



## **Daime Religions, Mediumship and Religious Agency: Health and the Fluency of Social Relations**

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This article presents an analysis of unconventional events experienced during fieldwork among participants in the *Centro Espírita e Obras de Caridade Príncipe Espadarte*, or the Barquinha (little boat) of Madrinha (Grandmother) Chica. Barquinha is located in the city of Rio Branco, Acre, Brazil. Barquinha participants use the sacramental psychoactive *daime*, known generically as ayahuasca. The focus of this article is to revisit and analyse - in terms of ethics, methodology and epistemology - an event in which a spiritual entity, Vó (GrandMa) Nadir, a *Preta Velha* (Old black woman), who is dedicated to help and guide young participants, intervened ritually on their difficulties and problems, creating a favourable context for social interaction and problems resolution/management. It is also based on interviews on the personal experience of the mediums who facilitate these occasions, regarding conceptions of health and spiritual help, relationships between members of the centre, and interaction with spiritual entities.

Keywords: mediumship and health; daime religions; spiritual entities; ethics, epistemology and ethnography

### **Introduction: preliminary notes**

The aim of this work is to contribute to the analysis of unconventional events experienced by researchers and which are usually discarded during the preparation of our analytical work. This analysis is based on a paper presented at an event that cannot be seen as 'conventional', the Breaking Convention 2015 (BC 2015), a 'multidisciplinary conference on psychedelic consciousness', where scholars, activists and performers gather biannually in an ecumenical assembly to discuss what has been called the 'Psychedelic Renaissance'.

My general intention is to reflect on the events experienced during my fieldwork in Brazil in which I explored the use of 'ayahuasca'<sup>1</sup> and 'mental health'<sup>2</sup>. The text is also organised in a less conventional way, keeping in mind on the one hand what was

<sup>1</sup> Ayahuasca is a Quechua word that means 'vine of the souls' and specifically identifies the plant *Banisteriopsis caapi*. The term 'ayahuasca' has been used to identify generic ritual preparations fabricated with *B. caapi* and other plants in South America.

<sup>2</sup> I put the two words between quotation marks to emphasize at this point that these expressions evoke many aspects, phenomena and implications that do not allow a conceptual definition of what they mean as generic categories. Their meaning can only be effectively drawn up in and as the empiric-social contexts where their use becomes current.

planned for the presentation of the paper at an event like the BC 2015. On that occasion, the aim was to open a discussion about the importance of a consistent approach to the relations and social life that we find particularly in Barquinha, a Daime religion. Daime religions are religious organisations which use a substance considered sacramental for their spiritual works<sup>3</sup>, which they call Daime, derived from the use of ayahuasca. This approach has the purpose to reflect on the issue of the growing *biomedicalisation* of ayahuasca, particularly regarding this field of studies, including 'alternative' circuits and networks which I think are involved in the configuration of the Breaking Convention meeting.

I start with preliminary and punctual notes which I consider important in order to structure the critical and theoretically 'clinical' perspective I am trying to develop here. By 'clinical' perspective I will refer to what has been elaborated by Márcio Goldman when he addressed the extraordinary work of Jeanne Favret-Saada (1977), which was received with 'enthusiastic misunderstanding' (Goldman 2005: 151), and that Goldman criticises for its conventional theoretical task through these words:

To do so would be to abandon once the *scientificist* paradigm in which we move, in favour of a 'clinical' method, in the medical and psychoanalytical sense. In the first option, the choices are limited: proceed inductively, generalising from the largest possible number of empirical cases, or deductively, by applying to any case of some general principles previously established (Goldman, 2005: 151).

And regarding the contribution of Favret-Saada, designs the anthropological work from the standpoint of a 'clinical' approach:

Favret-Saada, on the other hand, proceeds through observation, examination and establishment of cases whose singularity does not eliminate the fact that each can share with certain other elements and features. This implies that from the clinical eyes each case is at the same time, a single syndrome and part of common syndromes, and that each one will benefit indirectly from previous anamnesis and contribute to the future<sup>4</sup> (Goldman 2005: 151).

Therefore, I am encouraged by this idea that what the researcher examines ethnographically has a kind of 'clinical' implication. It flows by drawing up a narrative look at the experience that makes us think about its occurrence and implications for the people involved with it, including the researcher. And thus it may allow to inscribe the cases addressed in a series that will match less peculiar developments, and in being shared, allow a perspective to look at continuity and discontinuity of reasons, motivations, punctuations and generalisations, or that which constitutes what we call conventionally 'theory.'

