"Arreda (Get Away), Man, Here Comes Woman": Gender and Afro-religiosity in Afro-Brazilian Religious Organizations

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Abstract

This research investigates how religious organizations of the African matrix, through the discourse expressed in the songs intended for and chanted to the *Pomba-Giras*, contest gender stereotypes, enabling the understanding of multiple femininities. In this article, to analyze *the corpus*, we opted for the methodological theoretical contribution of the French discourse analysis (DA) derived from Pêcheux. We observed that by studying gender in religious organizations, through the figure of the *Pomba-Giras*, spaces are opened up for new dialogues within the field of organizational studies, besides understanding how some words used in daily life to belittle women can assume other meanings in the songs, contributing to an understanding of the performance of femininity in a non-puritanical way. Based on the reflection proposed by this article, we dare to affirm that the *Pomba-Giras* is not only a deity, but also one of the numerous modes of gender performance, serving as a lens to understand other forms of resistance and existence of the multiple femininities in various types of organizations and organizational practices. Following Oyěwùmí in proposing an Oxunist analysis of gender and based on the characteristics of the divinity *Òṣun (Oxum)*, we suggest *pombagirismo* here as an analytical orientation for gender studies.

Opening the *Gira*

> ♪My St. Anthony, open my turn and close the door
> Ô opens the *Gira* as it opens there *Aruanda*♪

Religions practiced in African-based religious organizations are a particularly interesting field for the area of organizational studies to the extent that the universe of deities usually reproduces with skill the lives of humans who are devout to them, evidencing subalternized practices and knowledge that, for a long time, have been – and still are – marginalized by the field of organizations. Keeping these practices outside this field of knowledge is to ignore all the contributions that can emerge from these organizations. Meneses (2012) argues that the magical dimensions of policies originating in Africa are often overlooked by researchers; however, this "magical" dimension is not marginal, since it is a central dimension of the nature of some leaders and popular identities on the continent.

In the field of organizational studies, religions continue to be marginalized due to the apparent belief that religion is not an appropriate "object" of scientific study for the field of management. Therefore, the study of religion is not attractive to management schools that are considered to be "traditional," nor is it subject to systematic analysis in any case (Tracey, Phillips, & Lounsbury, 2014). It is important to note that the study of the influence of religion on the theory of organizations and their practices is not well developed and articulated, although religion plays a significant role in individuals' lives, sociability, societies, and nations (Dyck, 2014). The field of management has explored this issue in a light and restricted way, such as in relation to the influence of religion in the workplace (Dyck, 2014). In Brazil, the pioneering study of Vergara and Irigaray (2000) makes use of the idea of divinity of the Orixás, using Afro-Brazilian mythology as a metaphor for the study of organizations. Although few studies on organizations come close to understanding religious organizations, it is possible to verify the predominant production of knowledge about a single religion: Christianity. Some knowledge has been subalternized and, consequently, relegated from this area of knowledge, especially when the object of study is knowledge from religious organizations of African origin. This fact is not surprising, since the ontological and epistemological field of the ministry itself has been forged from an assumption in which the central figure of a man prevailed, cis, heterosexual, white, and an employee of industry (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Hansen, 2002).

When talking about subalternized knowledge, one should not be guided only by the idea that this act consists in exposing the thinking of those who, for a long period, have been silenced. One must go further, seeking to develop another grammar, other references, and epistemologies, different from those that are hegemonic and taught to us as "true" or even as the only ones worthy of learning and respect (Pelúcio, 2012). When we take African-based religious organizations as an object, it is possible to verify that some deities are more demonized than others. For example, the *Pomba-Gira*, due to having a transgressive character, has been seen by

the Christian religion as a diabolical deity (Barros & Bairrão, 2015). Therefore, "knowing the figure of the *Pomba-Gira* allows us to understand something of the aspirations and frustrations of large portions of the population, which are very far from a code of ethics and morality based on values of the Western Christian tradition" (Prandi, 1996, p. 46). Thus, the *Pomba-Giras* is a considerable example of a religion that incorporates several human characteristics into the sacred (Barros & Bairrão, 2015), especially when these characteristics are tied to gender issues (Barros & Bairrão, 2015; Birman, 2005; Capone, 2004). Considering the aforementioned context, the starting question of this article is: how do religious organizations, through the songs destined to the *Pomba-Gira*, challenge gender stereotypes and how do these songs enable the understanding of what it is to be feminine?

Prandi (1996) observes that "in Afro-Brazilian religions, every ceremonial is sung to the sound of atabaques, and almost all also dancing. The songs of *Candomblé* and the *Umbanda* chants are instruments of identity of the entities" (p. 144). Barros and Bairrão (2015) also point out that "Afro-Brazilian religions have long been a productive scenario for gender investigations precisely because they are capable of subverting socially rooted gender understandings" (p. 140).

