

THE GYPSY AND THE UNIVERSITY

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DOSSIER RELIGIONS: THEIR IMAGES,
PERFORMANCES, AND RITUALS

FABIO SCORSOLINI-COMIN

Universidade de São Paulo, Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil, 14040-902
– epch@eerp.usp.br

ORCID
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6281-3371>

ABSTRACT

To problematize how knowledge can be transmitted through orality, body, and experience, inside and outside ritual spaces, this article starts from the case of a medium from Umbanda in the state of São Paulo (Brazil). At 53 years old, she works as an independent salesperson in spaces like those of a public university, is known as “Gypsy”. After passing through some terreiros (it’s the temple where the Umbanda ceremony, “gira”, is held) in search of knowledge about her spiritual experiences since adolescence, she started to develop mediumship in the terreiro where this case was observed. In this space, she experiences various orientations through her body, initially occupying the position of cambona (caregiver) and dialoguing with the knowledge transmitted by the community, especially by the Pai-de-Santo (priest). From the addresses of the case, it is discussed, analogously, how the transmission of oral knowledge and deep support in and through the body are eminently separated from the training offered at the University.

KEYWORDS

Mediumship;
Umbanda; Religion;
Ethnopsychology;
University.

In this day and age, it is good to be protected.

(*A cartomante*, Ivan Lins)

In 2012, I started to attend a terreiro located in a peripheral region in the city of Ribeirão Preto, in the state of São Paulo, to learn more about Umbanda and to get started in a new field of research. The terreiro was known for regularly receiving researchers interested in Umbanda, especially psychologists from the University of São Paulo. At the time, I was finishing my doctoral degree in Psychology with a study on the repercussions of parental conjugality on their children's romantic relationships. As I finished my doctoral degree, I felt more and more attracted to researching African-oriented religions, especially Umbanda. I was directly influenced by the studies carried out in the Ethnopsychology Laboratory at the Ribeirão Preto School of Philosophy, Sciences, and Languages of the University of São Paulo, coordinated since its inception by José Francisco Miguel Henriques Bairrão, Ph.D. Studying the religious field became not a rupture in my education, but rather a continuity or even a rescue of expressions, influences, and ancestry that had been faded away by a pretended need of being neutral and keeping distance from the things and people under research. The understanding of health and disease processes has an important interface with religiosities/spiritualities/ancestral ties (Koenig 2012; Laplantine 2010), vertices that currently make up my line of research.

With the doctoral degree, I felt invited to explore new ways of being a researcher and also to learn about other research contexts and their methods. Rescuing my interest in the religious universe was also a way to connect with a researcher who, until then, had little or no intimacy with fieldwork and with the activities in this new scenario permeated by rituals, consultations, and a whole universe of health promotion in the community. Opening myself to the possibility of being affected in the field (Favret-Saada 2005) became essential in my construction as a researcher and psychotherapist. My Habilitation Thesis (Scorsolini-Comin 2020) discussed a part of this trajectory and its crossings in detail.

To problematize how knowledge can be transmitted through orality, body, and experience, inside and outside ritual spaces, this study is based on the case of a Umbanda medium I interviewed during the beginning of my fieldwork in this community. In methodological terms, in this study I will make use of three data sources: an in-depth interview I conducted with the medium, fictitiously called Soraya, in August 2012, audio-recorded and transcribed in full, which makes up a database on a study conducted on mediumship in Kardecist spiritist, Umbanda, and

Candomblé communities¹; information contained in a field diary I built on the research occasion, containing memories not only of the contact with this medium but with the entire community and the field in scope, as well as this activity's resonances in my experience as a researcher; observations I made during the fieldwork involving the researcher's presence in the religious rituals and also in the terreiro's socializing spaces outside the days dedicated to attending the public, opportunities in which it was possible not only to observe the institution's daily life but also various characters that were part of that context but were not necessarily present in the ritual spaces.

All observations and records contained herein were guided, theoretically and methodologically, by the Brazilian ethnopsychology (Bairrão and Godoy 2018; Macedo 2015; Scorsolini-Comin 2015; Scorsolini-Comin, Bairrão and Santos 2017). However, because ethnopsychology is an ethnotheory that allows different readings and approaches, it is important to consider that this field experience is not meant to provide any possible itinerary to new researchers, but rather to problematize the subjects' and fields' positions.

My writing commitment, narrated in the first person, aims to allow the researcher fruition in the field and to discuss this field's resonance in the researcher's training. It is in this sense that I recover the concept of ethnobiography. According to Gonçalves (2013), social sciences have been giving little space to the biographical approach as knowledge production. Still, according to this author, ethnobiography makes it possible to understand individual experiences at the same time as they reveal aspects beyond the personal universe, that is, it can unveil cultural realities that are also relevant to the work in the social sciences field. When we work with ethnobiography, we should not stick to the justification of the relevance a life story can have, but assume, *a priori*, that every life story has relevance and meaning from individual and cultural markers. Here in this study, this ethnobiography is written from a polyphonic listening that allows us to apprehend not necessarily what is hidden, in a perspective that questions the "ethnobiographed" or its narrator, but of joint production, shared, with mutual implications.

Inspired by Gonçalves (2013), I am primarily interested in the power of the encounter between the anthropologist and the native, or this case on display, the researcher and the gypsy. In this sense, I emphasize that

1. Research Project entitled "Trajectories of life, development, and health and illness processes in mediums: an ethnopsychological investigation from mediumship", approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of São Paulo at Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing (CAAE 88314618.9.0000.5393) from the National Health Council Resolution No. 510, of 04/17/2016, which deals with the research specificities in the humanities and social sciences areas.

the gypsy's individual experience meets, in this account, the narrator's experience, building intelligibility that allows, in fact, the life story. This life story should not be a portrait or appear fixed, but rather in motion, which leads us to think about performance. Ethnobiography is, in short, the product of an encounter, a dialogue, an inside-outside *continuum*. Having made these initial clarifications, I will now narrate my experience *in* and *with the* field.

