

## **The Role of Music in Work Activities / *O papel da música nas atividades de trabalho***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article discusses the role of music in work activities by considering music an intersemiotic discursive practice. It uses an interdisciplinary approach composed of discourse analysis, ethnomusicology and ergology in order to be able to examine the topic including music and work factors, put together by discourse. Firstly, the boundaries of traditional work songs are expanded through two unconventional examples: one in an advertisement, and the other one in a product packaging. Then through that expanded framework, it explores examples of two Brazilian communities, one from Bahia and the other one from Maranhão (both in Brazilian Northeast) that sing while they work in extractivist and agricultural activities. The conclusion points out that the relationship between music and work far surpasses the traditional framing of work songs. To better understand the role of music in the discourse of work activities, scholars need to take into account the renormalization which is brought into play and the discursive communities concerned by those complex discursive practices.

**KEYWORDS:** Language and work; Music at work; Work songs; Intersemiotic discursive practices; Renormalization.

### **RESUMO**

*O artigo discute o papel da música no trabalho, considerando a atividade musical como uma prática discursiva intersemiótica. Para ser capaz de examinar o tema tanto do ponto de vista da música quanto do trabalho, colocados juntos pelo discurso, a abordagem utilizada é interdisciplinar, composta por análise do discurso, etnomusicologia e ergologia. Primeiramente as fronteiras do conceito tradicional de cantos de trabalho são expandidas através da análise de dois exemplos pouco convencionais: uma peça publicitária e uma embalagem de produto. A partir desse viés expandido, o artigo explora cantos de duas comunidades brasileiras, da Bahia e do Maranhão, que cantam enquanto trabalham em atividades agrícolas e extrativistas. A conclusão ressalta que a relação entre música e trabalho ultrapassa em muito a abordagem estreita dos cantos de trabalho. Para compreendê-la, é preciso levar em conta as renormalizações postas em jogo e as comunidades discursivas implicadas por estas práticas discursivas complexas.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Linguagem e trabalho; Música no trabalho; Cantos de trabalho; Práticas discursivas intersemióticas; Renormalização.

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## 1 First Steps

This article aims to highlight how music and work are discursive practices and showcases the importance of the relationship between music and labor in different kinds of work. The current literature on music and work comes mainly from perspectives in anthropology, ethnomusicology, and folklore studies. These fields consider this issue in terms of the “work song” repertoire – songs that are sung by traditional communities only in traditional ways of working and singing. Even this well-known field of study lacks in research if one wants to move beyond folklore. Here is a contribution to fill some of that gap with this discussion about work songs.

A larger intent of this article is to displace the narrow “work-song-approach” as best characterized by the search for untouched authenticity performed by idealized traditional workers. Instead, I investigate the role of musical discourse in different work activities while attempting not to pre-judge the ways that workers use music in their day-to-day activities often without noticing it. To do so, the article first pushes the boundaries of work songs through unconventional contexts and then explores some examples of semi-traditional work songs through that expanded framework.

In the field of Applied Linguistics, the study of the relationship between language and work is an important locus to investigate and comprehend these two universal human activities and their mutual implications: language and work. In Brazil, the Research Group *Atelier: linguagem e trabalho* [*Atelier: Language and Work*] has studied on this relationship since 1997, through two main axes: a) to investigate the discursive practices in work situations and; b) to study various discourses about work in different fields, e.g., in the media, in advertising, in politics, in law, in work associations (SOUZA-E-SILVA, 2005).

Throughout both my post-doctoral research and my participation in *Atelier*, I intend to investigate the relationship between language and work from the specific locus of musical language as a universal human practice. In all human groups in many times and places, musical activity (often, but not always, accompanied by sung speech) goes together with work in some way. It is possible to mention quite different examples from this phenomenon like the Viking sea shanties, the *Capinas de Roça* [*Hoeing the Field*] from Minas Gerais (Brazil), or the work songs from African American slaves in the

United States. But I can also highlight the use of headphones in contemporary offices or the migrant music that we can often hear in restaurant kitchens around the world as separate from the music played for the spaces reserved for restaurant patrons.

The use of music at work takes part in the discourse practices of labor activities. With that approach in mind, it is possible to ask: what does music at work inform about language at work? Furthermore, why and how do people use this specific form of discourse while working?

To respond to those questions and to overcome the tendency of only collecting folkloric eccentricity, this article will mobilize three theoretical and methodological approaches in an interdisciplinary triangulation: discourse analysis, ethnomusicology, and ergology.

With this as a foundation, and by way of pushing the topic's boundaries, I will talk about two examples of music at work from 2014: one of them in an advertisement, and the other one in a product packaging. These two examples are creations of the advertising industry, and the musical discourses therein are used to sell products rather than arise organically from a population of workers; thus, it is important to analyze the circulation of discourses about music and work in this different field.

Finally, I will present an analysis of two films, which are part of the Projeto Sons e Imagens da Terra - Cantos de Trabalho no Brasil [Sounds and Images of Land Project - Work Songs in Brazil], comprised by films of different communities that work in rural Brazil, recorded by the Brazilian Ministry of Agrarian Development. The two films are part of the broader corpus of my post-doctoral research.

