

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE PRETOS-VELHOS FOR UMBANDISTS AND FRIENDS¹

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ABSTRACT. Pretos-velhos are entities in Umbanda, known as the spirits of enslaved black Africans, working to assist people who go to terreiros in search of help for various problems. The objective was to analyze the structure of the social representation of pretos-velhos in Umbanda for their faithful and sympathizers. This is a descriptive-exploratory, qualitative study, in the light of the structural approach of the Theory of Social Representations. Conducted virtually through Google Forms®, with 202 Umbanda umbandists or religious sympathizers, captured through the Snowball technique, via sharing a link via WhatsApp, from November 6 to 11, 2020, who answered sociodemographic profile questions and three free evocations in response to the inducing term 'Preto-velho in Umbanda'. Sociodemographic data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and those related to evocations using prototypical and similarity analysis. The results present the representation structure in the conceptual, practical, affective-attitudinal, imagery and human action dimensions, whose probable central core is composed of the elements love, wisdom, charity and psychologist. Thus, Pretos-velhos are understood as wise, caring, loving, empathetic, caring, welcoming entities who teach resistance and resilience in life, acting similarly to psychology professionals, and can be recognized as umbanda psychologists. His representation for this group resides in the image of the enslaved black man, with more Christianized characteristics, defender of Christian morals, such as patience, humility and charity that, together with the whole context, make it possible to reinforce the human action of faith and hope in life.

Keywords: Social representation; umbanda; spirituality.

REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS DOS PRETOS-VELHOS PARA UMBANDISTAS E SIMPATIZANTES

RESUMO. Os Pretos-velhos são entidades na Umbanda, conhecidos como espíritos de negros africanos escravizados, atuando no atendimento às pessoas que vão aos terreiros, em busca de auxílio para problemas variados. Objetivou-se analisar a estrutura da representação social dos pretos-velhos na Umbanda para seus fiéis e simpatizantes. Trata-se de estudo descritivo-exploratório, qualitativo, à luz da abordagem estrutural da Teoria das Representações Sociais. Realizado virtualmente por meio do *Google Forms*®, com 202 umbandistas ou simpatizantes da religião, captados através da técnica *Snowball*, via compartilhamento de *link* por *WhatsApp*, no

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período de 6 a 11 de novembro de 2020, que responderam a questões de perfil sociodemográfico e três evocações livres em resposta ao termo indutor 'Pretos-velho na Umbanda'. Os dados sociodemográficos foram analisados por estatística descritiva e os relativos às evocações por análise prototípica e de similitude. Os resultados apresentam a estrutura da representação nas dimensões conceitual, prática, afetiva-attitudinal, imagética e de ação humana, cujo provável núcleo central é composto pelos elementos 'amor, sabedoria, caridade e psicólogo'. Assim, os Pretos-velhos são compreendidos como entidades sábias, carinhosas, amorosas, empáticas, cuidadoras, acolhedoras, que ensinam resistência e resiliência na vida, com atuação semelhante aos profissionais da psicologia, podendo ser reconhecidos como psicólogos da umbanda. Sua representação para este grupo reside na imagem do negro escravizado, de características mais cristianizadas, defensor da moral cristã, como a paciência, a humildade e a caridade que, em conjunto com todo o contexto, possibilitam reforçar a ação humana da fé e da esperança na vida.

Palavras-chave: Representação social; umbanda; espiritualidade.

REPRESENTACIONES SOCIALES DEL PRETOS-VELHOS PARA UMBANDISTAS Y AMIGOS

RESUMEN. Los pretos-velhos son entidades en Umbanda, conocidos como los espíritus de los negros africanos esclavizados, que trabajan para ayudar a las personas que van a los terreiros en busca de ayuda para diversos problemas. El objetivo fue analizar la estructura de la representación social de los pretos-velhos en Umbanda para sus fieles y simpatizantes. Se trata de un estudio cualitativo, descriptivo-exploratorio, a la luz del enfoque estructural de la Teoría de las Representaciones Sociales. Realizado de forma virtual a través de Google Forms®, con 202 umbandistas o simpatizantes religiosos, captados a través de la técnica Snowball, mediante enlace compartido vía WhatsApp, del 6 al 11 de noviembre de 2020, quienes respondieron preguntas de perfil sociodemográfico y tres evocaciones libres como respuesta a la inducción término 'Pretos-velho na Umbanda'. Los datos sociodemográficos se analizaron mediante estadística descriptiva y los relacionados con las evocaciones mediante análisis prototípico y de similitud. Los resultados presentan la estructura de representación en las dimensiones conceptual, práctica, afectivo-actitudinal, imaginario y acción humana, cuyo probable núcleo central está compuesto por los elementos amor, sabiduría, caridad y psicólogo. Así, los Pretos-velhos son entendidos como entidades sabias, solidarias, amorosas, empáticas, solidarias, acogedoras, que enseñan resistencia y resiliencia en la vida, actuando de manera similar a los profesionales de la psicología, pudiendo ser reconocidos como psicólogos de la umbanda. Su representación para este colectivo reside en la imagen del hombre negro esclavizado, con rasgos más cristianizados, defensor de la moral cristiana, como la paciencia, la humildad y la caridad que, junto a todo el contexto, permiten reforzar la acción humana de la fe y esperanza en la vida.