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<sup>3</sup> 'Spiritual Work' is how Daime religions participants call events when a more intensive contact may be established with the spiritual plane. They can be organised rituals, but also personal experiences, when one may face difficulties or insights in life, regarded as coming from invisible forces.

<sup>4</sup> The author's translation.

Taking this clinical perspective as an analytical motive, I move to an ethnographic approach of the events I witnessed during my fieldwork. This movement raises issues on the embodied relationships ethnographers establish with *beings* and *becomings* during their work. I also seek to address the question raised by the proposal in this JSRE Special Issue, that elements associated with ethnography until recently were treated as anecdotal events or irrelevant to the analysis. This includes the experiences of corporeality and the unusual relationships between researchers and beings from other planes of existence, which their research partners recognise as fundamental. These forces have been treated in general by an epistemology that reifies, and even disqualifies, them as 'part' only of the 'symbolic life', or something that happens only in the mind, avoiding to recognise that this attitude is part of a Westerner informed 'possible' or 'acceptable' ontology. The theoretical perspective involved has as starting point the argument proposed by Edward Evans-Pritchard who states in his 'reminiscences' (Evans-Pritchard 1976 [1937]) that if something like God or witchcraft makes sense to people who use it to think and act according to their consideration, then they may have a consistent ontological status. In this case, it is absolutely desirable in terms of ethnography and knowledge to regard them as existent and central to comprehend what people think and how people act.

The following notes are relevant to the reader who is particularly unfamiliar with the study of the experience of ayahuasca. Ayahuasca is the generic name by which substances made with the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* and other plants are popularly known, and which modify states and ways of being and relating to the world. Its use emerged among indigenous and other groups in South America, but it can now be found in various regions of the planet, particularly due to the expansion of Brazilian religions. By describing the use of these substances I will introduce the subjects of mediumship and spirituality particularly addressing their epistemological implications in life and in 'scientific' approaches.

The central aim of this article is therefore to articulate the perspectives emerged from an event I recorded during fieldwork which unfolded in a relevant ethical dilemma. First, I will discuss the reflexivity and experience in the field in anthropology. Next, I will share the analytical approaches to Daime religion emerging in Brazil, and to mediumship in Barquinha. Finally, I try to address the implications and consequences of the 'embodied' experiences witnessed during the fieldwork, as challenging to and transforming of what I call 'epistemological conditionings.' These transformations somehow evoke and reveal not only the density of these epistemological conditionings in narrowing or expanding the 'native', or subject's perspective in the quest to solve their life problems, but they also influence and even weigh heavily on 'scientific' production in general, and anthropological in particular. In this sense, the ethical dilemma presented in the article discusses the conduct that researchers should assume when facing references and even embodied experiences with beings that are not evidently visible or recognisable, as in the case of spiritual entities perceived by participants in Daime religions.

### **Note 1: Reflexivity and experience**

In the 1990s, Brazilian anthropologists consolidated their concern to contribute to the debate on reflexivity in the research inspired by the notion of ethnography. This process, was discussed in detail at the symposium on the 'critical vocation' of

anthropology as a motivation for self-reflexivity organized by the University of Brasilia, which to this date constitutes one of the most successful attempts to explain the phenomenon. In this debate, the contributions in particular by Rita Laura Segato (1992) and José Jorge Carvalho (1993) were extremely important. With different approaches but in dialogue, Carvalho and Segato mainly discussed the attitude and conduct of anthropologists based on the character and content of the experiences of other participants of their research. Both of them recommended not to reify these experiences reducing them into simplistic rationalising categories. The reflection about the attitude of the researcher facing these experiences is still present in Brazilian anthropology, and the debate unfolded in empirical, ethical, methodological and epistemological points of view.

In my study I consider Carvalho's approach in that the formation of an anthropologist constitutes an initiatory event (Carvalho 1993). Carvalho refers to the correspondence that shows what happened with Bronislaw Malinowski, considered the precursor of modern ethnography compared to what happened to Madame Elena Petrovna Blavatsky, who systematised Theosophy. He suggests that in both cases the event of travel to the 'other's' worlds was built up with the purpose to know and to transform conventional forms of knowing, with the difference that in this process, Malinowski turned his experiences to a rationalist discourse, and M. Blavatsky to an initiatory method to develop spirituality.