It is important to mention that one of the authors of this research is a member of a religion of African origin. This fact does not make the research impossible, since the field of social demand allows researchers belonging to specific groups to have their activities legitimized and allowed from the sociocultural point of view of the groups of which they are members (Bruyne, Herman, & Schoutheete, 1977). The researcher's body must also be understood as a political territory that seeks to study some "marginalized" phenomena not as the "Other," but as a way of producing knowledge and, at the same time, breaking with the thoughts of white academic intellectuals who see the world from a Eurocentric perspective (Grosfoguel, 2006). Thus, the essential element "is the locus of enunciation, that is, the geopolitical and body-political place of the subject who speaks" (Grosfoguel, 2008, p. 119). Just as researchers adhere to different world views, they generate a variety of alternative perspectives as they impose different meanings and interpretations on the data (Astley, 1985). This article proposes, through ancestral knowledge, to expose a new theoretical and analytical approach on gender within organizational studies, focusing on analyzing the entity called *Pomba-Gira*.

Here we emphasize the need to approach phenomena from other epistemological and ontological perspectives in and around the organizational one that are not hegemonic, because, according to Teixeira, Oliveira, and Mesquita (2019), in the field of administration, there is a need to expand the attempts, which are still incipient, at drawing close to intersectional theory. For this, it is necessary that these attempts start from Afrocentered thought, in the less limited sense of this concept, and consider issues related to ancestry and cultural belonging.

In this context, this article "disorientates" the knowledge produced in administration, since it detaches itself from the North as its main point of reference (Lauredo & Oliveira, 2022). The theory of Afrocentricity is a viable epistemological choice to create these "disorientations," since, according to Asante (2009), it places both culture and the African people at the center of symbolic and material productions to the detriment of Eurocentrism. It is worth considering that, historically, Eurocentrism has mobilized efforts to subalter and erase African cultural productions, such as their beliefs, knowledge, and ancestral values (Asante, 2009), and that racial and ethnic issues are often silenced in the field of organizations (Teixeira, Oliveira, & Carrieri, 2020).

It should be emphasized that the construction of this article is based on the way the *Gira* happens (with an opening and closing). The *Gira* is the moment in which devotees sing in praise of the deities and form a circle to dance, always going to the right; this turn is an ordering manifestation of the religiosity of beings (Saraceni, 2014). Mediums should dress in their ritualistic clothes and their guides (religious necklaces) and then head to the *Gonga (Congá)*, where they seek to keep their minds from thoughts that are considered to be profane. They also seek to ask entities and *Orixás* to help to perform their mediumistic functions (Trindade, 2017). In the *Gira*, there is a separation between the sacred space, where the mediums are, and the public spaces, where the consulters are located (Trindade, 2017). Trindade also notes that "during the turn of a yard, several charitable works are practiced, involving traditional consultations with the incorporated entities, passes, cures, etc. " (p. 142).

Starting an epistemological *Gira* of gender

♪Supreme is a woman in black
Terreiro joy
Your spell has axé♪

It cannot be affirmed that gender is an isolated category belonging to a single sphere of life in society. Gender issues can be understood from an economic, cultural, social, and even religious perspective.

Although Butler has become a great theorist on *gender and queer studies,* she does not cease to observe these phenomena from the conceptual and theoretical lenses of the North. Oyěwùmí (2017) notes that we must consider that the concept of gender is not timeless and not universal, as is assumed by some scholars and theorists in the field, who do not recognize or consider other social organizations, since they do not look at the dynamics of African communities without using Western lenses. In other words, there are other possible viewpoints from other peoples that are even, in a way, linked to African peoples. In this context, the debate about the universality of gender/sex concepts is presented as a possibility to undertake several analyses about bodies within religious organizations, such as *terreiros*, especially when considering the ancestral trance and matripotency (Bernardo, 2005). For Oyěwùmí (2017), colonial incursions led to a delimited conception of bodies: the notion of a male body (male) and a female body (female) came to be understood as an inexorable process.

Olajubu (2003) and Oyěwùmí (2017) observe that in *oyó Yorùbá* society the conception of body and gender did not exist as a structuring factor before colonization, as it was structured through the seniority of members within families and societies. Oyěwùmí (2017) shows that it is seniority within this society that "classifies" people based on their chronological age. Thus, within the context of yorùbá, it is chronological age that is responsible for the distribution of the prestigious places of society and not the sexual type of a body (Oyěwùmí, 2017). The word *ẹ̀gbọ́n* refers to the older sibling and to the younger sibling of those who speak, regardless of gender: "the principle of seniority is dynamic and fluid" (Oyěwùmí, 2004, p. 5). Conversing with the

previous position, Olajubu (2003) emphasizes that gender is a construction within the life experience of a people and it is embedded in the basis of its philosophy, manifesting in the theoretical and pragmatic levels of its politics, since gender is not independent of other social systems. Thus, it would be erroneous to consider it as a fixed and immutable construct; on the contrary, it is a process. In this same line of thought, Oyěwùmí (2017) breaks with the idea of gender binarism, showing that this category is a creation of the West and brings the concept of bio-logic.