Palabras clave: Representación social; umbanda; espiritualidad.

Introduction

Umbanda is a religion whose foundation and origin translate into controversial issues due to its historical, social, and cultural formation, related to the major changes that emerged at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. During this period, significant events in our history occurred, such as the abolition of slavery, the urbanization of society, the Proclamation of the Republic, and the end of slavery (Ortiz, 1999).

Certainly, accounts that attempt to identify the foundation of Umbanda encompass numerous narratives of cults involving Umbanda spirits, including those from periods before the landmark (19th century), as assumed by many researchers. This perspective can be found in various works on Umbanda and its roots, which have diverse characteristics and sometimes converge or diverge, especially regarding

the emergence of the religion, according to contributions from Negrão (1996), Birman (1985), Brown (1985), Carvalho and Bairrão (2017), and others.

However, regardless of the narratives or timeframes used to recognize the emergence of the religion, according to Negrão (1996), Umbanda is considered by its followers to be a genuinely Brazilian religion because it accompanies the ethnic formation of the nation, resulting in syncretism from Afro-Aboriginal-Christian cults. Therefore, it has a black matrix flanked by indigenous and European ones. Umbanda is based on spirit possession and worship, transforming marginalized social groups into religious symbols and preserving and valuing their memory through psychological reparation for the faithful (Bairrão, 2003).

For Lopes (2003, p. 70), the word Umbanda is a vocabulary derived from *Kimbundu* and *Umbundu*, whose meaning is “[...] the art of healing, magic, and medicine.” Silva and Scorsolini-Comin (2020) point out that people seek out these “terreiros” to address various issues, including illnesses of multiple causes. These issues mainly fall under the purview of the healing work carried out by entities known as caboclos and Pretos-Velhos.

Pretos-Velhos are, therefore, responsible for consultations with people who seek out Umbanda terreiros, since they present themselves as a reference for care, whose psychological and emotional focus is easily recognized by practitioners and sympathizers of the religion (Lages, 2019). They are recognized as spirits of enslaved African blacks and ancestors, with their outstanding characteristics, such as humility, kindness, and patience (Dias & Bairrão, 2011), but also having linked to them memories of insurgency, rebellion, and the fight for freedom, due to those who did not yield to total submission and obedience, fleeing from their masters (Dias & Bairrão, 2014).

Thus, it becomes relevant to understand the social thought of the group in question regarding the Pretos-Velhos in Umbanda, through the symbolic and religious construction of practical purposes of care, grounded in the historical-cultural recovery of Brazilian formation, in light of the Theory of Social Representations (TSR), which, according to Moscovici (1978, p. 78), refers to as “[...] a particular modality of knowledge, whose function is the elaboration of behavior and communication between individuals, thus explaining aspects of daily life.”

The social representation (SR) of the Preto-Velho by Umbandists and sympathizers of the religion allows us to recover important issues in the development of Brazilian religiosity, including health care, in view of its notorious recognition by the religion’s followers and, mainly, for granting space and opportunity for social and historical reparation. Marginalized and subjected to inhumane conditions in the past, Preto-Velho is now respected in Umbanda terreiros as a knowledgeable entity. The representation originates in the daily lives of the faithful, in conversations inside and outside the terreiros (Sá, 2015), and in the interaction with these entities, shaping the social thought of the group and, consequently, their knowledge, practices, and behaviors shared in the religious environment and in society.

Thus, this study contributes to theological knowledge, the human sciences, and health by broadening research horizons and favoring the observation of religious phenomena that can interfere with health and how individuals understand it. For example, Scorsolini-Comin (2014) offered psychological support in an Umbanda terreiro, in conjunction with spiritual consultations.