LEARNING TO TREAD SLOWLY: FIELD TIME

One of the Umbanda chants is the one that goes: “*tread on Umbanda, tread slowly*”. Beyond the teachings for those who want to get to know Umbanda, I recognize in this and other chants some guidelines also for the researcher who wishes to approach this context and get to know it in depth: it is necessary to go slowly to get to know it. This means, among other things, that the times of the research, the researcher, and the field are different, so that, in the field, one must listen to its time and be guided by the time it presents to us. It is for this reason that, from the beginning of my contact with Umbanda as a researcher, I started trying to guide myself not by my deadlines and my timetables that responded to my own and the University's logic, but to the time narrated by the characters in my field and by the field itself. Therefore, listening to the chants' wisdom would not have to be just something cosmetic that many researchers employ to illustrate their studies: these precepts had to be embodied by the researcher. Thus, the experience narrated here reveals this attempt, as described by Silva (2015) in his work as an anthropologist.

In January 2012 I arrived at the popularly known Terreiro do Pai Toninho, in the city of Ribeirão Preto. It was a well-known terreiro in the city, founded more than 20 years ago. With little schooling and retired from his job as a lathe operator, Toninho is a white, widowed Pai de Santo. He is about 70 years old. With services open to the public on Mondays and Fridays, there were about 30 mediums in this terreiro in 2012 when this study began (Macedo 2015; Scorsolini-Comin 2020).

From the beginning, I was well received in the community. But I did not arrive at this space alone: I was accompanied by today's Prof. Dra. Alice Costa Macedo, professor at the Federal University of the Recôncavo da Bahia. At the time, Alice was collecting data for her doctoral degree in this terreiro and weekly attended all the giras (ceremonies or works) for her fieldwork. Pai Toninho's terreiro was well known by Umbanda researchers in Ribeirão Preto since it had already been visited and researched by different interlocutors, especially those linked to the Ethnopsychology Laboratory, as was Alice's case. I was accepted by Pai Toninho as a researcher from the very first moment, and on the second visit, I was invited to be a cambono as a way to understand Umbanda from another

position: from the inside. Until then this position, as a researcher, was unheard of in my experience.

Cambonos are mediums' helpers during public ceremonies. They have many functions, such as making sure that the medium does not lack anything during the works (smoke, water, wine, coffee, drink, and candles, depending on the services and the guides incorporated in the ceremony), as well as actively participating in the mediumistic consultations, helping the consultants understand what the entities say and recommend, and taking note of the prescriptions and procedures dictated by the entities to each person in search of help (Macedo 2015).


In this community, most of the cambonos are in the process of mediumistic development. In this terreiro's hierarchy the first way to "initiate"² is to act as cambono. As soon as the believer is accepted into the community, he or she becomes the cambono of a specific medium or helps all those in need during the ceremonies and incorporations. This same itinerary was recommended to the researcher by the pai de Santo, as we will discuss below.

LEARNING TO BE A MEDIUM, LEARNING TO BE A RESEARCHER

Joining as a cambono usually takes place due to a demand related to mediumship: by going through a consultation, the subject recognizes his/her mediumship and the need to develop it, going through a learning process within the community. This can happen when the so-called "flourishing mediumship" is identified, or even when this mediumship is "out-of-control", generating uneasiness in the consultant and bringing damage to his/her life in several dimensions. On this path, in this terreiro, the subject occupies the position of cambono - if he/she wishes to be further developed - considered a learning function.

Always on Fridays, these cambonos can go through the mediumistic development process, that is, an opening is given so that the cambonos can incorporate their entities. In this process, they are assisted by the mediums who are already active in the terreiro. In other words, there is an inversion of roles: if in the public service giras the cambonos assist

2. I employ here the term initiation which, however, should not be confused with the initiation that occurs in Candomblé, known as the *feitura de santo* (Camargo, Scorsolini-Comin, and Santos 2018; Scorsolini-Comin, Godoy, and Gaia 2020). Initiation into Umbanda can occur in different ways, depending on the way each House (terreiro) structures itself and its references. In the terreiro where this field study was conducted, initiation corresponded to the process of becoming a medium and being able to serve the consultants in public ceremonies. To do so, the person had to go through an itinerary that involved acting as a cambono and participating in the development giras. Once ready to act as a medium, which was guided by the entities, also with the pai de santo's mediation, the person would go through a "crowning" ceremony that represented, to the whole group, the beginning of their performance as a medium in that space and the "authorization" to attend the community.



the mediums during the works, at the development moment it is the mediums who help these cambonos, guiding the entities and offering the necessary support, such as taking care that the cambono does not become unbalanced during incorporation or even providing drink, smoke, and candle to the cambonos who are already in a more advanced development process and who receive spirits that request this materiality in the incorporation process. This development *gira* includes the participation of all mediums and cambono members active in the community, and there are cambono members at different stages of mediumistic development.

In my case and Alice's, we acted as cambonos, but we were not in the mediumistic development process. Thus, the invitation to become cambonos was part of Toninho's grammar: to learn about Umbanda it was necessary to observe, to be close, to help. According to him, learning should take place in practice and not just from what he might tell us or from what we might read in books. The experience of getting to know Umbanda should take place in the field, with the researcher also being the one who is willing to act as a cambono. This invitation was not extended to all the researchers who visited there, but the possibility always existed. Being a cambono, therefore, proved to be a necessary learning stage for mediums and researchers alike.

As time went by, I started to invite mediums and cambonos to participate in my research, which consisted in listening to their life stories and how mediumship was an element that could also narrate their lives and experiences. It was on one of these occasions that I talked to a medium who was at the beginning of her activities in the terreiro. Although at the time, she was identified as a cambona by the community because she occupied this function in the ritual, I refer to her as a medium because her experiences in this field go back to the transition period from childhood to adolescence. To portray this character I will use a fictitious name: Soraya.