The conclusion points out that even in this “work-song-oriented” material from the Ministry of Agrarian Development, the presence of music at work activities is more complex than a folkloristic collecting project could indicate.

## **2 Interdisciplinarity: Discourse Analysis, Ethnomusicology, Ergology**

Korzynski, Pickering and Robertson (2013) assert that:

In the study of music at work, the conceptual approach must necessarily be inter-disciplinary. We want to be able to examine the topic in a way that will allow us a better understanding of both music and work (p.9).

In agreement with the above statement, an investigation of music and work needs interdisciplinary approach that is, for example, common to the demarche of Applied Linguistics. Thus, I will mobilize three different lenses to view the object of my study.

Discourse analysis provides a way to see language as a historically and socially situated practice in which the meaning is considered in its link to *discursive communities* (CHARAUDEAU; MAINGUENEAU, 2002) seen as social groups that produce and expand a certain kind of discourse. In this sense, discourse is not an external point of view, nor is it an ideological extra that one can append to language. Discourse is a social practice, constrained by language and also by social positioning, and, thus, discourse is a meeting point between language and history. Another notion that is important to my work is the notion of *intersemiotic discursive practices*, developed by Dominique Maingueneau (1984). There he argues that discourse is not limited to verbal life, but rather it encompasses institutions, ways of moving, ways of dressing, ways of living, and I also add: musical practices.

One challenge of interdisciplinary research is to be rigorous with the theoretical frameworks and data that form the basis of the study. In this sense, a study that expands the concept of discourse beyond verbal materiality while also paying close attention to musical aspects requires a specific theory and method. The musical approach in this study comes from ethnomusicology, a field that sees music as culture, a practice that is not only placed in a “cultural context,” but also a practice that forms and transforms traditions, values, and shared systems.<sup>1</sup> Ethnomusicology provides a way to understand music at work which is compatible with music as a discursive practice, as constrained by musical language and also by historical and sociological positioning. Thus, the articulations between discourse analysis and ethnomusicology come from the theoretical principles of both disciplines, and for this article, I draw from two main principles from two scholars. I utilize John Blacking’s principle that music is an important part of human experience of living, and that “the majority of us live far below our potential, because of the oppressive nature of most societies” (1974, p.116), which creates a division between few elected and many incapable to play, sing, and dance. I also borrow Thomas Turino’s approach to “music as social life,” with his warning that “music is not a unitary form of art, but

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<sup>1</sup> See Netll (2005) for a good outlook of the discipline's history.

rather that this term refers to fundamentally distinct types of activities that fulfill different needs and ways of being human” (2008, p.1). That statement leads him to propose a distinction between music as participatory or presentational events.

In addition to discourse analysis and ethnomusicology, the specificity of my subject also claims knowledge about work. The Brazilian research group *Atelier: Language and Work*, where I develop this research, shares a concept of work as a human activity in a broader sense than as only a paid service in a commercial society (SCHWARTZ, 2011a). Based in a pluridisciplinary approach called ergology, proposed mainly by the French philosopher Yves Schwartz, the activity is seen as, “an impulse of life and of health, without preset boundaries, that synthesizes, crosses and links everything that the disciplines represents separately: the body and the soul; the individual and the collective; the doing and the values; the private and the professional; the imposed and the desired” (DURRIVE; SCHWARTZ, 2008, p.23).<sup>2</sup>

Ergology also postulates that every single work activity is never done exactly as it had been thought before happening. Sometimes the difference between what had been thought before and what is actually performed is huge, but sometimes it is microscopic. However, this difference is always there, and it is called *renormalization* (SCHWARTZ, 2010, 2011b).

With these three lenses, I seek to position music as a part of the discursive practices of work. As it will be explained in the last section through the comparison of four analyzed examples, the musical language always take part in some kind of renormalization in different intersemiotic discursive practices of work. These renormalizations have multiple functions in workers’ life, one of which, a very important one, is to create, replace, or reinforce discursive communities. Since music as social life always implies discourses, identities and belonging, it is also needful to analyze whether the musical event that occurs is participatory or presentational, according to Thomas Turino’s concepts (2008).

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<sup>2</sup> Text in original: “um impulso de vida, de saúde, sem limite predefinido, que sintetiza, cruza e liga tudo o que se representa separadamente: o corpo e o espírito; o individual e o coletivo; o fazer e os valores; o privado e o profissional; o imposto e o desejado”.

### 3 An Exploratory Expedition: Two Examples

When I started this research, I thought I was looking for “work songs.” But how can one comprehend and explain when music at work is not sung? And when it is not part of a traditional and pre-industrial society? How do we comprehend the two examples that follow?

#### 3.1 Closing the Office Door

The advertisement below (Fig. 1), from “BOSE Headphones and Headsets,” was in Southwest Airlines in-flight magazine (*Spirit*, January/2014, p.9). Here it is possible to see some relationships between music and work, which cannot be put in terms of work songs.

I’ll go through this ad briefly, obviously not straining the analysis in terms of persuasion and mobilization of imagetic and linguistic elements. Even though it is an interesting point, it would be out of the proposal for this article, for it intends to highlight and analyze the role of music in work activities.