Therefore, once the religious potential of the behaviors, practices, and beliefs about the Preto-Velho and the way Umbanda understands the health-disease process is assumed, it is reasonable to examine the religious aspects of the group to understand its structure and the basis of recognition of the Preto-Velho in the context of care. Thus, it is imperative to inquire into the social representation of the Preto-Velho in Umbanda and its effect on the lives and/or health of the faithful and sympathizers. For this reason, the overall objective of the investigation was to analyze the structure of the SR (spiritual network) of Pretos-Velhos in Umbanda for their followers and sympathizers.

Method

This was a descriptive, exploratory, qualitative study, outlined on the theoretical-methodological framework of the structural approach of TSR (Abric, 2003). Participants were recruited using the snowball technique. Invitations to participate were sent via a link to the data collection instrument on the Google Forms platform. The authors (Umbandists and sympathizers), who are residents of the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, initiated the invitations via WhatsApp. The initial shares were intended for members of the

terreiros where the researchers participated. These members then forwarded the link to their contacts with similar profiles, and so on.

The Snowball technique, also known as snowball sampling, refers to a non-probabilistic sampling method, widely used in qualitative studies to reach participants or groups that are naturally difficult to capture or are not well known (Bockorni & Gomes, 2021). Google Forms is a Google Drive spreadsheet application integrated with Gmail that allows users to create and share online questionnaires (Mota, 2019).

To this end, the inclusion criteria for participants were: ≥ 18 years old at the time of data collection, identifying as an Umbandist or sympathizer of the religion, and having had contact with or frequented Umbanda terreiros. Twenty respondents were excluded because they were duplicates generated by the Forms report. It is important to emphasize that the research took place during the pandemic, when most terreiros suspended in-person activities, making virtual data collection possible. Additionally, the selection of the target audience is justified by their knowledge of and direct contact with Preto-Velhos during religious practices. As this is a study of social representations, the representational object must be socially relevant and important to the social group under investigation (Sá, 1998).

Thus, upon receiving the invitation via the Google Forms link, all information regarding the research and present in the Informed Consent Form was initially presented so that participants could be aware of and agree to the data collection. After consent, the research proceeded with the participant characterization section with seven variables (sex, age, self-declared race/color, place of residence, education, length of Umbanda practice, and what they are in Umbanda: for example, medium, consultant, sympathizer, or other).

Subsequently, the free word evocation technique was initiated. Thus, after the variables mentioned above, the following request followed: Write 3 words that immediately come to your mind in relation to the expression: Pretos-velhos in Umbanda. This is an associative technique, in which a stimulus is provided to the participant through a previously defined inducing term, following the criteria of interest of the study by the researcher, which aims to understand the contents and representational structure related to the social phenomenon (Oliveira & Gomes, 2015). Thus, free evocations make it possible to access the social thinking of the group about a given object (Wolter et al., 2022).

Therefore, 202 participants responded to the survey between November 6 and 11, 2020. Subsequently, the results were exported in the form of a Microsoft® Office Excel for Windows 2016 spreadsheet, which allowed the processing of the characterization data, through their relative and absolute frequencies, in addition to the standardization of the evocations with the creation of the dictionary of evoked terms.

After standardizing the terms, the corpus was formatted in Microsoft® Office Word for Windows 2016 to be inserted into the Software Esemble de Programmes Permettant l'analyse des Evocations (EVOC) 2005, which, in turn, calculated the frequency of evocation of each word, as well as the weighted average of evocation position and, thus, also calculated the average of the weighted average orders of evocation (Rang) which, together, allowed the prototypical analysis of the SR with the construction of the four-quadrants table, which distributed the elements into four quadrants, obeying frequencies and average order of evocation (OME) (Oliveira & Gomes, 2015).

It should be noted that these parameters were determined by the researchers after attempting to apply Zipf's Law, which generated empty quadrants for discussion and, therefore, was discarded in order to reach the elements and the internal organization of the SR (Brandão, 2021).

Continuing the description of the SR structure, the evoked elements that constitute the four-quadrant table were used for the similarity analysis proposed by Flament (1986). This analysis was carried out by calculating co-occurrence, which is the observation of at least two elements of the table being evoked by the same participant. This observation is expressed by the similarity index, which highlights the highest values as well as the greater number of connections between them.