> The idea that biology is destiny – or rather, fate is biology – has been a milestone in Western thought for centuries. Whether it's the question of who is in Aristotle's porlls or who is poor in the United States at the end of the 20th century, the notion that difference and hierarchy in society are biologically determined continues to enjoy credibility, even among social scientists who want to explain human society in terms other than genetic ones. In the West, biological explanations seem to be especially privileged in relation to other ways of explaining gender, race, or class differences. (Oyěwùmí, 2017, p. 27)

The existence of gender construction among the Yorùbás does not translate into notions of oppression and domination of women by men, since it is mediated by the philosophy of complementary gender relations, which is rooted in the cosmic experience of the people. A complementary gender relationship is rooted in all levels of consciousness and religious yorùbá, because male and female principles are crucial to the experience of a quiet social life (Olajubu, 2003). Within the state of Oyó, for example, there were not the categories "woman" and "man," *but obìnrin and okùnrin*, which are not gender categories, but an anatomical distinction that defines male (male) and female (female) bodies.

Oyěwùmí (2011) also draws attention to the erroneous conception that male domination is somewhat timeless in Yorùbá societies and to accept its timelessness is to be a gender worker, that is, a case of gender imposition in times and places where there were no socially constructed gender distinctions. The sociocultural experiences of the yorùbás reveal, for example, that women play important roles in all spheres of life, with evidence of this fact in oral traditions and in the myths of the yorùbás (Olajubu, 2003). Thus, philosophical and religious conceptions influence the daily life of society and for both there is a need for a balance between the feminine and masculine principles, a notion informed by the assumption that the sexes are interdependent. Therefore, they do not fit with the idea of male domination. Olajubu points out that within Yorùbálândia some women played roles expected of men and vice versa.

The imagery construction of several deities belonging to the religions of African origin in Brazil "permeates, even today, a hegemony of the sex/gender system where myths, in some way, also suffered from the payments perpetrated by colonization" (Passos, 2021, p. 24). That said, the *Pomba-Gira* emerges as a transgressive figure (divinity) who inhabits the imaginary of Brazilian society, as a woman dressed in red and who exudes danger (Barros & Bairrão, 2015). When we look at the *Pomba-Gira*, deities belonging to the Brazilian afro religious pantheon, as entities that *have a gender performance*, we allow for a break with several categories, such as "body," "sexuality," and "sex," thus causing the resignification of gender, through a figure that breaks with

pre-established structures (Souza, 2019).

Cruz (2007) observes that the *Pomba-Gira* reflects the transgression of the images of what is feminine, since it is seen as an eloquent deity, often understood as an entity possessing two genres. An important issue to be observed is that *Pomba-Giras* incorporate both women and men, disrupting the duality of sex-gender. Simas (2019) shows that the pulsating energy of the *Pomba-Gira* presents a liberating character, but one that is never uncontrolled, because it is always controlled by the power of female power, which it manifests as a striking characteristic of the entity: the *Pomba-Gira* is the owner of its own desires and exposes them through seduction, in a waddling corporeity capable of challenging any normative standard. The next section seeks to provide elucidations about this divinity.

It's time to praise the "street people"

♪Rose Skull I'm singing in her praise,
On the bar of your skirt runs water and bloom stems♪

The *Pomba-Giras* are examples of how the Afro-Brazilian religions of the Umbanda segment and some traditions of Candomblé can include in their deities human characteristics from a sacred perspective. The *Pomba-Giras* are entities that are considered to be feminine and transgressive, also known as female Exu, which are complex, contradictory, and ambivalent, as well as their male partner (Exu) (Barros & Bairrão, 2015). Meyer (1993) and Reis (2020) point out some characteristics of *Pomba-Giras*: erotic, sorceress, seductive, and wise. These characteristics encompass a varied ancestry and culminate in multiple images of a subversive female (Meyer, 1993). Souza adds:

> The *Pomba-Giras* are linked, whether in Afro-religious discourse, or empirical narratives, to the function of supplying demands of consuls and mediums in the sexual sphere. In this way, they break with the phallic organization regarding sexuality, as much as female sexuality articulates itself in a discourse of biology purely in a strategic way. (Souza, 2019, p. 94)

The *Pomba-Giras' Gira* (part of the public cult designed to praise these entities) is permeated by the sound of drums, shrill laughter, cigarette or cigar smoke, bowls full of alcoholic beverages, and lush dresses. Thus, trying to understand the *Pomba-Giras* through the lens of gender requires indating the categorization of these deities, which seem transcendent to the divisions of "sex" and the imposed and socially constructed gender binarism (Souza, 2019). It is worth remembering that the *Pomba-Gira* entity can manifest in female and male biological bodies, bringing in this manifestation another rupture with gender binarism. In this context, *Pomba-Gira* is the representation of subversion, disruption, freedom, and sexual order that drives women to break the rules pre-established by society, showing that it is possible to accomplish something outside the concepts and norms that have been introjected over time. That is, they break with the

historical continuity of submission and possession that come from time immemorial (Costa, 2015). Therefore, "the *Pomba-Gira* raises in women all that is buried by male dominion with the endorsement of society and the Christian religion that is based on biblical precepts" (Costa, 2015, p. 111). Another important image passed by the figure of the *Pomba-Gira* is that of the strong woman able to rebel against oppression and male and patriarchal domination (Mesquita & Oliveira, 2021).

