

For *Babá*, in addition to the five questions posed to all participants, I asked one further question which I consider crucial for understanding the

14 *Abiã* refers to someone who attends a *terreiro* but has not yet been formally initiated into the religion. In this case, Júlia had already undergone two religious procedures, but had not yet *feito o santo* (made the saint), having only offered sustenance to her *Ori*.

15 Term given to a person who has completed the initiation process in Candomblé and thus becomes a *filho-de-santo* (child of the saint).

different corporeal codifications of these *Ogums*: *How do you describe the dance of each of these Ogums*? It is important to note that none of the individuals listed here is a professional dancer.

In addition to these questions, Lucas and Moira were also asked how they imagined their *Ogum*. Both replied that their *Ogum* would have a large physical build—a tall and muscular man—appearing in garments reminiscent of the armour of the Templar knights, which bears a strong resemblance to the iconographic depictions of Saint George in paintings and statuary.

Observing Lucas in trance is an instructive exercise, as one perceives how the medium is adapting to the energy of the entity, and how *Ogum Beira-Mar* seeks to discern the limits of the medium's body. Lucas's trance movements are rather restrained, without great muscular outbursts. He himself reported during the interview that he frequently finds himself, in trance, questioning whether the action he is performing or wishes to perform stems from his own consciousness or from the will of the entity.

In Moira's case, the process is nearly exact opposite. She explained that she retains no memory of events occurring during trance—being an unconscious medium—yet, perhaps precisely because of this, when observing her trance, one sees that *Ogum Xoroquê* appears more at ease within her body, and that she herself offers less resistance, both to the trance and to the execution of the movements. *Ogum Xoroquê* respects the physical limits of the medium's body, even when performing jumps, running, and interacting with those present in the ritual hall.

Concerning the end of the trance, both Lucas and Moira report a feeling of relief and of "peace of mind" as if *Ogum* were "returning" the body to the medium in a state of relaxation, carrying away the energies mobilised during the trance which do not belong to that physical body.

Júlia also describes some sensations similar to those reported by Lucas and Moira, as well as a warmth in the hands and chest. Yet, due to the particular nature of her mediumship, she does not retain strong memories of how her *Ogum* acts. However, thanks to video recordings, a brief description of her actions may be provided. The first transformation occurs in her facial expression: a furrowing of the brow and the impression of clenched teeth—perceptible through the tension in the jaw—which lends her a 'closed' countenance. One also notices a slight flaring and contraction of the nostrils as she breathes, as well as a reddening of the facial skin.

Beyond the chest being understood as an energetic point—as in both *Bantu* and *Nagô* philosophies—*Umbanda* also adopts the concept that we flow in seven directions: upwards, downwards, forwards, backwards, to the left, to the right, and inward. The centre, which culminates in the

chest, forms an internal crossroads of vectors often conceived only externally. Each of these directions holds a symbolic relationship to the individual: above us lies the *Aiê*, below the *Orum*, before us the future and our descendants, behind us the past and our ancestrality, to the left feminine energy, to the right masculine energy, and in the crossroads of the chest, all of them together, emphasising that the human being is constituted by, and must maintain balance among, these energies in order to ensure a harmonious existence.

In an informal conversation concerning my impressions of the corporeality of Júlia's and Moira's *Ogums*, *Babá* Marco Antonio observed that the movement of Júlia's *Ogum* is directly tied to the medium's breathing. For the observer, one of the first noticeable changes in Júlia's state of presence is her breathing rhythm. According to Babá's observation, it appears that when Júlia inhales, her body is projected vertically—as if, by filling her lungs, a line along the spine stretches her upwards to the top of the head. Upon exhaling, *Ogum* projects the body forward in a sudden rush or urgent displacement; it is as if an invisible thread pulls her chest, moving the rest of the body in its wake. In this case, I understand that the act of breathing is directly associated with the preparation of a warrior readying for battle.

There is a direct relationship between breathing—an involuntary bodily action—and an African philosophical principle: *emí*. *Emí* is the breath of life; it is what makes human beings human. Speech is also breath; for trance to occur, the sung word is required; for the spell to take effect, there must be speech—the act of professing, the prayer, the verbalisation of desire. Júlia, in inhaling and exhaling, draws into herself the air—the breath of life that nourishes her—and in exhaling, her air becomes propulsion.