Her life story will be narrated from this point on with attention to the continuities in her development and her narrative, especially from her body. As Rabelo (2014) highlights, even the ruptures observed in the *candomblé* devotees' narratives can be seen as a continuity of the same religious experience. Inspired by this author, her life story - or her ethnobiography - will be understood as a trajectory, as a total drama, "itself animated and animating the drama of a life" (Rabelo 2014, p. 65).

WHERE DOES THE GYPSY LIVE?

The first time I saw Soraya at the terreiro was in January 2012, just as I started visiting the community. But I had not met her in that space. I had met her at the University. Since the beginning of my Psychology degree, in 2002, Soraya was a frequent character in that space: always carrying heavy

bags, she was the saleswoman that wandered through the department corridors, the social center, the restaurant, and the employees' rest areas. Soraya was a brown-skinned person, with long curly black hair, with a body very prominent in its curves, and always wearing colorful clothes, with necklines, short blouses, flowing skirts, or very tight pants. She was a frequent figure at the University and well recognized by the whole community. Shee always seemed to walk the halls, in an informal trade that stitched together laboratories, classrooms, students, professors, and other employees. But her customers were unequivocally female employees. Soraya sold all sorts of products such as clothes, creams, cosmetics, perfumes, and lingerie. The one who drove her to the University and accompanied her from afar was her husband, with whom she has been united for more than 30 years.

When I saw her in the terreiro I was immediately reminded of the image of that woman at the University: sometimes a little “out-of-place” by the way she dressed and walked through that space, being recognized an “outsider”. On the other hand, she was someone who was so well integrated into that scenario that she could “move around” with great ease, being accepted, recognized, well-liked, and also, in a way - hidden when her activities became too noticeable in those spaces dedicated to teaching and research. What I want to point out is that her trade was also maintained by the alliances made in that context and by the people who were often her clients and friends. Their support network made their work activity³ - read as “informal” or not expected within that space - fully integrated with those from the University. In this sense, she could also be understood as an “inside” figure.

Soraya also remembered me, she said she had seen me many times around the University. And she added: “Everyone knows me there, I am the gypsy from USP”:

Fabio: Yeah. I remember you very much, during college, I used to see you at USP, you know? So, the first time, when, when I saw you here, I already, I already knew you.

Soraya: Yes. If you ask there: “Gypsy”. I started in 1983 when I got married in 1983 and started selling there. I carried heavy bags on my back for years. This, with no Sunday, no Saturday, was rare for me to rest.

She worked as a saleswoman for many years, even inside the terreiro itself, selling perfumes and also white ritual clothes (pants and skirts), especially to people who started to attend the community. Several times

3. It is important to note that such trade activity within the University has been increasingly rare. Thus, these salespeople no longer transit in this space, although they may keep their customers from the University through other contact channels. The memories I have of Soraya at the University are from the period between 2002 and 2006.

I could observe her arrival in the community - she was always one of the first, carrying heavy bags with products that she offered to mediums and cambonos. She accepted orders and also saw in that space a possibility to sell her products. This profession had a direct influence from her parents:

My mother was in sales and my father was a traveler. But, well, I was raised watching my mother work with products too, which my mother always liked a lot. I think I ended up well identified with this type of, of, of profession. Yes, I have worked in some stores, but nothing better than working and having your schedule, right?

In the terreiro, the positions seemed important to narrate. At the University she seemed to be an “outsider”, although she was integrated into that space’s daily life. In the terreiro the external element was me, sometimes displaced and trying to understand and experience, in fact, that field. If at the university I was a student and could walk through those spaces without identifying myself and without needing support networks to perform my duties, in the terreiro, all the time, I was asking what the elements meant, what I could do, what I should do, if and how especially in my beginning in the field. I always tried to make sure I was not doing anything wrong or breaking any rules or protocols. Hence, the metaphor that sews this study is that of learning, of the transmission of knowledge, and of how both contexts - terreiro and University - work as spaces that promote these processes. In the same way, the positions occupied by Soraya and me - the researcher’s role and the medium’s role in the terreiro, the student’s and the saleswoman’s role in the University, in search of complementarity, as announced in the ethnobiography (Gonçalves 2013) - are tensed up.

Previously knowing Soraya was fundamental in our approaching process within the terreiro. I recognized in Soraya a person closer to me than the other mediums because we already knew each other. Although everyone knew that I was a researcher, perhaps it was Soraya who knew best what it was like to be a researcher, since she was at the University almost every day. Even though her way of reading and interpreting that space and the researcher’s work might be different from the way I saw her interpretation, it was a matter of considering that Soraya did not present herself as an outsider to the University, on the contrary. By her daily attendance, she was almost a registered employee - to find her was easy - just go to the University. She also presented herself, as said before, as someone from inside the University, the USP Gypsy.

Soraya was a much-loved person at the University and recognized by all, students, staff, and faculty alike. Her sales took place in an almost domestic setting, especially during the employees’ break times, when she

could display her products with greater ease. Her customers became loyal consumers not only because of the products she offered but also because she created special payment conditions and also got close to them as a friend, tightening her bonds in that place. In this informal and almost home-based space, Soraya was a figure who also knew the University as few people do, both in terms of the physical space as well as the sociabilities and customs. A character, then, from within. The University was also her field.