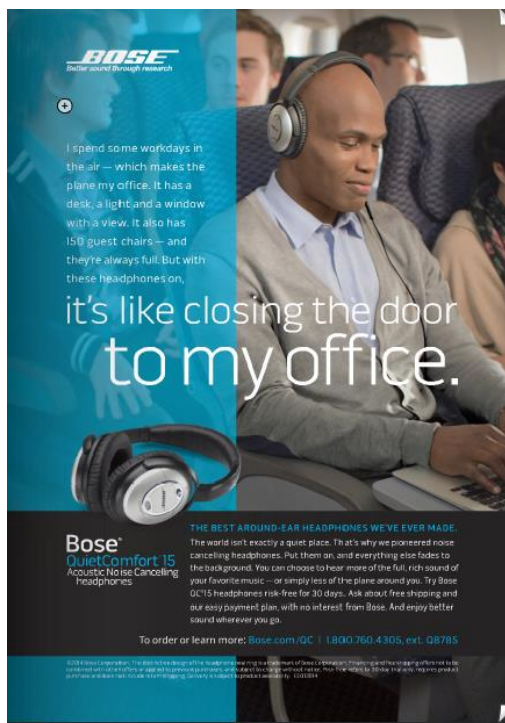


Fig. 1: Advertisement from BOSE headphones and headsets in Southwest Airlines in-flight magazine (*Spirit*, January/2014, p.9).

The image features a man seated on a plane seat in the foreground. The plane is full; it is possible to see people in his side and also behind him. They are talking and looking through the window. The entire scene could indicate an improper place for concentration, but the man is working on his laptop and his expression is serene. He is wearing a headphone, and we can conclude that it is a *BOSE* one. The ad copy in first person singular composes the visual scene, and it is expected that the reader comprehends it as a thought or an explanation coming from that man foreground. He *says* that some of his workdays are spent on planes, which could make it difficult to work and use the time (“150 guest chairs,” “always full”). But with “these headphones on,” he can concentrate, as if he closed the door to his office.

In another section of the advertisement at the bottom of the page (delimited by a black stripe), there is a different kind of ad copy, in first person plural, but the enunciator does not include the man of the text who is wearing a headphone. “We,” in this part of the advertisement, is the enterprise *BOSE*, which presents the product as “the best around ear headphones that we've ever made.” That affirmation attributes a superior quality to the headphone and provides the enterprise with a technological *ethos* (MAINGUENEAU, 2008) because it implies that they are used to making highly technological products. The message of the advertisement is reinforced by the slogan right below the name of the enterprise, on the top left side of the page: “BOSE - better sound through research.”

There are two different discursive tones in this advertisement: one, in first person singular, personal and informal, with a businessman giving his *testimony* as a regular user of the product; the other, in first person plural, with technical information about the headphone *signed* by the enterprise. In the second, the reader is informed that this headphone is special because it “cancels acoustic noise.” With this resource, the user can choose whether to listen to his “favorite music” or to create a silent atmosphere. And in this case, the sonic landscape is responsible for changing the environment of the plane to provide an adequate space to work.

### **3.2 Singing and Simply Sparkling**

The package of this dishwashing brush, from “EVRI HOLDER Products” (Fig. 2), presents a young woman singing, using the brush as a microphone, while she washes

the dishes, which we can notice due to the plate in her hand. The bubbles all over the scene fill the place as an index <sup>3</sup> of freedom and amusement while also reminding us that the material of work in this case is soap and water. The woman is both dressed to perform labor and dressed to go out and have fun: she wears comfortable pants, a T-shirt and a scarf in her head, but at the same time, a beautiful checkered shirt with a sexy knot, pearl earrings, red nails, and makeup.



Fig. 2: Dishwashing brush package, from “EVRI HOLDER Products.” Picture taken at HEB Supermarket, Austin, TX, USA, in March/2014.

The style and the colors of the clothes, makeup and scarf, and also her attitude echoes a famous icon <sup>4</sup> of women as workers that has remained in the imaginary of the United States since 1943. It has become an important image of feminine power and liberation since the 1980s, known as *Rosie the Riveter* with her famous “We can do it!” slogan (Fig. 3).

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<sup>3</sup> Following Turino’s use of Peircean semiotics, indices are “signs of experience and emotion [...], they are signs of our lives, not signs about them” (TURINO, 1999, pp.234-235).

<sup>4</sup> Following Turino’s use of Peircean semiotics, icons are “a sign that is related to its object through some type of resemblance between them” (TURINO, 1999, p.226).





Fig. 3: Poster produced by Howard Miller in 1943 as a propaganda to encourage women's work in factories during the World War II.

And what is this “it” that the discourse of the package is saying that the woman from *EVRI* dishwasher brush can do, and by extension all of the women who view this package and who incorporate this ethos into their lives? We can sing while we work! We can be efficient at doing the dishes, and at the same time we can have fun and feel beautiful doing so.

The pun in the slogan, as a good aphorization (MAINGUENEAU, 2010a), summarizes this discourse, “simply sparkling”: anyone who uses the *EVRI*L dishwasher brush can just turn the dishes into simply sparkling ones; at the same time, she can have fun, pretending to be a music star, simply sparkling, while singing a song and accomplishing her labor.