The maximum similarity tree was constructed graphically through the established connections (Pecora & Sá, 2008). This tree was created with the participation of 163 of the initial 202 participants, with a similarity index of 0.03. This index was defined by the researchers to ensure an organized and uncluttered graphical demonstration. This approach provides a clearer picture of the potential centrality of this SR (Pecora & Sá, 2008).

This investigation also respected all ethical guidelines and regulations for research involving human beings, in accordance with Resolution No. 466/12 of the National Health Council. The Research Ethics Committee (CEP) approved the research with substantiated opinion number 4.380.513 and certificate of presentation for ethical consideration (CAAE) number 31050020.0.00005282.

Results and discussion

The study participants were predominantly women (65.35%) between the ages of 29 and 39 (33.66%). Most were white (55.94%) and resided in the state of Rio de Janeiro (90.10%), primarily in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro (52%). Most had completed higher education (50.50%) and had been Umbanda practitioners for at least five years (32.67%). Most were also self-declared Umbanda mediums (88.61%). This profile is similar to the results of Spezani et al. (2020). Furthermore, Morais (2020) highlights that those living in Rio de Janeiro strongly share the symbolic characteristics of the Umbanda religion through the set formed by their identity, beliefs, and values.

In addition to this, more than half of the participants self-identified as white. This can be explained by the recovery of the historical-religious constitution of Umbanda in Brazil, specifically in the southeastern region. Some religious leaders at the time sought recognition for Umbanda as a genuinely Brazilian religion. They approached so-called Kardecist Spiritism following a whitening movement to distance themselves from the image of African blacks that gave rise to the macumbas of Rio de Janeiro (Morais, 2019; Ortiz, 1999).

Taking into account the period in which the research was carried out (2020) and the space in which most of its participants are situated (Rio de Janeiro), the results demonstrate a different scenario than that found by Negrão (1996) in their research conducted over two decades in São Paulo. At that time and in that context, Negrão (1994) attributed low levels of education and little interest in political, cultural, or professional studies to the Pais de Santo, who pursued study initiatives only within their religious universe. The present research, however, demonstrates a different profile of participants who have spent a relatively short time in Umbanda. More than half of the participants have completed higher education, and some have even obtained graduate degrees. These findings are corroborated by Brandão (2021). Therefore, it is a different reality, a different time, and a different space of concentration for the religious community.

Regarding what is understood by medium in Umbanda, Campelo and Monteiro (2017, p. 115) consider “[...] the one who serves as an intermediary between spirits and human beings [...]”, that is, individuals and guides and/or entities, such as exus, caboclos, Pretos-Velhos and others, who manifest themselves in their mediums through incorporation, whose objective is the practice of charity. This charity, probably, as rightly pointed out by Negrão (1994), is absorbed from Christian morality of Kardecist influences, especially in Rio de Janeiro, from the 1920s onwards, with the institutionalization of the religion by followers of Kardecism, from the middle class, and mainly fond of caboclos and Pretos-Velhos.

Concerning the technique of free evocations, a total of 606 words were recorded, of which 100 were different. Thus, a minimum frequency of nine and an average of 18 were adopted, in addition to the average of the MOEs, also known as Rang, 2.1, for the construction of the four-quadrant table, as presented in Chart 1.

Chart 1. Four-quadrant table referring to the evocations of the inducing term 'Preto-Velho in Umbanda'

M.O.E.	< 2.1			≥ 2.1		
Average frequency	Evoked term	Freq.	M.O.E.	Evoked term	Freq.	M.O.E.
≥ 18	Love	89	1.775	Humility	25	2.160
	Wisdom	79	1.759	Reception	22	2.136
	Charity	53	1.830	Faith	19	2.105
	Psychologist	29	1.517	Peace	19	2.158
≥ 9 < 18	Affection	17	2.000	Respect	17	2.353
	Counselor	14	1.929	Hope	12	2.417
	Guidance	11	2.000	Care	10	2.200
				Gratitude	10	2.300
				Protection	9	2.222

Observation. $N = 202$; Min. Freq. = 9; Average Freq. = 18; Rang = 2.1. M.O.E. = mean order of evocation.
Source: The authors.