GYPSY IS THE BLOOD THAT FLOWS

Retracing her religious background, she told me about her childhood and the first experiences regarding mediumship when she was a teenager, the first visions and premonitions. These premonitions have always been seen as natural by her family of origin, and are even a mark of her gypsy ancestry:

(...) but we are gypsy races, Spanish, my grandmothers were gypsies, right? (...) My mother, always said to me: “Hija, at last one, came out like me in this family”, right? Because all my sisters, don’t have the same gift I do, so, I had many premonitions, I have, like, visions, I dream, sometimes, many times, things happen. So, my mother had a lot of this mystical side, you know? My grandmothers were like that, my aunts. They all had this side, so to speak, of clairvoyance. Because the gypsy race, as much as the Indigenous race, have this gift, you know, of clairvoyance, it is a very mystical side, you know? They are people, like, that stir a lot the mysticism side, right? So, since we were little, we always heard a lot of cases that my mother used to tell us about getting things right, about the clairvoyance they had, you know? And I was scared, when I was a little girl, when I was 14, I went to bed and my twin sister was next to me, and I put my head against the pillow and it was such a strange thing because I had never seen it like that, you know? My mother hadn’t told me, like, in details, I laid my head on the pillow and suddenly several scenes came to me, in a fraction of a second, like a camera, you know, several flashes, like this, you know, all followed by each other, fast. And I saw several scenes. And I got scared, I started to cry. My mother ran into the room, “What is it?”, “I don’t know, Mom”. She lay down, my mother commented, you know, and then I started to explain: “Mom, a lot of things came to my mind. What is it? I don’t understand”. Then she calmed me down, and said: “No, daughter, all your aunts had this, your grandmothers had this, and so did I, it is called premonition”. And it is a very scary thing. Because, for the first time, when I felt it, I was very afraid, I thought I would fall.


In this first episode regarding mediumship, the vision Soraya had while lying down was interpreted as the first manifestation of clairvoyance, of a premonition. The mother calms her daughter not only because she has an interpretation for the event, but also because the event had a close relationship with the family’s history: the transmission of the

clairvoyance, of the premonition gift. Thus, Soraya is interpreted as a person who legitimately belongs to the family because she has the same gift as her aunts, mother, and grandmothers. This episode and the others that followed and that were narrated in the interview would reassure Soraya of her place as a gypsy, as an heir to the gypsy wisdom linked to clairvoyance and the contact with the supernatural world.

In the terreiro, in which the interview was conducted, there is no gypsy or Eastern line cult. Although they are recognized entities in Umbanda and occupy an interstice place between the so-called right (comprised of entities such as caboclos, baianos, and pretos-velhos, for example) and left (comprised of exus and pombagiras), they are still little investigated within this pantheon (Brumana and Martinez 1991; Macedo 2014). The gypsy's female figure also appears represented in some pombagiras, as highlighted by Bairrão (2019). Still for this author, the gypsy people are represented in Umbanda in parallel with other ethnicities considered to be ancestral in the Brazilian people's formation, and it is important to point out that the gypsies do not have this origin. In any case, the gypsy people's representation is always associated with signifiers such as freedom, love of nature, and sorcery, being also on the margins of society, and being sacralized in the Umbanda universe, just like other populations. The gypsy representation also has a great popularity, especially for the sorceries, the clairvoyance faculty:

For example, because I am the daughter of gypsies before I came here, I always had strong intuitions, I know that a person talks to me, I have a gypsy that talks to me, I always since I was a little girl, all the Centers (temples) I go to, they say: "you have an Indian and a gypsy on your side". Everyone I go to sees it. And I feel a lot of, like, both of their presences. And I feel them talking to me. I already know that there are many things in my life, I have predicted many things that have happened. There are many people, both at USP and in Jardim Paulista [the neighborhood where the first terreiro she attended was located], who have witnessed all the things that I used to say, and it worked, it worked, and it still works. Why? I say: "people, it is not me, I have these strong intuitions because I have the entities on my side, I feel them", do you understand? And it comes as something so natural as if I was feeling a, an example, coffee being made there, do you understand? It is very natural.

This process of communicating her visions to others ends up promoting public recognition of both her mediumship and her gypsy heritage. Mediumship, in her case, is interpreted as a natural characteristic, in such a way that she coexists with this element, not separating herself from it, that is, not refusing this condition's sense of inheritance. By allowing herself a natural experience regarding her visions, Soraya positions herself



in a way that integrates what had been transmitted to her in her family and her socialization, recognizing and accepting her gypsy condition.

At the University, her foresight is one of how she is being included in that community, in addition to her work activity. It is in this space that she becomes, in a way, an advisor to her clients, also explaining her mediumistic work and communicating her knowledge on Umbanda and Spiritism, knowledge acquired both from her religious experiences and from the various readings she has done over time. Thus Soraya not only occupied a position as a saleswoman but also as a person who was recognized for making predictions and carrying out certain spiritual orientations.

Returning to her trajectory, in the transition to adolescence, upon recognizing Soraya's mediumistic manifestation as something close to her intelligibility and ancestry, her mother intervened so that her daughter would not be frightened and impressed by the first visions. It was a matter of allowing the gypsy tradition to emerge and to enable her, over time, to deal with this phenomenon in a more relaxed and controlled way. As discussed by Rabelo (2014) when analyzing the trajectories of candomblé devotees, "the discovery and consolidation of ties with sacred entities often preceded the establishment of formal ties with a terreiro, occurring in the context of domestic or almost-domestic religious enterprises and even within the family space" (p. 64). This process also takes place in Soraya's trajectory, this domestic and family universe being before her engagement in terreiros and spiritist centers.

In this domestic and family universe of contact with religiosity/spirituality, her mother warns her that these mediumistic experiences and contact with entities would occur other times. It is for this reason that, almost at the same time, Soraya seeks help in a Umbanda terreiro in another peripheral neighborhood in Ribeirão Preto, described by her as "Center". There she experienced her first incorporations, but, according to her account, she did not receive any guidance, a fact that contrasts with the teachings she had been receiving in the terreiro where the interview took place:

But, this is a place where you arrive and it is as if you were learning to read and write, from the first steps, you learn everything. You have a follow-up. Not there. I didn't have what you have here. A whole follow-up that they have, it is, it is like you are learning the first year, let's put it this way. And there, where I was, I had no idea how to act, I didn't know who my head guides (*guias de cabeça*) were. So it was, it was a different thing. So, I never got it right.