### 3.3 Reflecting on the Expedition

Of course those two examples have to do with work and with music, but how can we connect them to work songs? All of the studies about work songs say that the practice of singing them is a phenomenon of traditional societies and that they are dying or they are already dead. Most of the literature about work songs is seeking to record and preserve *authentic manifestations*.

The first clear questioning about the narrowness of the label *work songs* came from Korczynski, Pickering and Robertson (2013), in their effort to comprehend the causes of the huge lack of studies about the relationship between music and work,

pernicious for both music and work studies. The authors say that “if we break free of the conceptual straitjacket of 'work song' to focus on singing at work, we are able to hear a great deal more, and a great deal more clearly” (2013, p.14).

Going even further, I think that we do not need to stay attached to “singing at work” because sometimes what happens is that workers play an instrument, hum, whistle, listen to music, or dance at work. In this exploratory expedition, the “straitjacket of ‘work song’” could not be farther. Now, through that expanded framework, I will analyze two examples of Brazilian communities from the states of Bahia and Maranhão (Brazilian northeast). In the final part, the article will outline some common points of those four events that somehow involve music at work and it will integrate some notions of discourse analysis, ethnomusicology and ergology to get to more general conclusions.

The *Images and Sounds of Land Project - Work Songs in Brazil*, from the Ministry of Agrarian Development, the source for two videos that I will analyze in this article, is “work-song-oriented” as stated in the title (*Work Songs in Brazil*). For this reason, it is possible to notice from the unedited footage from the documentary that many times in these films, there is a reconstruction of a work scene. Its focus seems to be guided to reach a filmic post edition result, the closest to *authentic traditional songs*.

To give just two brief examples, I will mention one episode in the community of Jequitibá, in the state of Minas Gerais (Brazilian southeast), and another episode in the community of Propriá, in the state of Sergipe (Brazilian northeast). In the first one, a member of the project team asks a farmer, who will perform a Capina de Roça [Hoeing the Field] to wear an older and holed hat in the film instead of the one he was wearing. This attitude reveals the need of registering a poor and humble stereotype of worker. In the second example, a member of the project asks a group of women to sing songs in the middle of the rice field, pretending that they were picking rice, but they were actually just moving their arms in the air. Here, the work activity only pretended to be done so that the song would seem more inserted in reality.

In the material, there are many other examples of the effort to record the most *authentic* work songs of the most *authentic* people. What I am describing as *the search for authenticity* are scenes, ways of work, people and behaviors that match with an imaginary of simplicity, purity, untouchability that many times accompany folkloristic ideas. I am not saying that these efforts could not be interesting and valuable. I believe

that beautiful songs are now recorded and I also believe that the general public in Brazil knows almost nothing about these songs. Thus, it is important to promote these songs inside and outside the communities. However, I want to problematize the “work-song-oriented-approach,” which in many cases hides – or erases – what does not fit in the idealized imaginary.

In the following section, I will describe part of the rural work in Brazil to better explain the films of the two communities.

#### **4 Rural Work in Brazil**

Although I expect to be able to arrive at some generalizations in the conclusion, here I focus on two Brazilian communities that sing while working, in different ways. As stated above, these two films are part of the Project of the Brazilian Ministry of Agrarian Development. For the sake of general understandability, I will explain the origins of the material that will be analyzed in this article. While a specific analysis of the Ministry is beyond the scope of this article (see SALGADO; MOTTA, 2014), a general characterization of the context is important for tracing the main aspects of the communities that I present in this text.

Brazil is a country where different cultures and ways of life live together, sometimes in harmony and many times in any kind of opposition with varying levels of violence. For instance, in terms of rural work, Brazil has both huge farms that are enterprises with highly automated processes and also other small farms with traditional techniques for growing food and raising cattle.

The heterogeneity of worlds and consequent power struggles are also represented in the high level of Brazilian political bureaucratic organization: the federal ministries. To deal with the rural needs and improvements, Brazil has two Ministries: the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply, which “is responsible for the management of public policies to stimulate agriculture, the promotion of agribusiness, and the regulation and

standardization of related services sector,”<sup>5</sup> and the Ministry of Agrarian Development, which has the following subjects as its area of competence:

- I - agrarian reform;
  - II - promoting sustainable development of the rural segment formed by farmers; and
  - III - identification, recognition, delimitation, demarcation and titling of lands occupied by the remnants of *quilombo* communities.
- Single paragraph. The Ministry of Agrarian Development shall exert, extraordinarily, competencies related to regularization in the Legal Amazon, about which Art. 35 of Provisional Measure No. 458 of February 10, 2009 is.<sup>6</sup>

If one compares the descriptions of the ministries, one notices two different worlds: the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supplies deals with huge farms, large quantities of grains, and livestock for national and international consumption. According to their own definition on the website,<sup>7</sup> they are responsible for regulating what is known as “agribusiness.” On the other hand, the Ministry of Agrarian Development is responsible for promoting agrarian reform, sustainable development, family farming, and *quilombolas*<sup>8</sup> issues.