From this perspective*,* the *Pomba-Gira* is autonomous, independent, wise, welcoming, daring, subversive, courageous, erotic, free, and able to conquer what she wants, being a power of elaboration of the feminine that diverges from what is seen as traditional and that questions gender inequality (Birman, 2005; Capone, 2004; Mosque & Olive Tree, 2021). Barros and Bairrão (2015) state that it is "remarkable that prostitution was related to the images and 'life stories' of *Pomba-Giras* much more for the subversive and sexuality that the prostitute is concerned with than the idea of 'sex professional' (p. 133).

These entities are extremely polysemic and dynamic and not susceptible to descriptive exhaustion (Mesquita & Oliveira, 2021). By reducing them to a single image of prostitutes, a prostitute is committed to the feminine idea rooted in a misogynistic and sexist vision (Barros & Bairrão, 2015).

In the daily organization of female subjects, the *Pomba-Gira* becomes the core of a reorganization of the existing power relations in the affective and social sphere of the members and adherents of this religious organization (Mesquita & Oliveira, 2021), because it presents itself as a protector of those considered to be feminine, allowing them to face the violence and betrayal that comes from men (Birman, 2005). Barros and Bairrão (2015) also affirm that, through the relationship with *Pomba-Gira*, women see themselves as "agents of their bodies, women begin to reinvent the way they experience sexuality, femininity and what they understand as 'being a woman', so that the sacred also updates more original and less feminine *caricatos*" (p. 141)."

Each day, with each incorporation, female figures appear or "update" themselves and are capable of continuously offering the most plural possibilities of female experiences (Barros, 2013). Simas (2019) points out that *Pomba-Giras* are deities that result from the encounter that exists between the vital power of the crossroads and the performance trajectory of the enchanted, or women who lived on/from the street and who had many loves, in addition to expressing their vital energy, through the sensuality of their bodies, exposed freely and aflowering, in which the idea of sinful body makes no sense. In the *terreiros,* the terms "*Pomba-Gira*" and "woman" emerge as correspondents, thus proposing an invitation to create a deep reflection on how these female deities promote women's senses *through their performances in* rituals (Barros, 2013).

The Gira is discursive: discourse, interdiscourse, discursive memory, and effects of meaning

♪Old devil I'll cut off your horn
I'm going to cut your ass off and
You can eat your tongue I'll make a whip
To hit the back of those who speak ill of me♪

In this article, to *analyze the corpus*, we opted for the theoretical methodological contribution of French discourse analysis (DA), derived from the thoughts of Pêcheux. Although the guiding thoughts are those of Pêcheux, it is important to highlight that he is not alien to the thoughts of Foucault; on the contrary, there is some resemblance between these thinkers (Magellan & Kogawa, 2019). Both thinkers highlight "the importance they attributed to the aspects of exteriority of the discourse, the contextual conditions of its emergence, the description of its materiality, the search for discursive regularities and the factors that enabled them" (Azeredo & Bartho, 2020, pp. 54-55).

To understand what discourse is, it is fundamental to understand what it is not: discourse is not an individual production of the speaker; it is not under the control of the individual who enunciates; it is not timeless or planned (Pêcheux, 2015). According to Pêcheux (2014), for a speech to be pronounced there needs to be conditions of production given. In other words, discourse is a production enunciated through a discursive formation that crosses the enunciating subject and, consequently, it is always dependent on the position that this subject occupies. Thus, the concept of discourse mobilized here is one that understands it as the effects of meanings existing among announcers (Pêcheux, 1969), and as the practice of language, the moving word, according to Orlandi (2012). In this context, Pêcheux maintains that:

> . . . a word, an expression or a proposition does not have a meaning that would be "proper" to it, bound to its literalness. On the contrary, its meaning is constituted in each discursive formation, in the relationships that such words, expressions or propositions maintain with other words, expressions and propositions of the same discursive formation. (Pêcheux, 1988, p. 160)

What the speaker says, what he announces, promises, or denounces, does not have the same status, depending on the place he occupies; the same statement can be a fearsome weapon or a ridiculous comedy, depending on the speaker's position and what he represents in relation to his speech. A speech can be a direct political act or an empty gesture, to "pay back," which is another form of political action (Pêcheux, 2014).