Segato (1992) criticised the way that anthropologists 'relativise' the experiences of their 'others,' calling it a 'paradox'. From an epistemological movement of relativism 'from inside to outside,' which had presupposed new views on the human from the perspective of 'others', and thereby expand epistemological horizons, as well as question ethnocentrism, what followed was a 'relativism to inside'. In this sense, the anthropologists have relativised in fact the 'absolute' of the other's experience, converting it in rationalising and reifying categories, thus promoting in fact a sophisticated ethnocentrism, and palmed the perspective of the search for an 'internal logic' between the cosmology and the social life.

The remaining question from this debate is about what may be the ethic-epistemological role of anthropology: to amplify or to narrow the horizons of the approaching the others.

## **Note 2: Daime religions, mediumship and epistemology**

I would like to remark that the articulation between so called ritual-religious use of Daime and mediumship is an important feature of the religious groups I am calling *Daime Religions*. I mention here 'so called ritual-religious' because the use of Daime by itself certainly involves many other relevant aspects. It involves recreation, creativity, humour and pleasure even in these religious contexts. This may surprise those who think in this market like appeal that the use of ayahuasca in South America is a feature of just a sacralising and phlegmatic form of the use of the preparation. So this articulation is also related to a cosmivision in which reincarnation and karma are important features, and which relates Daime Religions to Kardecism<sup>5</sup> and to

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<sup>5</sup>Kardecism is how the writings of Spiritist systematiser Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, known by the pseudonym of Allan Kardec, and its unfoldings as a social-spiritual paradigm, have been identified in Brazilian scholarly perspectives.

Theosophy, due to an association of their founders with the so called esoteric societies and spiritist groups in Brazil<sup>6</sup>.

It can be seen as redundant or even naïve, but it is a relevant point to consider that a world composed by different planes and influenced by both corporeal and incorporeal *beings* has important implications. This point of view legitimises as existent what is considered by common sense as nonexistent because it is 'invisible' or because it is 'untouchable'. A fact which has - at the same time - practical, moral and epistemological repercussions. This serious consideration that there is more to explore beyond the visible things, actually challenges a poor and mediocre rationality, which simplistically denies the possibility of existence of what the ego is not capable or does not want to perceive, in general the things that actually are not of its taste.

In the early '70s, Gregory Bateson, in the chapter *The Cybernetics of 'Self': A Theory of Alcoholism*, included in his book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Bateson 1972) reflected and researched on this topic inspired by the idea that research and particularly ethnography was the expression of a relationship. This introduced a more symmetrical science which took into account the way research participants think about their experiences and considered them relevant theories to work with. So it was a more plural idea of science. Science in this way would not be just what a few scientists make of it.

From his work with the controversial Alcoholics Anonymous, Bateson launched the idea that their type of therapy is basically a sort of *epistemological healing*, in his words 'epistemological correction' (Bateson 1972). This implies to think about religion and therapy actually as ways of dislocating and relocating our points of view about our own experience and existence, and how this may affect, as Favret-Saada (2005) pointed out, our own perspectives and analytical choices.

The example Bateson gave was the two main principles of Anonymous Alcoholics organisation, which at that time were: 1) if you cannot cope with controlling your experience with alcohol you have to admit that the substance is dominating you; 2) that you have to agree that you are submitted to stronger forces, which are not necessarily transcendent. In a very summarised approach, according to Bateson to assume an attitude correspondent to these admissions may not mean that you are giving up, but that you are changing your own way to perceive the world where you live in, experiencing a sort of *epistemological healing*.

### **Note 3: Ayahuasca, self and epistemological *deconditioning***

My position can be understood within the current approach of those anthropologists who while critically applying the political-epistemological principle elaborated by Latour (1993) are also concerned with having symmetrical relationships with participants in their research projects, taking them seriously and considering their theories about their experiences as consistent as the so called scientific theories may be.

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<sup>6</sup>One of them was the *Círculo Esotérico de Comunhão de Pensamento*, of São Paulo, Brazil, an entity to which important daimistas, such as Raimundo Irineu Serra and Daniel Pereira de Mattos, the main founders of the most known lines of spiritual work, were associated.