Between 2004 and 2005, the Ministry of Agrarian Development conducted the *Sounds and Images of Land Project - Work Songs in Brazil*, which, in the Ministry’s words, was to record the “Brazilian workers’ musical expression.”<sup>9</sup> In the Project, they went to different states and recorded some communities that habitually sing while working in the farms. In 2012, a member of the team, the musician and traditional music

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<sup>5</sup> Text in original: “responsável pela gestão das políticas públicas de estímulo à agropecuária, pelo fomento do agronegócio e pela regulação e normatização de serviços vinculados ao setor”. For further information, visit <http://www.agricultura.gov.br/ministerio>.

<sup>6</sup> Text in original: “I. reforma agrária; II. promoção do desenvolvimento sustentável do segmento rural constituído pelos agricultores familiares; e III. identificação, reconhecimento, delimitação, demarcação e titulação das terras ocupadas pelos remanescentes das comunidades dos quilombos. Parágrafo único: O Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário exercerá, em caráter extraordinário, as competências relativas à regularização fundiária na Amazônia Legal de que trata o art. 35 da Medida Provisória nº 458, de 10 de fevereiro de 2009”. For further information, visit <http://www.mda.gov.br/portalmda/institucional>.

<sup>7</sup> For website, see footnote 5.

<sup>8</sup> TN. *Quilombos* are villages founded by Afro-Brazilians as a way to resist and survive in the years of slavery. Slavery in Brazil lasted for almost four centuries, and the enslaved people found ways to struggle against the enslavers, running away from the farms and establishing secret “cities,” called “quilombos.” The people who live in a quilombo are called “quilombolas.” At present, the descendants of ancient quilombolas have the right to live in their traditional lands and ways. The Ministry of Agrarian Development is responsible for this regulation.

<sup>9</sup> For further information, visit <http://www.mda.gov.br/portalmda/noticias>.

researcher Renata Mattar, gave me the unedited footage. It is important to make clear that all the communities recorded in *Sounds and Images of Land Project* work in *mutirão*,<sup>10</sup> which means that the relationship among them is not between boss and employees, and there are no companies involved. This kind of labor regime sometimes resembles a cooperative, but at others it is more informal and functions as a task force of a community doing something together for the sake of one of the members or of the community in general. When one considers the discourse of the group as a whole, it is possible to view singing together as part of an equal association between community members.

## 5 The Manual and the Industrialized

The first film that I address was made in the community of Barreiras, in the city of Barrocas, which is in the state of Bahia (Brazilian Northeast). The planting, harvesting and processing of manioc in this community is partly artisanal and partly mechanized. After the manual harvesting, the manioc is taken to the *Casa de Farinha* [Flour House], where it is scraped by hand using knives. Then, it is put in an electric grinder, and the dough is pressed until it is dry. It is then sifted by hand and taken to a woodstove. The level of mechanization of this process varies from community to community. In Barreiras' case, it is only the grinding that is mechanized.

In the middle of the film, a specific call-and-response song that I call *Semente de mandioca* [Manioc Seed] is featured. It lasts 1 minute and 50 seconds. The work in this Flour House is done in *mutirão* through one of two systems: Either the manioc that will be processed was brought by different members of community and the flour will be shared at the end of the process, or the manioc is the harvest of one member of the community and will therefore be processed by all members and eventually all of them will help with someone else's production, and so on. Thus, there is not, in this labor organization, a boss; at most, one of the members is the "owner of the manioc" for that day.

In this film excerpt, two main activities take place: There is a circle with seated women peeling the manioc with knives, and the pile of peeled manioc is in the center (Fig. 4); there are three men standing and working in the oven, stirring the grated manioc

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<sup>10</sup> TN. *Mutirão* is a work practice in Brazil whose word means collective effort, the cooperation of a group to accomplish a task.

so it dries (Fig. 5). Therefore, for the work in which *Semente de Mandioca* is sung, the women and men work in different and nonconsecutive stages of manioc processing.



Fig. 4: Women working in manioc peeling in Barreiras Community, Barrocas City, State of Bahia, Brazil, in 2004.



Fig. 5: Men working in manioc drying in Barreiras Community, Barrocas City, State of Bahia, Brazil, in 2004.

There is a gendered division of labor, which includes a division of roles in music. For women, the work is done in pairs. The first woman takes the manioc and peels half of it, and the other one finishes the job. They do it this way to prevent the manioc from becoming dirty. Regarding the songs, the roles of lead voice, second voice and chorus are alternated, allowing those who know more songs or with great skills to create them through improvisation. For that reason, a beginner in the *mutirão* can start singing the chorus because this participatory event allows for the inclusion of people with different skills and knowledge about the songs. Here we can clearly see what Turino points out as the main characteristics of participatory field:

(1) functioned to inspire or support participation; (2) functioned to enhance social bonding, a goal that often underlies participatory traditions; and/or (3) dialectically grew out of or were the result of participatory values and practices (TURINO, 2008, p.36).

In slight contrast, men's work includes singing in chorus, playing the instruments, and dealing with the oven. One of the instruments used is actually a knife scraping on a hoe. (As it is common in many musical practices around the world, the instrument of labor can be used as a musical instrument.) The other musical instrument is a mass-produced *pandeiro*, a Brazilian hand-played frame-drum.

The music genre of *Semente de Mandioca* is a *baião*,<sup>11</sup> in a call-and-response form. The rhythm and tempo of the music are not directly related with the pace of manioc peeling, but rather it seems that it drives the pace of stirring the flour. Here's the song sheet.