The conditions of production of the discourse are imbricated in a game of images in which the subject is not on the sidelines, but rather inserted into the center, which considers the understanding of the formations regarding his position and the position of the other, in a concrete and historically determined context, thus forming a triad: subject, discourse, and history (Magellan & Kogawa, 2019). The concept of discourse is dependent on the concept of discursive formation (DF), which is tied to the concept of ideological formation. Ideological formation must be understood as a complex set of representations and attitudes that are not universal or individual but are directly related to the class positions that conflict with each other (Haroche, Pêcheux, & Henry, 2007).

These ideological formations are composed of one or more DFs that interconnect, according to which the position of the subject is what gives room for something to be said, because the positions within a discursive formation are interrelated (Haroche, Pêcheux, & Henry, 2007) and "the words 'change meaning' as they move from one discursive formation to another"

(Haroche, Pêcheux, & Henry, 2007, p. 56). Pêcheux (1988) argues that "every discursive formation conceals, through the transparency of meaning that constitutes it, its dependence on the 'whole complex' of the discursive formations, which are intricate in the complex of ideological formations" (p. 162), always being linked to an interdiscourse.

According to Orlandi, "(i)nterdiscourse is a set of formulations made and already forgotten that determine what we say" (2012, p. 33). In order for what we say to make some sense, it must have made sense before. That is, interdiscourse can be understood as the entire dominant complex of the DF, called discursive memory. This discursive memory operates as a semantic support of discourse, in which it functions through the repetition of utterances, forming a discursive regularity that is part of an "already said" (Pêcheux, 1988). Finally, "in historical repetition, there is displacement, drift, transference, a metaphorical effect. And the metaphorical effect is taken over and forgotten, sliding to another place of meaning, a new gesture of interpretation" (Orlandi, 2016, p. 173).

Pêcheux reports that discourse is far from being configured as a place of human freedom, since "it is always pronounced from given production conditions" (Pêcheux, 2014, p. 77), always being under the aegis of the relations of forces existing between a given political field and the antagonistic elements. Discourse should be seen as inherent to ideology and, as Pêcheux (1988) says, "there is no discourse without subject and there is no subject without ideology" (p. 64). Since discourse is composed of utterances, it is important to mention that every utterance is linguistically describable and seen as a set of possible points that are adrift, offering room for interpretations (Pêcheux, 1988). As Pêcheux (2014) questions: "What does this text contain?" (p. 63). When seeking the meaning of a text, it is necessary to resort to the act of interpreting. This gesture produced by the analyst makes evident the relationship between history, language, and the functioning of ideology (Orlandi, 2004). Thus, DA is concerned with understanding how a symbolic object produces meanings and how it is imbued with significance by and for subjects (Magellan & Kogawa, 2019).

It's time to "consult" with the *Pomba-Giras*: analyzing the research *corpus*

The songs (or points) used in Afro-Brazilian rituals refer to the characteristics of the entities whose purpose is to honor the deities, prepare and maintain the "*Gira*" (as the ritual is called in which the deities manifest). These songs are passed between generations through oral tradition and their original authors are generally unknown, with them mostly being in the popular domain. Some have been recorded by popular music performers, sometimes achieving a lot of success. The songs (points) of *intotos* for the deities of umbanda are instruments that update the identity of entities through characteristics and components of everyday life and that are articulated with various elements of Brazilian social imaginary (Nascimento, Souza, & Trindade, 2001).

The materialities chosen to make up *the corpus* of analysis were taken from books whose content includes the dissemination of points (chants) of umbanda entities. Four materialities were selected from fragments of songs chanted to the *Pomba-Giras.* These materialities were taken from the book *Points sung by umbanda*, written by Marcos Scliar. It should be emphasized that the DA is operationalized as the *research corpus was analyzed*, seeking its interdiscursivities (when

one discourse is crossed by another), as well as the possible effects of meaning that the words provided to the perspective of their production context. The concept of discursive memory was also mobilized by observing that some elements present in the songs already referred to an "already said." The choice of these songs is anchored in the fact that they are the most chanted and common in various *terreiros*. The first song to be analyzed concerns the arrival of the *Pomba-Giras* in the turns:

> *Arreda* (get away), man, here comes woman!
> *Arreda* (get away), man, here comes woman!
> She's the *Pomba-Gira*, the queen of the cabaret
> Seven men come forward to say who she is
> She's the *Pomba-Gira*, the queen of the cabaret

This song was recorded recently by Mariene de Castro (Farias, 2020). The utterance in this fragment assumes an imperative character ordering the departure of men, as can be seen in the word "arreda" (get away). This utterance emanates several meanings and interpretations, including: (a) the song aims to warn that the *Pomba-Gira*, a female entity, will arrive; men should be afraid, because a female being will take over the space, whether geographical or spiritual; (b) there is a rivalry between men and women, and both cannot occupy the same space; however, the woman holds more power, since it is she who dominates (she is the "queen of the cabaret"); (c) females and males can inhabit the same space, but with a certain distance; (d) the utterance "*arreda* man" makes it possible to understand that women will occupy a place that was once occupied by men; women begin to enter in male spaces, not peacefully, but through imposition, thus evidencing the power of women; (e) the authoritarian character of ordering shows that women can have male characteristics, such as aggressiveness, so that they conquer spatialities; that is, a female "body" is also a source of (re)production of masculinities. In the utterance "seven men come forward to say who she is," "come forward" emerges to affirm that the *Pomba-Gira* also raises an idea of submission of these men's greatness.