In attention to the inducing term Preto-Velho in Umbanda, Chart 1 shows the probable central core of the SR, the cognemes *love, wisdom, charity, and psychologist*, expressed in the Upper Left Quadrant (ULQ), relative to the average frequency ≥ 18 and Rang < 2.1 . Regarding the contrast zone, located in the Lower Left Quadrant (LLQ), *affection, counselor, and guidance* are observed, with minimum frequencies ≥ 9 and averages < 18 and Rang < 2.1 . Considering the peripheries, *humility, welcoming, having faith, and peace* are observed constituting the first periphery, in the Upper Right Quadrant (URQ), which obeyed the average frequency ≥ 18 and Rang ≥ 2.1 ; Finally, *respect, hope, care, gratitude, and protection* appear in the second periphery, that is, the Lower Right Quadrant (LRQ), whose minimum frequencies were ≥ 9 and averages were < 18 , in addition to the Rang ≥ 2.1 .

As Abric (2003) asserts, it is more important to understand the internal organization of an SR than to identify its elements. Through the position that an element occupies in the four-quadrant table, its importance to the investigated group is recognized to a greater or lesser degree, and two SRs related to the same inducing term can be distinguished. Furthermore, this allows us to observe the representational dimensions identified by Moscovici (1978), such as the information/concept dimension, the attitudinal dimension, and the representation/image field dimension. Other dimensions are based on the researcher's empirical analysis.

Considering also that the central core of an SR has the functions of generating (giving meaning), organizing (unifying the elements), and stabilizing the representation, it is clear that the cognemes belonging to the peripheral system are organized around it and gain meaning through the influence of its elements (Abric, 2003).

Thus, it is possible to affirm that *love, wisdom, charity, and psychologist* are the most important elements of the SR for Umbandists, as they form the probable central core, uniting the most frequent and

least MOE cognemes. They are also characterized as consensual, rigid, and coherent. This defines the homogeneity of the group and is linked to its collective, historical, and social memory. These elements resist transformations and are insensitive to the immediate context. They organize and give meaning to the SR (Abric, 2003).

Regarding the peripheral system, Abric (2003, pp. 38-39) states that it contains the most accessible, concrete, and living elements of the SR that are located, corresponding to the functions of “[...] concretization, regulation, prescription of behaviors, protection of the central core, and personalization [...]”. Therefore, it is flexible, evolutionary, sensitive to the immediate context, and assumes integration of experiences at the individual level. It also accepts heterogeneity in the group, allowing adaptation to objective reality and differences in content.

It is then observed that, when observing the functions of the central and peripheral systems, as well as the set of their elements, the SR focuses on five empirical dimensions: conceptual, practical, affective-attitudinal, imagistic, and human action. Furthermore, it is highlighted that the elements present in the contrast zone reinforce the SR, as they do not demonstrate a subgroup with cognemes that contrast with each other, especially those related to the central core.

In view of the dimensional analysis of the elements, the conceptual dimension brings together the elements present in the literature to describe Pretos-Velhos: *wisdom, humility, welcoming, counseling, and guidance*. The practical dimension demonstrates, among many others, how Pretos-Velhos work in Umbanda: *charity and care*. The affective-attitudinal dimension is represented by feelings: *love, peace, affection, respect, and gratitude*. The imagery portrays an analogy between professional psychologists based on the elements present in the conceptual dimension, combined with the idea of spiritual protection, present in the imagination of the followers: *psychologist and protection*. And the human action aspect refers to what the Preto-Velho encourages in Umbanda followers, in terms of behavior and daily life challenges: *to have faith and hope*. Therefore, from this perspective, it is possible to deepen and discuss the SR, based on its internal and dimensional organization.

Lages (2019) considers the Pretos-Velhos and Pretas-Velhas in Umbanda as wise, welcoming, charitable, and healing elders who are endowed with specific knowledge about medicinal plants. They are known for their ability to help and support people in times of need and fragility. This competence is mainly justified by their history and past suffering due to years of slavery and subjugation. They learned from their life experiences how to overcome adversity. It is also added that the social, political, and religious context of the Catholic Church led the Preto-Velho to be symbolized by his Christianized behavior, with virtues similar to those of the Saints, such as resignation, patience, *humility, charity, and kindness*.

On the other hand, Dias and Bairrão (2014) argue that the sacralization of the life stories of Pretos Velhos includes those rebellious and insurgent enslaved people in the memory and social imagination of Brazilians. This contradicts the representation of Pretos-Velhos for the social group investigated and is relevant to point out, as it challenges generalizations and simplifications about their existence in Umbanda, which is so plural, diverse, and dynamic.