## Semente de Mandioca

Tem u ma se men te de man dio ca que a qui nin guém tem del' ê

vá cai fo ra na mi nha bo la man dio ca não re la

Eu vou re lar eu vou re lar

eu vou re lar man dioc' eu vou re lar

Fig. 6: Transcription of lead voice and choir of the song “Semente de Mandioca,” Barreiras Community, Barrocas City, State of Bahia, Brazil, in 2004.

The lyrics describe the manual process of grating the manioc, “relando [grating]”<sup>12</sup> in the “bola de relar [grating ball].” Thus, this example shows what Schwartz describes as “the strings of a patrimonial memory, inscribed in our lives and operant bodies” (SCHWARTZ, 2011a, p.21);<sup>13</sup> a practice this community no longer performs – the manual manioc grating – reappears to these people, who sing while they work in other manual stages of their labor.

Considering work and song as a part of the same inter-semiotic discursive practice, it is possible to say that this community is *doing* two different processes to grate

<sup>11</sup> TN. *Baião* is a binary rhythm from Brazilian Northeast that is very popular in the whole country and also abroad. The Brazilian musician Luiz Gonzaga (1912-1989) is known as *Baião's king*.

<sup>12</sup> TN. *Relar* and *Ralar* both mean *to grate*, but *ralar* is a more urban form. In this song, the community uses *relar*.

<sup>13</sup> Text in original: “os fios de uma memória patrimonial, inscrita em nossos corpos vivos e operantes”.

manioc: on the one hand, they are using the electric grinder, and on the other, they are maintaining the manual grating in the words of the song. The music at work, in this case, materializes a tension between industrialized ways to deal with the fields and artisanal ways.

## **6 The Labor Organization**

The second film was made in the city of Imperatriz, in the state of Maranhão, also in the Brazilian Northeast. This community of women lives with their families in settlements. Settlements are occupied land that had a previous owner or belonged to the State. They were then occupied by settlers who went there of their own free will or were put there through a process of relocation headed by the government. These women are part of the Movimento Interestadual das Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu [*Interstate Movement of Babassu Coconut Breakers*], a group that organizes these gatherer workers to get their rights to work and live in their traditional lands. Sometimes, the Ministry of Agrarian Development works together with communities and social organizations and against other powers in Government (for instance, against the agribusiness defenders).

Those women work in a cooperative to pick and break babassu coconut while also manufacturing some products, such as flour, oil, and soap. In this film, sometimes the women sing traditional work songs and at others they sing more politically driven songs related to labor consciousness.

The film starts out showing six women seated on a porch (Fig. 7), rehearsing the song *Eu sou feliz é quebrando coco* [I am happy breaking coconut] for one minute and thirty seconds.





Fig. 7: Two of the six women singing and following the printed lyrics of *Eu sou feliz é quebrando coco*, in a porch at the City of Imperatriz, State of Maranhão, Brazil, in 2004.

Are they singing while working? A quick answer could be *no*. They are not picking or breaking coconut here; rather, they are sitting on a porch; they have sheets of paper with the lyrics in their hands, and they did not *spontaneously* create the song. The rehearsal and the song (music and lyrics) may seem artificial to a folklorist. The music genre is a *coco do Maranhão*,<sup>14</sup> which is typical of this community. To rehearse, some of the women beat on their leg or on the chairs to pace the rhythm (Fig. 8). When a *coco do Maranhão* is sung while they break the babassu coconut, the rhythm is done by the movements of the hands breaking the coconut.



Fig. 8: Women beating their hands: one in her leg (in the foreground) and the other one in the chair (in the background), while rehearsing *Eu sou feliz é quebrando coco*, in a porch at the City of Imperatriz, State of Maranhão, Brazil, in 2004.

<sup>14</sup>TN. *Coco do Maranhão* is a genre of music and dance. It is also a binary rhythm.

The lyrics are about the necessity of organization, resistance, and union. The interpellation of the co-enunciator is present since the first verse, with the vocative “woman,” and also in the appeal “Let us unite” and “Let’s proceed in this fight.” From the third verse of the first stanza on and also in the second and third stanzas, there is a didactic tone based on a cause-and-effect logic, emphasizing the need to act and follow the structure of “if this - then that.” Below we find the lyrics of *Eu sou feliz é quebrando coco* [I am happy breaking coconut]. The translation into English is ours.