Thus, one of the first meanings about the Umbanda terreiro that emerge in the interview with Soraya is how these spaces can be welcoming,

promoting understanding and tranquility, but, at the same time, also confusion and suffering. These possible ruptures or discontinuities, however, are part of the same religious experience, which is continuous and total, as Rabelo (2014) points out. In the terreiro she started attending as a teenager she didn't have the information that, according to her, was very important to develop her mediumship. She exemplifies this with the knowledge she got regarding her "head guides" only when she started attending her current terreiro. These head guides can be understood as her protecting orixás (deities), the orixás that take care of her head, promoting well-being, guidance, and also tranquility so that she can develop mediumship.

This recognition of the orixás and guides is one of the first processes that take place in this terreiro. To have access to them, the consultant must get in touch with one of the guides received by the pai de Santo, usually, the caboclo Ogum da Mata or, more often, the preto velho Pai Benedito do Cruzeiro das, Almas. When the consultant is in front of these guides, there is a process of identification of the protecting orixás based on a "protocol" described in other studies (Macedo 2015; Scorsolini-Comin 2020) and recalled here: the guide asks the cambono who is assisting him/her to copy the complete name of the consultant on a line and, below that, his/her birth date. After that, the guide asks the cambono to count how many letters there are in the whole name. After this process, the guide passes the flame of a candle under the paper. The flame will produce on the paper some sketches and smudges. By looking at the smudges on the light, the guide reveals who are the orixás that protect the consultant. In Soraya's case, her orixás were Oxaguiã, Ogum, and Oya (Iansã):

I have three head guides, who they say is very strong, which are Oxalá Guiã [Oxaguiã], who is a boy, and Ogum and Iansã, Oya, who is Iansã, right? There are three head guides. Some people have two. (...) And they say they are very strong, very quarrelsome, very firm, right? Because Ogum is a warrior, right? Yeah, St. George, right, in the St. George line. So, it is, it is a very strong and very beautiful thing. My father [Pai de Santo Toninho] said something very interesting, it is like going back to that subject I told you about: each person has an affinity with the entities. If you have such attitudes, such a personality, the one that fits your style comes along. So, we are, if you look at it, by nature, we are warriors (...) firm in what we want. We are hard workers, aren't we?

The explanation offered by the pai de Santo does not take place only in the sense that Soraya, from this socialization, starts to recognize who her "head guides" are. Knowing her head guides can mean access to a very specific interpretation, even attributing meaning to other intelligibility, for example, that narrate her guides' nature: warriors and fighters, justifying the fact that they "come" (are incorporated) with a lot of strength, even


with some violence, as we will discuss further below. Thus, these guides reveal to Soraya - and also to the community - a bit of what she is like, a bit of who she is, which sticks in her ethnobiography. Here we realize that the identification of who the medium is and who his/her entities are does not occur in a dissociated way, but intimately integrated, just like a double, as suggested by Augras (1983), just like halves of the same self, as pointed out by Godoy and Bairrão (2014), in a trajectory of religious experience continuity (Rabelo 2014).

This intelligibility provides Soraya a place of comfort, belonging, and integration of her mediumship into her life experience. Mediumship is no longer a characteristic described as something uncomfortable that must be controlled, but a dimension that says something about the subject, about his or her character, about the possibility of being someone trustworthy, being able to develop and work in the future in the terreiro.

In her mediumistic development process in the terreiro, Soraya was developing *for* Ogum as the front orixá, considered the main one in her “crown”. This same itinerary was followed by the pai de Santo in his initiation process (feitura) in candomblé⁴ - although he was a son of Oxaguiã, Toninho had first initiated to Ogum by a choice of his babalorixá (priest), at the time. In a “second feitura” he was developed for Oxaguiã, already with another babalorixá. However, many of the entities incorporated by Toninho are of the Ogum line, such as the caboclo Ogum da Mata’s spirit, who usually presides over the mediumistic development works on Fridays at the terreiro (Macedo, 2015).

To develop *for a* particular orixá, in Umbanda, was to recognize that it protected and cared for your head. For this reason, in the development rituals in this terreiro, always held on Fridays, before the services to the public, the cambonos were called to incorporate following a orixás hierarchy. When the pai de Santo summoned the “sons of Ogum”, all the cambonos that developed for this orixá would approach to begin the incorporation. This development giras moment was much awaited by all the cambonos, not only for being able to lead the ritual, but also for having a space to receive the entities’ energy, receive guidance, and learn about their mediumship.

4. Although he is an Umbanda pai de santo, Toninho was “initiated” into candomblé. His initiation process, however, did not take place exactly like that of a traditional “feitura de santo”, with all the recommended recollection and procedures. But, in this text, we will not make this distinction, mainly due to the fact that Toninho emphasizes in interviews that he was “feito” in candomblé. From an ethnopsychological perspective, listening to his story is more representative than, in fact, distinguishing or explaining the similarities and differences between the initiation and feitura processes or the parallels between candomblé and umbanda.



In Pai Toninho's terreiro there was a series of processes that the cambonos had to go through for their initiation as mediums. This learning is highly valued in this space, being a necessary path both for the evolution within the community and also for the control of her spiritual faculties - Soraya had experienced what could happen in her body without these teachings, without this important knowledge process. In addition to acting as cambonos in the public ceremonies, as previously reported, they regularly went through some processes such as the *amací*, which is a herbal bath directed to the developing medium's head, responsible for opening paths and preparing the medium's head for the entities' manifestation, favoring the incorporation process.

Also in this terreiro, at the end of the public services, it was common for the cambonos to become consultants and be assisted by the mediums they had accompanied until then. The cambono, who had spent most of the ceremony assisting the public consultations, then occupied that same position, consulting on various aspects of their lives. On these occasions, it was also common for the cambonos to ask about their mediumship, their mediumistic development, and their path within the terreiro. Thus, this space in which the cambono became a consultant was also interpreted as a process related to mediumship - even being valued as an important moment for the future medium's orientation and also for interaction, so that the cambono would occupy the position of consultant and also of a learner.