Another possible interpretation is anchored in the idea that the female being assumes a distinct image from that proposed by patriarchal society: the woman submissive to men gives way to one who orders them to make way, because she will pass, while they only enter this space to refer to her (say who she is). Through these analyses, it is possible to verify that the gender causes in this "body" a discontinuity, thus breaking with the biological and with the binarism exposed by Oyěwùmí (2017). By saying that "seven men come forward to say who she is," the utterance allows us to understand that men are not in charge, since they occupy the role of enunciators, showing the power of the feminine. Another possible reading, which also inferiorizes women, is the fact that men are still always the first, putting the feminine in the background. However, the fact that there are seven men who announce her arrival evidences a transgressive character, considering that they may appear as a possession or even as loving partners. Another effect of meaning allows us to understand that men have the role of heralds: the position of the *Pomba-Gira* prevents her from speaking to anyone, she only speaks through heralds or emissaries; men come to be understood as mortal, while the feminine remains divinized. Therefore, this utterance converses with the thought of Cruz (2007), according to which the *Pomba-Gira* manifests as a

transgression of the images of what is socially considered as feminine, since she is an eloquent deity and often presents both male and female characteristics.

In this sense, the feminine, not the *Pomba-Gira*, presents itself as a transgression, since it confronts Christian thought, as pointed out by Barros and Bairrão (2015). The sense effect of being called queen causes an emptying of the power attributed to her, considering that, to be queen, there must be a king. Retrieving the discursive memory, the figure of the king is predominant over that of the queen, thus removing the protagonism of the feminine, which contributes to gender inequality, since there is a pseudodependence of the feminine being. These issues, in part, converse with the thinking of Barros and Bairrão (2015), that the *Pomba-Gira* is often represented as an authoritarian, aggressive, conquering, and active deity. These characteristics, in Brazilian society, are examples of masculinity, therefore belonging to the male universe. This fact exemplifies Olajubu's (2003) thought that women can perform tasks aimed at men and vice versa, also evidencing the thinking of Oyěwùmí (2017). For the author, the body is only a marker, but not a definer of gender. This song also makes it possible to understand the feminine not as a unit, but as something fragmented, since it does not express a "pure" feminine identity. In the next discourse, it is possible to verify the repetition of the need for the feminine to occupy space, as well as the "body" being presented as a place that manifests both the masculine and the feminine.

Open the wheel
Open the wheel
Let the *Pomba-Gira* work
She's got a steel chest,
She's got steel chest
And the heart of a thrush

The previous song is known as "The Feast of Maria Padilha" (Stonlogun Music Group, 2020). The utterance "open the wheel" produces a sense effect that refers to the need for the female to occupy the space so that she can act, even if it is in a delimited space. However, this space can be composed of subjects who perform different genders, since the "wheel" consists of a set of people. Unlike the previous discourse, there is no character of ordering and emptying of space (in the case of men), but rather the need to put the feminine at the center, when opening the wheel for the *Pomba-Gira* to work. The utterance "She's got a steel breast and the heart of a thrush" suggests a metaphorical effect, allowing other interpretations, as shown by Orlandi (2016). Therefore, the figure of the *Pomba-Gira* appears as a resistant subject with high malleability. The utterance gains this meaning in that the word "iron" could have been chosen instead of "steel," that is, the *Pomba-Gira* represents a much more resistant feminine being with greater adaptability.

This feminine being, expressed in the figure of the *Pomba-Gira*, initially presents itself as essential to life, fragile and free, as seen in the utterance "the heart of a thrush." Another possible interpretation is that the heart can be seen through its metaphorical condition as a sign linked to love, considering that the word "heart" takes on different meanings because of interdiscourse. The "heart" of a thrush can refer to a form of free love, without an owner, considering that birds, in the social imaginary, represent freedom or allow an understanding of the free ways to love a

welcoming woman. In addition to the above, the statement evidences an intense and fragile feminine being, since the hearts of birds are more accelerated and delicate. It is important to note that any bird could have been chosen, but choosing the thrush raises an ideological issue, common to the discourse, as already pointed out by Pêcheux (1988).

The first question is anchored in the fact that the thrush has been consecrated as a bird that represents Brazil, so this character of the *Pomba-Gira* manifests as a representation of many Brazilian women. Another effect of meaning, which emerges through interdiscourse, lies in the meaning of the word "*sabiá*" in *Tupi*: "he who prays a lot", in allusion to the bird's ability to learn various sounds, thus attributing to the *Pomba-Gira* the characteristics of a wise woman. These characteristics converse with the thoughts of Birman (2005), Capone (2004), and Mesquita and Oliveira (2021), since these authors affirm that the *Pomba-Gira* breaks with the power relations present in both the affective and social spheres of practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions, creating a break with the bio-logic exposed by Oyĕwùmí (2017). The effects of meanings produced by the analyzed utterance create a break with the thoughts of Passos (2021), for whom there is a hegemony of the sex/gender system that can be observed in the myths of deities, for example.