***Eu sou feliz é quebrando coco***

(Movimento Interestadual das Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu)

***I am happy breaking coconut***

(Interstate Movement of Babassu Coconut Breakers)

[primeira estrofe]

Mulher, vamos se unir  
Nessa luta prosseguir  
Se ficar aqui parada  
Nada vamos conseguir

[first stanza]

Woman, let us unite  
Let’s proceed in this fight  
If we stand still here  
We will achieve nothing

[refrão]

Eu sou feliz é quebrando coco  
É quebrando coco eu sou feliz  
Eu sou feliz é quebrando coco  
É quebrando coco eu sou feliz

[chorus]

I am happy breaking coconut  
It’s in breaking coconut that I’m happy  
I am happy breaking coconut  
It’s in breaking coconut that I’m happy

[segunda estrofe]

Se fizer plano de roça  
E na roça não plantar  
Não vamos ter a colheita  
Para nos alimentar

[second stanza]

If we make a field plan  
But we don’t plant in our field  
We won’t have the harvest  
To feed ourselves

[refrão]

Sou feliz é quebrando coco  
É quebrando coco eu sou feliz  
Sou feliz é quebrando coco  
É quebrando coco eu sou feliz

[chorus]

I am happy breaking coconut  
It’s in breaking coconut that I’m happy  
I am happy breaking coconut  
It’s in breaking coconut that I’m happy

[terceira estrofe]

Se não unir nossas força  
E começa a trabalhar  
Não vai ter a fabriqueta  
De sabão para lavar

[third stanza]

If we don’t unite our strengths  
And begin to work  
We won’t have the small manufacturer  
To make soap to wash

The third and fourth verses of the first stanza establish the conditionality statement in a general way which could be thus paraphrased: *if we do nothing, we achieve nothing*. The generality yields its place in the second and third stanzas, but the cause-and-effect

structure continues. Thus, the second stanza's theme focuses on the necessity of planning and of following the plan in work activities; it argues that it is not enough to make a "field plan," but it is necessary to plant in order to obtain the harvest. The third stanza adopts the same logic, but here the condition is applied to the theme of manufacturing the babassu coconut soap. This stanza reminds the union of strengths evoked in the two first verses and puts it as a condition to build the small soap manufacturer and, consequently, the fact of having soap to wash.

The lyrics have a tone of labor organization, union and fight, and they also have a double function in this community: as a participatory event when sung in work activities, it reminds the workers of their commitments to the needs and rights of the community; as a presentational event when sung to the external public, it demonstrates their motto and propagates their image as strong and organized women.

The chorus has a different, more festive tone. The message of the verse is repeated four times – a change in word order occurs twice. The chorus message of "It's in breaking coconut that I'm happy" could be seen as only a happy statement and in contradiction to the message of the stanzas that describe the coconut breaker's life as a road full of struggles, difficulties, and where nothing comes easy. But in the chorus, these women are not just stating that they are happy in work; rather, they are defending their rights to be there in their traditional lands and to work with coconut in their traditional forms. These women are saying that they are happy "breaking coconut" and they would not be happy in any other way.

In the film, the women have printed lyrics in their hands, signaling some previous organization for the activity implemented by the *Interstate Movement of Babassu Coconut Breakers*. However, the official nature of the printed lyrics does not prevent those women from feeling comfortable at discussing and changing the lyrics. It happens in the third stanza, when some of the women start singing "Vamos unir nossas forças" ["Let's unite our strengths"], and some others sing, at the same time, "Se não unir nossas forças" ["If we don't unite our strengths"]. Then one of the women says, "I will change this part," and then crosses out and writes over words from the lyrics (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9: A woman worker says, “I will change this part,” and writes over words from the lyrics while rehearsing *Eu sou feliz é quebrando coco*, in a porch at the City of Imperatriz, State of Maranhão, Brazil, in 2004.

These women are recreating a work tradition, using a traditional practice and music genre, and creating lyrics with themes they consider important for their political fight.

## 7 Putting it Together

In thinking about music at work, the more common evaluation is that it is a moment of distraction to relieve hard work and/or a way to pace work. It could be true in some cases, but that is not all. The lack of studies about the theme has resulted in a limited comprehension of the phenomenon and also in its reduction to an idealized folklore form linked to the traditional culture. Even work songs in traditional societies are much more common to what is often studied by music and work scholars.<sup>15</sup> Through its analysis of the four examples, this article demonstrates that the relationship between music and work far surpasses that traditional manifestation.

I propose that music at work has always a close link to what ergology calls renormalizations, the resingularizations of previous norms – which are microscopic or very noticeable – managed by *corpo-si* [*body-self*] (SCHWARTZ, 2010). I also propose

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<sup>15</sup> See Gioia (2006) for a critique of the lack of studies of work songs.

that, many times (and it is the case in our four examples), renormalizations have something to do with the constitution, the replacement or the reinforcement of a discursive community, whether actual or desired. Therefore, these renormalizations can modify the presentational or participatory characteristic of the musical discourse in work activities.

In *BOSE headphone and headsets advertisement*, renormalization is the key to comprehending music at work in that scenography (MAINGUENEAU, 2010b). As ergology infers through Canguilhem's (1943) main idea about the infidelity of the environment and the necessity of self-determination to live in health, humanity always renormalizes work activities. The scenography of that advertisement presents a man renormalizing: his work place is frequently the plane and he has to deal with it. To do so, he starts to play with the reality to better accept that "the plane is [his] office," and, like a real office, "it has a desk, a light and a window with a view," which are positive, expected and desired things in an office. It also has undesired things, things against good work in an office, such as "150 guest chairs [...] always full." Here the enunciator, with the verbal discourse, passes from the scenography of a normal office to the scenography of a busy plane, inadequate for work. "But" – and the conjunction is important to stress that he will overcome the infidelity of the environment through a renormalization – he can put his headphones on. With this action, he can choose his discursive community through his soundscape. He can choose whom he wants to bring, through sound, to his work activity, or if he wants to be in silence. Therefore in this ad, the scenography of work activity renormalization mobilizes the music (or the silence) as an element capable of creating a proper working place. By doing this, the worker can exclude or minimize the presence of anyone whom he does not want as part of his work activities. Music, which can be in or out, in this case, will not be produced by the worker; thus, it will be a presentational event, in Turino's concept.<sup>16</sup>