In the field of the so called 'psychedelic studies' there are researchers who argue the validity or the legitimacy of the way the use of ayahuasca emerged in the form of institutionalised religious groups. An ethnographic approach may allow us to observe that each system, and even each of its local settlements or groups has its own, singular and interesting configuration to approach ayahuasca. So it is pointless to consider *a priori* the religious use of ayahuasca as 'satisfying or not satisfying', and deny *a priori* the right of any kind of use of the substance.

Inspired by Bateson's argument (1972), I would like to confront what I can call *epistemological conditioning*, or an unfolding and reverberation of a systematic and well-designed strategy to put a specific form of science in hegemony. As authors like Michel Foucault (2004) and Thomas Szasz (1961) have pointed out, the process of legitimising this form of science was consolidated by the spread of the notion of abnormality, which for Foucault (2004) was constituted by the arising of the Republican State in France, for which its political agents had recurred, or by the emerging medical and cosmological point of view which had worked systematically to disqualify religious points of view and had looked for a 'naturalisation' of those until then considered 'supernatural' phenomena. From Szasz (1961), regarding his approach to Charcot's episode in the Nineteenth Century, what was relevant was to consider this legitimisation process as part of a *circularisation* of what he called 'the myth of mental illness'. In sum, our contemporary 'field of possibilities' (Velho 2003) to think about extraordinary experiences, as mediumship may be in the academic world, is still to treat them from narrowed psychological or psychiatric points of view carrying the stigma of 'pathology'.

In other words, what it is relevant here to consider is that the convenient alliance between the Republican State, the biomedicine and conventional science—in order to establish a hegemony of the notion that extraordinary experiences may be taken analytically by its 'natural' and 'individual' character—has been a way to narrow down the possibilities of approaching these extraordinary experiences and to reify them under the umbrella of 'psychological or *paranormal*<sup>7</sup> phenomena'.

Taking this controversy as an epistemological 'black box', as Latour defined similar issues (Latour 1987), my perspective here is to reflect on the epistemological importance of the contrary, or the expansion of epistemological horizons. Whereas part of the historical role of anthropologists has been promoting a kind of *epistemological deconditioning* in academy and society, in particular confronting forms of establishing relations of power and domination between at least different points of view and corresponding social groups, in searching to appropriate symbolic and funding resources.

## **The research project and the events which motivated this reflection**

The research project at the basis of this paper was motivated by the expression and notion of *'pronto soccorso espiritual'*, which I heard back in 1988 while preparing a

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<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that the category of 'paranormal' recognises some consistency in the paradigm of 'normality' as a classificatory criteria of human phenomena.

fieldtrip trip to Céu do Mapiá, the headquarters of CEFLURIS-ICEFLU<sup>8</sup>, an ayahuasca religion best known as Santo Daime. On that occasion, the expression was mentioned by a daimista who I met in Brazil, and was used to define what they were doing at the local daimista centre, '*Pronto socorro espiritual*'. The term '*pronto socorro*' (emergency room) is what health care emergency services are called in Brazil, in this case it was an emergency service for spiritual problems. I also realised that there had been a significant amount of meaning transits between public and religious services, which has been efficiently explored almost exclusively by the religious ones. Furthermore, a sort of 'side effect' of mental health policies in Brazil nowadays would be the pushing of public services users towards religious organisations, seen in Brazil as much as 'healing agencies'. This is related to what has been called in Brazil *Psychiatric Reform* entailing the idea of *deinstitutionalising* mental health care, closing confinement institutions and investing in '*Psychosocial*' ambulatory services.

My initial idea with the project was to collect data on the knowledge and experience *ayahuasca religions* participants have developed in dealing with a set of different problems they demanded to solve, which one may associate with 'mental health'. However, I was not allowed to research at all religious organizations which use daimehoasca<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, I went to investigate the knowledge Daime Religions participants have developed and incorporated to ritual-religious life in order to deal with the idea of perturbation in both personal and collective terms. I chose Florianópolis, where there are organised Daime religious groups, and Rio Branco, state of Acre, in the Brazilian Amazon, because according to official data they are on the two opposite poles of the Psychiatric Reform schedule of implantation.