Addressing the learning process and knowledge transmission in Umbanda terreiros are explored, for example, in the studies by Katrib and Santos (2020) and Macedo, Maia, and Santos (2019). This study's terreiro is always open and is attended by cambonos on days other than the giras, or even on the days of services in the period before the works are prepared or after the services. In these moments there is a frequent exchange of information and knowledge between the cambonos and the mediums. Mediums tend to explain some procedures and even answer questions, especially those of cambonos, who have less experience regarding Umbanda, the terreiro's functioning, and even regarding mediumship.

In this transmission process from the more experienced to the cambonos, important figures in the community stand out, such as the older mediums, those who have already become the terreiro's *pais pequenos* (beginner priests), and by an interlocutor who takes care of the entrance of people into the terreiro. Although it is not a medium, this character also acts as cambono at some moments, but it is responsible for the organization of all the institution's bureaucratic processes, from the bills to the process of guiding people to specific rituals that should take place outside of the terreiro or even rituals considered stronger, such as the burning of

gunpowder, performed when the person was interpreted by the medium as having received a “demand” from another entity.

This knowledge transmission takes place largely mediated by the pai de Santo. He occupies a central role in this process because he is requested all the time - by mediums and cambonoes alike. The pai de Santo’s speech occupies a prominent role in the community because of the position he holds, but also because of the way he usually approaches people, always talking, explaining, and showing himself open to bringing explanations and guidance. Thus, this is a pai de Santo who is open and interested in transmitting knowledge on Umbanda. It is through these conversations and oral transmission that much of this knowledge is shared and reaches, for example, the cambonos. One of these teachings was mentioned by Soraya:

I don’t know how to explain it right, it is, as they say, you know, Paizinho [Pai de Santo Toninho] says that we have a great affinity, both the guides and the mediums, we are like, it is a fit. I think that everywhere you go, regardless of religion, you have to feel good. It is just like you wear a type of shoe that fits you well, everything. It is like, it is an affinity, so to speak.

The “fitting” that the pai de Santo refers to can be understood in different ways. One of them is from the corporeality notion developed by Csordas (2008), which allows us to consider that the medium’s body does not function as a receptacle for the sacred’s body, represented by the entity, but involves an integration so that this body we can observe in the trance of possession or incorporation, the latter term more present in Umbanda is a single complete-dimension that can be read from the experience that brings together perception and also practice. Thus, the subject is, at the same time, the body that perceives (in this case, the entity’s manifestation) and the body that acts (in its role as a medium, as the mediator of the relationship between entity and consultant), and it is not possible to fragment this experience.

This “fitting” mentioned by the pai de Santo also refers to the way each cambono and each medium approaches the community and feels a sense of belonging to it. The transit between terreiros and spiritist centers is common among African-oriented religions devotees (Rabelo, 2014), which can be observed in Soraya’s own story:

So it was, it was a different thing. So, I never got it right. And often I felt bad, why? My entity, that I received from the Indian, was always a very beautiful and strong entity, as they all are, of course. But she hurt me so hard, that she would come and hit, you know, several times on my shoulder, hurt me and jump high like that. So, it was wearing

me down. And I, at that time, was selling clothes, carrying heavy bags. So, for me, it was torture. Every time I went to the Center, to try to improve myself, to be able to do charity, I would come back detonated, because the next day I had to carry the weight.

At this point in the story, Soraya highlights a kind of “disciplinarization” of the dyad formed by the medium and the entity she incorporated. This is not an attempt to “discipline” the entity, as if it needed to be “tamed”, but to recognize this entity’s characteristics in the incorporation process and also the medium’s characteristics, promoting synthesis of two biographies that, at the consultation moment, were integrated. An example of this is that in this terreiro when the cards are distributed for the services before the giras begin, people from the community can choose which mediums they can consult⁵with. The choice is not necessarily made by the entity, but by the medium, which is why the cards have the mediums’ names as identification.

In Soraya’s case, she reports a lot of suffering regarding her incorporation process by the bodily resonances after the possession trance is over. The muscle pains resulting from incorporation are interpreted by Soraya as a response to the absence of teachings and a properly conducted development process by the first terreiro. Without this development, the “fitting” process was compromised, and negative repercussions were almost always felt by the medium, who sought to understand this process.

This interpretation was also shared orally by the people from Pai Toninho’s terreiro - at these moments Toninho reaffirmed the importance of proper mediumship development, with guidance, by serious people committed to Umbanda and charity. With the absence of answers for this suffering, the mediumistic activity’s interruption and the transit through other terreiros worked as a strategy over time, until she felt she belonged to the current community.

In her story, the negative experience in the first terreiro promoted not only her transit to other institutions but also her intermittence regarding her mediumship’s development. It generated important gaps, so much that her first experiences began during adolescence and had a welcome place in her adult life, at the age of 53, when she started attending the current terreiro. In this period, although she was a medium, she could not develop herself due to the absence of a space in which she could be understood,

5. For example, at each gira five to eight cards are distributed for each medium to serve. Some mediums are considered to be more “crowded”, so their cards run out quickly. When it is a first consultation, usually the consultant who does not know the community asks for suggestions from the person who distributes the mediums cards with whom he/she can consult with. Although the people who attend the community may make this choice based on certain entities, this does not occur separately from the medium’s figure, which is why we consider the intertwining of these two biographies at the consultation moment.

oriented, and also welcomed in her questions and in her suffering resulting from the fact that she could not control her mediumship expression.

The gypsy, in her mystical wandering, was seeking guidance. But this whole trajectory was her religious experience, it was her total drama, as Rabelo (2014) highlights. This transit is discussed by the author with *candomblé* devotees, evoking the need for us not to interpret the ruptures as religious experience discontinuities. The experience would be precisely the continuity that takes place in this transit and that is not exclusively due to the subject, but to a series of alliances, exchanges, and disputes that involve “her family, neighbors, and religious leaderships, but also the entities themselves; not only the house and the terreiro but the neighborhood and the street” (p. 65).