> The *Pomba-Gira* is the wife of seven husbands!
> The *Pomba-Gira* is the wife of seven husbands!
> But don't mess with her!
> The *Pomba-Gira* is dangerous!
> She's the *Pomba-Gira*, the crossroads queen,
> Who faces her enemies
> With a loud laugh.

This fragment was extracted from the point known as "Pomba-Gira is the wife of seven husbands" (Oliveira, 2008). The discourse contained in the fragment has an utterance that presents the *Pomba-Gira* as a contravening female entity, stating that "she is the wife of seven husbands," because it creates a break with the Western thought of monogamous marriage. The misdemeanor also appears in the fact that in several countries only men are allowed to marry several women, with the opposite being penalized. Another possible interpretation is that, by having more than one husband, the *Pomba-Gira* shows herself as a source of struggle against male domination, considering that she does not play the role of submissive wife, but as a free woman who can choose several partners. Through this statement, it is perceived that there is no relationship of oppression of women on the part of men, as the *Pomba-Gira* manifests as a deity that sets the balance between men and women. Therefore, this utterance converses with the thoughts of Olajubu (2003) and Oyĕwùmí (2011), for whom the idea of male domination is not present in some Yorùbá societies.

The utterance also generates another sense effect that is not passivity. By presenting female polygamy as a transgression, this figure that represents the feminine as a dangerous subject is capable of having several attitudes that are considered transgressive. The utterance "Who faces her enemies with a strong laugh" allows us to understand that this entity also has a combative character and that it does not let its enemies (male figures) do what they want. It is important that the *Pomba-Gira*, in the chosen utterance, has no enemies, which gives a sense of

union between female subjects. The discourse presented highlights the *Pomba-Gira* as a representation of the feminine, as the center of the reorganization of power relations that permeate the social and affective spheres. Mesquita and Oliveira (2021) affirm that these deities are important to think about the reorganization of power relations, mainly through how they affect the social life of adherents and members of religious organizations of African origin, as well as through the need to face male domination. The discourses analyzed in this article show the *Pomba-Gira* as a representation of the feminine who is autonomous, wise, independent, daring, subversive, courageous, free, and able to conquer what she wants, being a power of elaboration of a feminine woman that diverges from what is seen as traditional and that questions gender inequality.

> In red and black
> Wearing the night, the mystery brings
> Gold necklace, gold earrings
> The promise makes
> If you must go, you can go ask for whatever you want
> But beware, friend, she's beautiful, she's a woman
> And at the corner of the street turning, spinning, spinning
> She's a pretty girl, spinning, spinning, spinning there
> Spinning, *laroiê* spinning there

This utterance is part of a song popularly known as "Moça bonita," recorded by Brazilian folk singers such as Ângela Maria and Rita Ribeiro (Benneditto, 2019). The fragment has several sequences of utterances. In the first, the *Pomba-Gira* is described as a mysterious and seductive woman, because, in discursive memory, red is considered to be the color of sensuality and black the color of mystery. The utterance "wearing the night, the mystery brings" makes it possible to understand the *Pomba-Gira* as a representation of the feminine who is free to walk the streets at any time of the day, but it is the night that the mystery inhabits. By exposing the fact that she wears a gold necklace and gold earrings, this deity is evidenced as a holder of riches, able to make promises, that is, as a woman capable of fulfilling commitments. Thus, the feminine is manifested as a liberating character. Another statement warns the enunciator that he is free to ask for anything, but a warning is given and shows that it is not possible to deceive women. It causes an effect of meaning that refers to female power, according to which the *Pomba-Gira* brings the identity of the woman who owns her own desires. The analyses derived from the previous utterance converse with the thoughts of both Meyer (1993) and Kings (2020), because for the authors the *Pomba-Gira* is a figure of subversion of what is socially understood as feminine, since she is wise, seductive, erotic, and even a sorceress. Moreover, the *Pomba-Gira* represents, through the analysis of the previous song, a disruption of female submission, because she brings freedom of sexuality and breaks the rules preestablished by society. In this context, according to Costa (2015), she breaks with the historical continuity of female submission and the idea of the woman as the man's possession.

The notion of freedom is also present in the fragment – "And in the corner of the street turning, spinning, spinning" – because it refers to the notion of freedom of the woman: she can turn down the street regardless of the eyes of others, because she knows how to defend herself

from those who mess with her. These questions illustrate Simas's (2019) thinking by evidencing the *Pomba-Gira* as a potential representation of female power and independent women. In this discursive sequence, an utterance allows an effect of meaning that presupposes that every beautiful woman is innocent and incapable of having attitudes that allow her to defend herself against men, since the warning is given to men ("but careful, friend"). This DS exemplifies Barros's (2013) thought that *Pomba-Giras* and their incorporations enable a "reupdate" of what is understood as a female figure, continuously offering a plurality of possibilities to understand female experiences.