Concerning Moira, Babá notes that, from his perspective as a priest, the movements of this *Ogum* bear closer resemblance to trance phenomena observed in *Candomblé*. According to the *pai-de-santo*, *Ogum* arrives, performs his dance with actions present in the ancestral narrative of the *orixá*—cutting the plain, riding a horse, guarding, fighting, forging—and only after this sequence is completed does he move through the space, with minimal interaction with the other *médiuns* present.

What I observe in the trance processes of these individuals—who have no prior familiarity with Afro-Brazilian dance outside the religious context—is that their bodily performance during trance is marked by a characteristic of insubordination. These are bodies that, although the entities respect their physical limitations, explore a lexicon seldom used by these

individuals: movements that would be considered unconventional by the standards of contemporary Western society.

By serving as the physical vessel for a Black or Indigenous ancestor, each medium experiences a corporeal code and gestural lexicon that transcends their social experience. This may well be the only means by which, for instance, a white person may embody the corporeal codification of the ancestral gestures of a Black warrior. When I seek to apply this matrix of experience and movement to the training of actors and actresses, I break with the canons of Western theatre, which often appropriates what it designates as 'exotic culture' while disregarding the socio-cultural context and historical roots embedded in codified traditional dances.

In my thesis, I suggest that awakening the bodily codification of our ancestral narratives and memories may offer a pathway toward constructing a corporeal dramaturgy—or indeed a literary one—grounded in alternative references: ones that are not crystallised in Western white methodological frameworks, nor the product of cultural appropriation devoid of meaning. I believe that, by fostering this transition from sacred ritual space to the artistic realm, we not only make possible the representation of Black art on stage but also inscribe an identity and aesthetic matrix centred on *terreiro* traditions without necessarily having to stage the theme of the *orixás*.

I can envision, for instance, productions of classical texts such as *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the physical preparation of the Capulet family would be rooted in the corporeality of *Ogum*, and the Montague family in that of *Xangô*; or a staging of *The House of Bernarda Alba* exploring the feminine corporeality of its characters through the dances and ancestral narratives of the female *orixás*. I do not claim that this is the best or only means by which we might begin to heal the colonial wounds that continue to afflict Latin America but it is, I believe, a path worthy of exploration.

Ogum rests while he dances

Drawing upon the testimonies offered by my interviewees, I introduce here a hypothesis posited by Leda Maria Martins (2020) concerning the uses of the body. According to the author:

> My hypothesis is that the body in performance is not merely an expression or representation of an action that symbolically refers us to a meaning, but rather, above all, the locus of the inscription of knowledge—knowledge that is etched into gesture, into movement, into

> choreography; into the inflections of vocality, as well as into the adornments that performatively clothe it. In this sense, what is repeated in the body is not merely habit, but also a technique and a procedure of inscription, of recreation, transmission, and revision of knowledge-memory, whether aesthetic, philosophical, metaphysical, scientific, technological, and so forth. In the context of Afro-Brazilian rituals (and also those of Indigenous matrixes), this conception of performance allows us to apprehend the complex abundance of African knowledge and wisdom which have been restituted and re-inscribed in the Americas—recreating an entire gnosis and a diverse episteme. From this perspective and in this sense, as Roach also affirms, "performances reveal what texts conceal" (66–67).

Within this framework, I argue that the dance of *Ogum* is not only a dramaturgy—for it carries within its bodily codification the narrative of a myth—but also constitutes what I call a *ponto dançado* (danced point), which, alongside the *pontos riscados* (inscribed points) and the *pontos cantados* (sung points), composes the *oralitura* present within the *Terreiro de Umbanda Aldeia dos Orixás*.

I find the notion of *Ogum's* dance as a *ponto dançado* particularly compelling for it seems that, by dancing his narrative within the sacred space of the *terreiro*, the entity energetically inscribes his trace upon the environment, much like a *ponto riscado*, albeit ephemeral like a *ponto cantado*. *Ogum* dances through space the memory of his battles.

Daniela Beny Polito Moraes is a professor in the Theater degree program at the Federal University of Alagoas (UFAL). She holds a specialization in Anthropology, also from UFAL, a PhD in Performing Arts from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), and was a visiting researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra (CES/UC) in Portugal. She has a master's degree in Performing Arts from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN). She is an Afro-religious practitioner, she is Mãe-Pequena of the Terreiro de Umbanda Aldeia dos Orixás (Maceió/AL). Additionally, she is the author of the books Oju Omim Omorewá—O Afoxé dança para Iansã (2022) and Do Terreiro ao Teatro (2021).

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