In this current space, the teachings and the follow-up promoted by the other mediums and, above all, by the *pai de Santo*, have contributed to a greater process of understanding the trance, the entities, and this “fitting” process that must take place between the entity and the medium. This learning, in practice, unequivocally goes through the body and this expression. It is the body that expresses the uneasiness since medium and entity are not aligned or connected. It is the body that expresses the complete harmony between entity and medium, felt after the mediumistic development process. Learning through the body allows Soraya to orient herself again, anchoring herself in this terreiro.

This does not at all mean that repercussions that are considered negative or painful, at the bodily level, cannot occur. During the observations I made during Soraya’s mediumistic process, I could see how the entities she incorporated sometimes intensely presented themselves, promoting jumps, big bumps, and even exposing the then *cambona* to possible falls. The teachings transmitted by the terreiro, however, attest that this process has to improve over time, in other words, that this “fit” should be achieved if there is a correct development of the medium and entity dyad. Recovering Csordas (2008), this “fitting” would only be possible when the experience is fully integrated into what is understood as corporeality, not fragmenting what is of the physical body’s order, the medium’s body or the entity’s body, but a total, complex corporeal experience.

When I observed Soraya later, when she was already working as a medium and attending consultants in the terreiro after her coronation, I noticed less intense bodily manifestations and less exposure of the medium to possible falls or injuries from the incorporation process. Thus, it can be understood that the mediumistic development process involves learning that does not take place only through speech and listening - through the teachings that one hears - but, above all, through the body. It is as if

these teachings, the orientations, and the close follow-up - since the *pai de Santo* is always present in the *cambonos'* development *giras* - should be understood and internalized by the medium's body, in a corporeality experience close to what is proposed by Csordas (2008). This learning could be seen in her body.

The "fitting", in this sense, is a process that must take place between an entity that wishes to manifest itself and a body that needs to be able to receive the energy produced by incorporation. This "fitting", also read as integration through corporeality, is the result of a complex process that involves, among other things, the emergence of learning *in* and *from the* body. To carry out this process, therefore, the *terreiro's* figure is fundamental. The way learning is experienced in this space is also essential in this journey - who teaches, who can teach, how it is taught, how it is followed-up, who learns, who can learn, who can follow-up. In this sense, also the wandering socially associated with the Gypsy people is not reinforced by a sense of disorientation, but precisely of integration between emotion and perception, as punctuated by Bairrão (2019), that is, a sense of "fitting".

Still following the "fitting" metaphor, at the University this process had also occurred with Soraya, since she became, over time, an increasingly frequent character in that space, increasingly "from within". This is not only related to a kind of "custom" due to her attendance at the University, but the fruit of a performance capable of recognizing the gypsy as an University figure. Her transit and her wandering were also observed in the way she related to the University, in her coming and going with bags, with orders, with news, with the delivery of products, with the collection processes. She did not need to be someone else to be read as a character at the University: there she could be the gypsy, she was welcomed, respected, and valued in her ancestry, in her corporeality, marked by colors, by shapes, by the sound of her bracelets hitting each other, in her fluency. The University was a place where the gypsy could manifest her foresight, practice her trade as a saleswoman, circulate - come and go and never, in fact, stay. A space of transit and experience true to her ancestry, her ethnobiography.

THE TERREIRO AND THE UNIVERSITY: WANDERING BETWEEN WORLDS AND WALLS

The learning process described in this study has important resonances when we bring it closer to the academic universe, in an interpretative parallel mobilized by Soraya's case. Somehow, in the *terreiro*, the whole process of thinking about services to the public, what is called charity, health promotion, and even mediumistic development focused on the well-being of the person who manifests this faculty involves an intense teaching and

learning process. In the terreiro where this case was observed, several times a more literate culture was presented as a possibility to know more about Umbanda (Scorsolini-Comin and Macedo 2021).

There are many examples in this regard. When I talked to some of the mediums, many offered me books that they had read about Umbanda, some of them even emailed to all the collaborators by the collaborator who looked after the entrance to the community. Some of these books also circulated in physical media - on one occasion, Soraya lent me a spiritist book that talked about incorporation, bringing, according to her, a view that was considered scientific. Soraya always highlighted her interest in reading, especially literature she identified as “spiritist,” also involving the so-called spiritist novels psychographed by mediums. She was an avid reader. Even the presence of researchers in that space was understood by many as an attempt to ‘scientificize’ the phenomena experienced there - subjecting those experiences to external standards that many were not even aware of.

The pai de Santo’s enthusiasm with this research sometimes had this sense - I remember, at the beginning of the fieldwork, that Toninho commented on neuroscience research that proved, according to him, the phenomena that they could experience, such as incorporation - he referred to these studies as those that put “apparatuses” (electrodes) on the mediums’ heads. As a researcher, although I welcomed these manifestations from the whole community, I also struggled to say that my interest did not lie in these methods or in the need to “prove it” - without moral or reality judgments, as ethnopsychology teaches us. It was up to the researcher, in the field, to listen and feel this field, these characters, their stories, and their paths.

At a certain moment of the research, I could see that part of the community was starting to get together to set up a study group so that everyone could deepen their Umbanda knowledge. At the time, between 2012 and 2017, when I was more intensely in the field in this community, I remember that the few meetings that were scheduled had a great impasse: on one side, the mediums who wanted to read, to have access to a more literate knowledge, and on the other side, the pai de Santo figure, who wanted to teach through his experience, sharing what he knew and what he had learned in over 40 years in Umbanda. These moments became emblematic of how learning ended up dividing the community - although Toninho’s experience was considered important, they also showed the desire to access other sources and to eventually challenge him. In a culture built mainly by oral transmission, the pai de Santo’s audience was a very important moment for learning that would not always be written in books, but inscribed in his body, in his memory, and especially in his biography.

Many mediums, in this sense, began to understand that these were distinct processes and, even though they read these books on Umbanda, they still valued Toninho's words as a power for learning. Similar to what Gonçalves (2013) highlights regarding the reduced importance that biography has occupied in the social sciences, also in the transmission of these teachings, in this community, Toninho's biography is not always valued as a piece of knowledge, as a possibility to access an entire culture regarding Umbanda.