During my fieldwork I was introduced to an entity from the spiritual plane, Vó (or a GrandMa) Nadir, a *Preta Velha* (Old black woman).<sup>10</sup> This entity incorporates in a medium who helps and guides young participants, and intervenes ritually in their difficulties and problems. I carried out interviews regarding personal experiences of the mediums who facilitate these occasions. They talked to me about their conceptions of health and spiritual help, their relationships with younger members of the centre, and their interaction with entities of the spiritual plane. Particularly, I try to point out that it is possible to find here, as well as in other Daime religions contexts, an articulation between knowledge on the use of Daime, mediumship and health which leads to what has been called 'healing properties' of Daime.

Although I may recognise that it may be important to know the bio-chemical effects of Daime and that, as researchers funded by the pharmaceuticals industry have argued, 'ayahuasca' may be better than other substances (such as the most known anti-depressants, for psychotherapy). I would like also to discuss and emphasise the

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<sup>8</sup> *Centro de Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra and Igreja do Culto Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal.*

<sup>9</sup> I submitted my project to the 'Scientific Committee' of the *Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal*, which refused to give me permission to do a fieldwork among UDV participants alleging that the mention of a research project on 'mental health' would constrain its associates.

<sup>10</sup> I have kept the form of narrating this passage of the field work in different works considering that all the revisions made have kept the structure and the elements of it as the most consistent description.

articulation between ayahuasca use, mediumship and health as a relevant and fundamental way to constitute the legitimacy and fluency of/in social relations, pointing to elements that have been remarked as therapeutically relevant. My aim in sum is to discuss the 'therapeutic properties' of ayahuasca in terms of its potentialities in stimulating a management of social-religious life, framed by the implications, contents and circumstances of its use among participants of these religions. This also includes their skills on providing this management. This approach seeks to expand the horizons that restrict the therapeutic efficacy to bio-pharmacological aspects. In this sense, we can consider that the role of ethnography, as well as the 'full' experience of the researcher (see particularly Halloy, but also the other contributions in this volume) is extremely important to situate its contribution. Ethical, epistemological and methodological self-reflexivity therefore may articulate in the same analytical horizon a search for objectivity and consideration of subjectivity in the production of knowledge.

### The Barquinha of Madrinha Chica

In Rio Branco, when visiting Barquinha, one of the Daime religions, I was introduced to two mediums, Hita and Luis. I interviewed Hita and Luis in 2011 and in 2012. They were members of *Centro Espírita e Obras de Caridade Príncipe Espadarte*, or the *Barquinha* (little boat) of *Madrinha* (Godmother) *Chica*. Just to give a very initial idea, the denomination Barquinha was inspired by a tradition established in the 1940s by Daniel Pereira de Mattos, introduced to me by Barquinha participants as an extraordinary man. He was a shipbuilder, cook, musician, barber, tailor, carpenter, joiner, craftsman, poet, mason, shoemaker and baker. But more relevant here, Pereira de Mattos used to be a sailorman in his past. He went from Maranhão, a state in Northeast Brazil, to Amazonia, in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There he was initiated to Daime use.

The initiative of Daniel Pereira de Mattos, known as Master Daniel or Frei (Friar) Daniel was established in 1945, in the outskirts of the city of Rio Branco, and was gathered around the *Centro Espírita e Culto de Oração 'Casa de Jesus Fonte de Luz'* (Spiritist Center and Cult of Prayer 'House of Jesus Source of Light Source.') This center was headed, after the death of Pereira de Mattos, by Antonio Geraldo da Silva, and then by Manuel Hipólito de Araújo. It is currently led by the son of Manuel Araujo, Francisco Hipólito Araujo Neto.

The 'Mission of *Frei Daniel*' had given rise to other groups over the subsequent years; one was first created in the 1960s, probably in 1967, by Dona Maria Rosa de Almeida, known as 'Dna. Maria Baiana', and her husband Juarez Xavier Martins. This centre was named *Centro Espírita 'Luz, Amor e Caridade'* (Spiritist Center 'Light, Love and Charity'), and is located in District Amapá, in the outskirts of Rio Branco (AC). A second was founded in 1977, by Antonio Geraldo da Silva, and was named Centro Espírita Daniel Pereira de Mattos (Spiritist Center Daniel Pereira de Mattos), now led by his son Antonio Geraldo da Silva Filho. The *Centro Espírita e Obras de Caridade Príncipe Espadarte* (Spiritist Center and Charities Opera Prince Espadarte), was probably the third funded after, as the daimistas say, the passage of Daniel for the spiritual plane. It was founded in 1991 and was organised under the leadership of Francisca Campos do Nascimento, known as the Madrinha Chica, who was an important medium of the Daniel's Centro in the past. There is a fourth, less well known,