In the same sense, Maia and Ferreira (2019) understand the Preto-Velho as the domesticated slave, given that they are passive, peaceful, submissive, tamed, subjugated, while the term *domestic* can also be considered in relation to what is understood by home, protection, comfort, shelter and support, configuring a symbolic character of a cultural and psychosocial nature for this entity. Mello and Oliveira (2019) describe this perspective when addressing the Preto-Velho as an ancestral African entity that provides comfort, a word of *affection*, and *hope*, of comfort, helping people persevere through difficulties and not abandon their life projects or their own lives.

Dias (2011) emphasizes that describing the Preto-Velho in Umbanda does not allow for restricted paths that condense generic characteristics of submission, Christianization, humility, domestication, or insertion into the domestic sphere. The fundamental aspect of his representation lies in ancestry, which, in turn, adds affiliation, belonging, and Afro-Brazilian, Afro-descendant, or even Brazilian identity. His role is notable for teaching coexistence with alterity, harmoniously. However, he neither denies nor combats it nor submits to or surrenders to oppressive authorities.

Therefore, the role of the Preto-Velho is symbolically reappropriated within the reified universe, through the role of the *psychologist*, as they are compared to these professionals due to the similarities in their actions (Rezende, 2020). Firm in listening, guidance, counseling, support, and acceptance, “[...] as

'popular psychologists,' they take care of the 'ills of the spirit' [...]. Thus, "[...] the psychologists of Umbanda par excellence are Pretos-Velhos" (Dias, 2011, p. 260, author's emphasis). Healing and counseling are their specialties, and they are therefore recognized as "[...] doctors and psychologists of spirituality" (Dias, 2011, p. 256). To better understand the similarities between Pretos-Velhos and psychologists, in their roles of caring for people, Dias (2011, p. 220, author's emphasis) adds:

[...] any similarities (and there are many) between what the Pretos-Velhos elaborate through the symbolic path of Umbanda, and what psychologists and psychoanalysts try to elaborate, obviously within a very different set of tools, with their clients in clinical offices, certainly demonstrate the value and refinement of popular religiosity in placing itself at the service of the deepest and most universal questions that touch the reality of the "human being."

Brazilian culture and media attention have portrayed the Preto-Velho as welcoming and caring. For example, the Paraíso do Tuiuti samba school in Rio de Janeiro illustrated the work of the Preto-Velho when he was an enslaved black man caring for another enslaved black man who had been whipped in the 2018 Carnival parade through the staging of its front commission, entitled *The Cry of Freedom* (Rezende, 2020). Many symbols representing the image, physical characteristics, personality, and actions of this entity were brought forth. The Preto-Velho lives on in the imagination of the Brazilian people.

Furthermore, it is clear that recognizing the role of the Preto-Velho in Umbanda, as well as the descriptions and characteristics expressed by the followers anchored in the period of slavery, highlights the historicity, the social memory, as well as the social and cultural marks that it left on its people, represented by the Pretos-Velhos and present in the common sense of Brazilians.

On the other hand, the archetype of the charitable old man discussed above suggests that charity, more than a practice, seems to be a social norm agreed upon by its followers, which is why it is presented in a prominent place, in the probable central core, that is, it tends to be non-negotiable for the group and, therefore, represented with greater intensity in the work of the Preto-Velho in Umbanda. Above all, the charity mediated by the relationship of Pretos-Velhos with the faithful reinforces their role as *popular psychologists*, as already pointed out by Dias (2011).

That said, it is relevant to reflect on the contributions of Jodelet (2001), especially regarding the social structure and conditions of sharing an SR in which subjects are embedded, since this process involves issues inherent to the inscription, position, and social belonging of social actors. These conditions directly influence the development and sharing of an SR because ready-made representational constructs that are not sensitive to an individual's cognitive processes translate into dominant ideologies that are already defined by the social structure.

Therefore, it is understood that *charity*, which figures as a social norm, ensures the inscription and social belonging of the group, which is formed by individuals who agree with these codes, including the function of guiding and justifying behaviors and ensuring identities. This is exemplified by the practice of charity because, without it, subjects would not identify as Umbandists. This is the significant difference that brings the image of Pretos-Velhos closer to psychologists while also distancing them. The latter must be paid for their work, which restricts the charitable aspect to Pretos-Velhos alone.

Furthermore, the influence of the image of the Preto-Velho cannot be denied, for all that he represents. This includes his life story, his position in the Umbanda religion, and his embodiment of resistance and resilience in social struggles for better living conditions, equality, and respect. These struggles combat intolerance, prejudice, and the theft of space from so-called minorities, as Purificação et al. (2019) and Rezende (2020) seem to agree.