Through this statement, it is also perceived that the *Pomba-Gira* makes it possible to understand gender from the experiences of a people, or even based on the divinity itself. In general, it is perceived that the songs chanted for the *Pomba-Giras* speak of their experiences that also reflect the lives of adherents of Afro-Brazilian religions. As already pointed out by Olajubu (2003), gender is constituted through the life experiences of a people. These experiences are instilled and manifest at different levels, such as the political, theoretical, and political. Thus, gender is not an independent construction of social systems and cannot be seen as a fixed construct, but as a process.

Closing the *Gira*

<div align="right">

♪The farewell of a rose

Makes you cry, makes you cry, makes you sob♪

</div>

In this section, the guiding research question of this article is taken up again: how do religious organizations of African origin, through discourses expressed in songs aimed at *Pomba-Giras,* challenge gender stereotypes and how do these songs enable the understanding of multiple femininities and masculinities?

It is considered that the *Pomba-Gira*, as a representation of the feminine, is inserted in an ambiguous situation in the classifications of being a man and being a woman. It presents socially constructed characteristics as belonging to the male universe, contrasting with the cisheteronormativity of outside religious organizations of African origin. Considering that the *Pomba-Gira* is endorsed with power, this female figure goes in the opposite direction to the normative intelligibility reducer that states that the only way for female subjects to become powerful and independent is if they are bound to or dependent on men. Thus, what would attribute power to the Pomba-Gira would lie in the performance of gender, despite being a female being and, simultaneously, presenting characteristics attributed to men. It can be observed that in one of the recurring themes in the chants sung – the different roles that the feminine figure can play in society – what is known and what is said about women in this afro-religious environment is, often, a mixture of resistance and reproduction of the woman as a passive figure, or as a subversive and transgressive figure.

We consider that discourses cannot be disrelated from the socio-historical conditions of

their production. Therefore, the discourses that emerge in religious organizations (*terreiros),* through the sung points of umbanda, are sequences of utterances that arise during a religious ritual and seek to revere the deities, in this case the *Pomba-Giras*, thus creating a status that puts them in a position of worship. Thus, the DFs of umbanda points very clearly clash with the meaning that words assume in popular knowledge about gender, women, and love relationships.

The discourses of the *terreiros* expressed by the points sung to the *Pomba-Giras* are positioned to value the freedom of women, this being a type of freedom that manifests in opposition to Christian moralization. The enunciations show the figure of the woman who laughs while facing her enemies, who has seven husbands and conquers male spaces. In this way, they are in favor of gender equality, freedom of expression, and even resistance to a paralyzing moralization.

Finally, we observed that by studying gender in religious organizations, through the figure of the *Pomba-Gira*, spaces are opened up for new dialogues within the field of organizational studies, besides understanding how some words used in daily life, to belittle and devalue women, can assume other meanings, contributing to the understanding of "feminine doing" in a non-puritanical way. We dare say that the *Pomba-Gira* is not only a deity, but also one of the *numerous forms of gender performance*, serving as a lens to understand other forms of resistance and the existence of multiple femininities in various types of organizations and organizational practices. In this sense, following the thoughts of Oyěwùmí (2016) by proposing an *Oxunista* analysis of gender, based on the characteristics of the divinity *Òṣun* (*Oxum*), we suggest *pombajirismo* here as an analytical orientation for gender studies.

Nevertheless, we should emphasize that although they are inserted in a Western context marked by patriarchal culture, in religious organizations of African origin it is possible to identify a predominance of the female role as a leader, whether in the religious field, or in the organizational structure of the *terreiros* or houses of *Candomblé*. Leaderships characterized by the female presence can be widely verified in several studies (Menezes, 2005; Moura & Silva, 2020; Santos, 2008), dealing with the importance of female characters for the consolidation and tradition of the *terreiros* of African religions in Brazil. This fact may reflect the view one has about the female gender, as synonymous with strength, courage, resistance, autonomy, freedom, and leadership, identified in the songs analyzed, in opposition to the view of the female gender present in Western society under the aegis of Christianity. In this sense, we suggest for future studies an analysis of religious organizations from the perspective of leadership, considering gender issues and the valorization of women in institutions embedded in a patriarchal culture.

It is important to point out that even in decolonial or postcolonial works, it is difficult not to resort to authors from the epistemic North to make up and structure both the theoretical and methodological path. Therefore, we leave as a suggestion for future works, articles, or essays the use of a research method based on Afrocentrality, taking ancestral knowledge as a starting point.

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Note

1. We chose the spelling "Pomba-Gira," with a hyphen, because this is the recurring spelling in the texts on the theme, even being the form used among practitioners of religions of African origins.

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