Although the University mentioned in the interview with Soraya was a way to bring our biographies closer, building a relationship that took place because of the common places we occupied, I understand that this element - the University, constitutes a powerful metaphor for the ethnobiography that sews this study. It is interpreted as a field in which what is scientific and academic is mostly overlapped to what can be translated as life knowledge, often transmitted orally and through experiences, through the body, through biography, it operates an erasure of this corporeality and of all the knowledge that inhabits this body. In the attempt to recognize and glimpse a certain - read "scientific" - intelligibility, one ends up fading out other world descriptions and, in this sense, other worlds inhabited by others that are excluded, marginalized, and woven around a knowledge considered better, more adequate, more valued. This erasure also takes place regarding the importance of Soraya's biography.

Little by little Soraya's attendance at the University was reduced by the various movements that curbed this informal trade. But her presence and her trajectory have always had a place in the University. The challenge, in this study, is precisely to highlight Soraya's biography so that we can problematize not only social processes but also the individual elements of her life story. To know and, above all, to recognize the USP Gypsy is also to be able to tell a little about this campus' history and, specifically, of the School of Philosophy, Sciences, and Languages - where these many transits could be observed by the researcher. Here an inversion operates, as proposed by Gonçalves (2013): it is the biography that tells us about something greater than the subject.

But what had the University brought to Soraya's trajectory? What is the University's place in Soraya's ethnobiography? Soraya was very comfortable at the University, as a field of her own, trodden on slowly at first, but over which she also narrated - and narrates - her biography. Although the interview with her was initially focused on the spaces considered religious - among them her domestic universe and the terreiros - the University also occupies this space. This space is possibly similar to what Rabelo (2014) presents as being that of the street, that of circulation, that of crossed narratives, where experiences are entwined.

At the University, Soraya can also demonstrate her knowledge from her experience and her biography. She brings to the University the products she considers new, represented by the fashion trends with which she dresses and dresses her clients. She occupies the position of counselor, of the medium who works in a terreiro, and who can explain religiosity/spirituality, who can make predictions, who can teach with what she narrates *through* her body which is the expression of her history - visible and invisible, written, spoken, or felt.

The gypsy, upon coming to the University to work selling her products, had to camouflage herself among other characters, sometimes unnoticed, sometimes known - and accepted - by everyone. The gypsy seems to be from another universe, but she is not - she belongs to that space, she works, produces, coexists, socializes, experiences, she "is" with her clients, with the academics. She even presents herself with the nickname that bears the name of the University: *the USP gypsy*. Likewise, even though literate knowledge, often produced outside Umbanda, can be received as important learning experiences by its devotees, the experience of being a medium, of stepping into the terreiro, of knowing by observation, by experience, and by corporeality, occupy an unquestionable role in the Umbanda composition.

Thus, one of this study's possible addressing refers to a greater appreciation of this learning through the body, through experience, an aspect taught by Umbanda and by oral tradition, in the example discussed from Soraya's case, which should find a greater anchorage at the University. This is a recommendation that is also supported by other studies, such as those of Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2010), Costa and Pereira (2016), and Bairrão (2019), who understand the postcolonial body as a place of experience and, consequently, of learning. This knowledge can and should be evoked and valued in the narratives of students, teachers, patients/clients/users assisted in university extension actions, for example, inhabiting the training of professionals more porous to what, in fact, paradoxically, the University cannot teach.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

At the end of this journey, I conclude that learning through the body and experience continue to occupy a prominent space in Umbanda and its transmission inside and outside the terreiros. Likewise, the University can and should be more porous to this knowledge, not only to promote these religiosities/spiritualities/ancestral ties assimilation in the academic space or even by the recovery of these dimensions in health care, but as a metaphor for a more humanized education, more open to oral, ancestral knowledge that is transmitted beyond books, through its characters, stories, and plots that continue to make up the University.

As stated by Gonçalves (2013), it is important to overcome the view that the individual would be only an expression of a collective representation, opening space for discussion of individual processes that can manifest themselves, for example, through narratives that are not neutral, but that can add new meanings while transforming the ethnographical narrative. Narration must be taken beyond a representational function. Ethnobiography understands the experience wholeness that is revealed not only in the subject's history, but also in his or her language, gestures, and body. What matters in this process is the way the individual experiences the world, which happens, phenomenologically, *from* and *through* his/her body (Csordas, 2008).

The University concept that emerges from this dialogue must be committed to these characters who, classically, have always been excluded from this space, which has been gaining substance, more recently, through affirmative action policies for admission into higher education, for example. Finally, I recall an image that takes me at the end of this article: once, during a consultation in a terreiro, a pombagira told me that for me to calm down during a presentation that I would give a few days later at the University where I was teaching, I should “call” the “sea gypsy”. Almost ten years after this experience, perhaps this recommendation remains current and not properly embodied, which compels me, here, to revisit it.


I conclude that the gypsy metaphor, aware of the challenges arising from the vulnerabilities she experiences in her daily life, can and should occupy other spaces in the University we intend to build. She must be able to share her experiences, her biography, recognize her ancestry, and put herself at the service of the education of students, professionals, and citizens who are capable not only of looking forward as those who seek innovation (and, in this metaphor, also the sorcery, the to-be, and beyond the walls), but also looking back (our ancestry, our history) and, fundamentally, inward.

TRANSLATION
Cia das Traduções.

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Fabio Scorsolini-Comin is an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatric Nursing and Human Sciences at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) at Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing, PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centre for Nursing Research Development. Psychologist, Master, Doctor, and Professor in Psychology by the USP. Supervisor of the Graduate Program in Psychiatric Nursing and the Doctoring Interunits Program in Nursing at USP. Coordinator of *ORÍ* - Research Laboratory on Psychology, Health, and Society. CNPq Research Productivity Fellow. E-mail: fabio.scorsolini@usp.br

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