In conjunction with the entire archetype of the Preto-Velho discussed above, Purificação et al. (2019) note that the sessions of Pretos-Velhos are attended by people seeking peace, health, strength, and encouragement, driven mainly by their faith in the sacred, and where respect for nature and the entities of Umbanda rituals is observed. Thus, it becomes clear how much the Preto-Velho can bring people closer to a transcendental, immaterial dimension of existence, without, however, denying the physical dimension and its direct relationship with spirituality. With this, physical and mental health undergo specific spiritual and religious care, which objectively impacts the lives of those who have faith in these possibilities in a biopsychosocial and spiritual context.

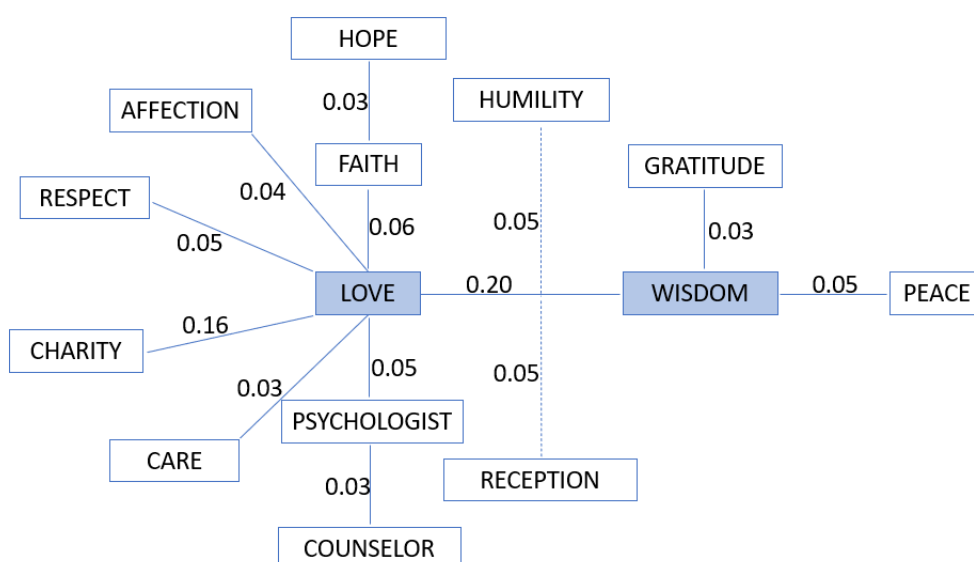
Within this universe, Rezende (2018) also highlights that although the historicity referring to the Preto-Velho to his position as an African ancestor is strong, the faithful of Umbanda speak of a familiar relationship with these entities. This makes the issue of old age stand out, portraying them as loving, caring, and patient grandparents, inspiring *respect* and *gratitude*, and strengthening the bond by considering them as family. The Preto-Velho in Umbanda symbolizes and gives new meaning to the sacralization of enslaved Black people.

Thus, the conceptual dimension of the SR encompasses the characteristics that best describe Pretos Velhos socio-historically, culturally, and religiously within the context of Umbanda. The practical dimension reveals their actions to the faithful. The affective-attitudinal dimension expresses how emotions influence the group's social thought, as noted by Campos and Rouquette (2003). This influence is reflected in the direction of behaviors and the group's evaluative process of the object.

The imagistic dimension is illustrated at a crossroads where the reified universe and the theological meet and communicate, revealing the role of the psychologist in the image of the Preto-Velho, and vice versa. The dimension of human action is also inserted into this context, which is plural, complex, and specific. This allows subjects to recognize the immaterial aspects of life that give it meaning.

In accordance with the analysis of the representational structure, Figure 1 graphically shows the connectivity between the elements of Chart 1 through the maximum similarity tree.

Figure 1. Maximum tree of similarity of the evocations of the inducing term 'Preto-Velho in Umbanda'



Observation. $N = 163$.

Source: The authors.