In *EVRI* dishwashing brush package, despite the unsuspected materiality, a rich web of meanings is evoked. The scenography of a young woman singing while she does the dishes echoes, by her body posture and her clothes (inter-semiotic discursive practices, as we have seen), an ethos of feminine power, present in the scene that the

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<sup>16</sup> Music at work can be tricky data ["dado **dado**," in Possenti's (2002) conceptualization] for Thomas Turino's theory about participatory and presentational events.

package recreates, known in the whole world as *Rosie the Riveter* with her “We can do it!” slogan. When the original propaganda poster was created in 1943, it was a part of a discourse to stimulate women work activity in factories, to supplement the lack of men, because they were fighting in World War II. In the decade of 1980, the meaning slides, and the poster comes to represent the feminine power to do everything that women want to do; the “it” here is as broad as deciding “our own life and destiny.” Calling on all of this feminine identity and the power of this icon, the package reminds us of the lack of lucidity<sup>17</sup> in many work activities, especially in the housework activities in this case.

Singing and being a star in housework activities is a way to renormalize an activity considered repetitive, boring and without glamour. The ad renormalizes the regular role of women against which the feminist movement fought so hard. Accomplishing the housework and having fun *being* a singer while working participates in another discourse common to women that stresses their resilience and multi-tasking capacity. This capacity could be expressed as “we can do it” and at the same time “we can do that” – we can be *homo faber* and *homo ludens* at the same time in work activities. Here, the mobilized discursive community is that of the empowered women. One more time, the renormalization focused on the membership of a discursive community, but in this case a desired one. As for the musical event being participatory or presentational, in this example, there is a curious play between the participatory and presentational events, because the created scenography makes the worker a music star (therefore, it will be a presentational event, with performers and public). But, in the worker’s point of view, the scenography changes this event to participatory, because she is the one who takes the microphone (dishwashing brush) and *knocks out*. The renormalization creates a play in which the worker is placed as the main piece in a scenography of presentational show to a crowd, by singing and dancing while doing the housework.

Regarding Brazilian manifestations, in Barreiras’ case music renormalize work in at least three ways. It complexifies the repetitive tasks of peeling and drying manioc to create a more interesting, varied, and challenging activity. It also clearly brings the community an omnipresent, but sometimes silenced, tension between the artisanal and

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<sup>17</sup> Karczynski, Pickering and Robertson (2013) write about the importance of paying attention to *homo ludens* in human life, because the majority of analysts only pay attention to *homo economicus* and *homo faber*. I also discussed the relation between work and pleasure in two previous articles (MOTTA, 2013; 2014).

industrialized ways of doing farm activities. As a third point, it reinforces the bond of this community through the simple act of singing together and also through singing a traditional song with traditional learning about their activity. Here, the renormalization is also related to the discursive community, but different from the first example (in which the plane community is excluded in favor of the worker preference) and also different from the second example (in which a sense of belonging to a desired community is created), in this case, the renormalization reinforces the already existent community. We can say that all the music at work, when it is part of a participatory event, reinforces the discursive community (actually, this is a central characteristic of participatory music). Here this is even truer, because of the meaning of this specific song.

In the last example that was analyzed in this article, music at work is playing an important role in a crucial struggle of power regarding Imperatriz community. Work renormalization is also present because these women could choose not to sing while they work or not to create new songs and only sing the traditional ones. But they renormalize their work activity, creating a political song from a traditional base (*coco do Maranhão* musical genre) to improve their work activity. As in both *Evril's* and Barreiras' case, singing while they work is a way to complexify a repetitive task, and, in this case, also to pace the work of breaking babassu coconut. Yet, just by the fact that they live in a heavily threatened community, the lyrics have a strong social meaning and reinforce the bond between these women while publicly demonstrating their struggle for their rights. The renormalization of traditional work songs turns them into something broader than a participatory event, giving power to this discursive community both internally and externally, in its public presentations.

For all that was developed in this article, it is possible to begin to uncover music role in the discourse of work activities. There is much more to study regarding traditional, industrialized and computerized ways of working and living. The three main aspects that I highlighted and put together in this conclusion – the renormalization, the discursive community and the music as a participatory or presentational event – come from, respectively, the three theoretical-methodological lenses that were mobilized – ergology, discursive analysis, and ethnomusicology.

The articulation of these and other notions and concepts taken into consideration in this article were essential for us to go in the direction of unveiling the role of music in

work activities. The three main aspects mobilized are present in various forms in the four cases and are relevant to discourse analysis, ethnomusicology and ergology issues. This can be exemplified when they take into account the relationship between discourses and the communities where they are or when they consider music as a work discursive practice. Music at work is often a part of the alternative reserves of workers that turn work into something more meaningful and healthier.

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Translated by the article's author

*Received August 19, 2014*

*Accepted May 12, 2015*