First, it should be noted that the cognemes that have more connections and higher similarity indices favor the finding of probable centrality, along with the prototypical analysis shown in the four-quadrant table. Therefore, love and wisdom stand out, due to their greater number of connections, with *love* having nine, whose highest similarity indices are with *wisdom* (0.20), *charity* (0.16), *faith* (0.06), *respect* (0.05), *psychologist* (0.05), *humility* (0.05), *acceptance* (0.05), *affection* (0.04), and *care* (0.03). And *wisdom* totaling five connections, whose highest similarity indices are with *love* (0.20), *humility* (0.05), *acceptance* (0.05), *peace* (0.05), and *gratitude* (0.03). In addition, *having faith* was also linked to *hope* (0.03) and *psychologist to counselor* (0.03).

Thus, the tree of similarity is linear but leans to the left due to the greater concentration of connections carried by the cogneme *love*, which seems to guide the SR and give meaning to the image of the Preto-Velho in Umbanda by personifying the feeling itself and focusing on the previously discussed affective-attitudinal dimension.

In fact, everything seems to be centered on love. Rezende (2020) argues that the environment in which Pretos-Velhos interact with the faithful and consultants is imbued with love, protection, comfort, and affection. This environment fosters reciprocal social support, in which consultants and Pretos-Velhos can feel cared for. Thus, the role of the Preto-Velho as a psychologist and counselor is anchored in providing care based on empathetic listening, emotional support, and helping individuals achieve physical, mental, and spiritual balance through love, care, and reception.

However, they are not only recognized as psychologists. They are also considered active in cases of health and illness, using medicinal plants and herbs for healing. In addition to this context of care, the links evidenced by the tree of similarity indicate that they are intrinsic to the representational structure and form the basis of the main foundations of Umbanda, such as love and charity (Purificação et al., 2019).

Furthermore, regarding the use of medicinal plants and herbs, it is important to clarify that this practice carried out by Pretos-Velhos converges towards the continuous construction and intergenerational sharing of valuable cultural knowledge, whose healing properties are increasingly being investigated, discovered, used and confirmed, through their clinical efficacy, by scientific studies in the field of health (Silva et al., 2019).

Returning to discussions within the religious sphere, we can understand the connections between love and respect, wisdom and gratitude, and wisdom and peace. We can also see the connections in the triads of love, faith, and hope; love, humility, and wisdom; and love, acceptance, and wisdom. The Preto-Velho archetype, alive in the imagination of the Brazilian people and beloved by his followers, embodies charity, respect, acceptance, gratitude, and peace. This movement is based on the triad of love, faith, and hope because faith in the Pretos-Velhos' care and the love they give, as well as the love of Umbanda, fuel hope in overcoming life's adversities.

Throughout the archetype of the Preto-Velho, alive in the imagination of the Brazilian people and filled with affection by his followers, the charity that they humbly offer to those in need with love teaches respect, and their peculiar wisdom in the form of reception strengthens the feeling of gratitude and the sensation of peace. This movement is based on the triad of love, faith, and hope, because faith in the care of the Pretos-Velhos and the love given by them and by Umbanda are the fuels for having hope in overcoming life's adversities.

Final considerations

The SR of Pretos-Velhos in Umbanda, for its followers and sympathizers, demonstrates a structure rooted in conceptual, practical, affective-attitudinal, imagistic, and human action dimensions. Its descriptions are anchored in the process of enslavement of African ancestors during the Afro-diasporic period in Brazil, present in the social memory of the Brazilian people and in the social representations of Umbanda practitioners. Thus, it is strongly symbolized in the affective values of the group, which foster attitudes of respect and gratitude, as well as the recognition of their main characteristics of wisdom, protection, and humility.

For this reason, the Preto-Velho is represented by this group as a psychologist, observing the functions described from the perspective of the reified universe, in the act of welcoming, advising, guiding, and caring, in an empathetic way that, together with the entire context, makes it possible to reinforce the human action of faith and hope in life. It is possible, then, to recognize the Preto-Velho as a *popular psychologist* or psychologist of Aruanda, of the Beyond, of Umbanda.

Therefore, through the Umbanda worldview and cosmogony, this investigation describes how the Preto-Velho is understood by the faithful and sympathizers, including pointing to forms of religious care focused on health in the biopsychosocial and spiritual spheres. However, it should be noted that the social thought of the investigated group seems to lead to the understanding of the Preto-Velho as a Christianized enslaved Black person who embodies Christian moral values, such as humility, patience, and charitable actions.

Finally, it is plausible that future research will delve deeper into this topic, incorporating participant observation and the dissemination of these religious practices, which are prevalent in the popular culture of the Brazilian people. This research could also be extended to non-adherents, allowing for comparisons of representations, provided that these comparisons are relevant to the representational object.

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