founded in 1994, by Antonio Inacio da Conceição, called *Centro Espírita Santo Inácio de Loyola* (Spiritist Center of St. Ignatius Loyola), in the neighborhood Sobral, also in Rio Branco (AC). These centres were all organised from a 'navigation' cosmology. In sum, it suggests that Daime take us to navigate the spiritual plane, a Sacred Sea.

## Mediumship in Barquinha

To present here the elements that can give a brief idea of the notions on mediumship in Barquinha is indeed impossible especially if we consider treating it with ethnographic rigour the possibilities of personal and collective experiences and correspondent exegesis. The contents that circulate among participants of the spiritual works cannot be brought together in an 'orthodox' or a static theology. Personal experiences modulate in fact the most accepted ideas. Thus, one cannot ethnographically establish parameters to an outline of the Barquinha participants' notions on mediumship. The few notions to which I will hereby refer will help understanding the association between people's thoughts and ideas and the experience of mediumship. It may be simplistic to take them generically. Instead I want to present an estrangement of conventional approaches in which one can find systematic notions forming a coherent and articulated whole, which researchers would call 'the cosmology of the group.' I resist the idea that any member of this collective perceive the world and act through and from a 'lens' of the same grade and colour. To establish this lens I think seems to extrapolate the possibilities of ethnographic studies, and also a reifying endeavour. Anyway what I can inscribe as an ethnographer is the record and the recognition that some notions may make more sense than others to the participants of the Barquinha: 1) because they correspond with what leaders / elders / veterans often say in conversations or statements during the rituals; 2) because they have read in published academic or not written works, on the Internet, exchanging on the social networks; 3) or what they have heard in side conversations that occur before and after the spiritual work, in the yard of the little church, in their homes or in places where they meet to talk about their lives. Thus, the notions related to mediumship in the Daime religions, and particularly those that researchers have heard in conversations, interviews, publications and other forms of reference, suggest that the influence of Kardecism<sup>11</sup> and African-Brazilian inspired religions, particularly Umbanda, is relevant in the whole trajectory of the social-historic constitution of these religions.

What I call here Daime religions are organisations whose trajectories are constituted of plasticity and creativity (Espírito Santo 2014) in the sense that they articulate and incorporate in their socio-cosmological, idiosyncratically, the experiences of their founders and other participants. Both Daniel Pereira de Mattos and Raimundo Irineu

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<sup>11</sup> Kardecism refers to the repercussion of the work of Allan Kardec, or how the French author Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail became best known. He is considered the 'encoder' of the Spiritism (neologism created by him). Researcher of animal magnetism and mediumship, wrote five books, here with the titles and date of original publishing: *Livro dos Espíritos*, *Princípios da Doutrina Espírita* (1857); *O Livro dos Médiuns ou Guia dos Médiuns e dos Evocadores* (1861); *O Evangelho segundo o Espiritismo* (1864); *O Céu e o Inferno ou A Justiça Divina Segundo o Espiritismo* (1865); *A Gênese, os Milagres e as Predições segundo o Espiritismo* (1868), and inspired the expressive expansion of Spiritism, or Kardecism as it is also known, in Brazil.

Serra, with whom Pereira de Mattos first took the Daime, were originally from the State of Maranhão, Brazil and most likely descendants of African slaves. In Maranhão, they also had very likely participated in African inspired religious organisations. The contact with entities of the spiritual plane were important aspects of the socio-cosmologies of these organisations.

Perhaps, thinking about the repercussion of Kardecism, we should reflect on the repercussion of the evolutionism of the nineteenth century, when it emerged, but perhaps also on the theories of Edward Tylor (1871) about the 'capabilities' of primitive man which would 'have been suppressed' by civilisation. These theories developed an approach to human being considering what he called 'spiritual evolution'. Interestingly and paradoxically in relation to classical evolutionism, on the one side Kardec articulated the trajectory of the human being on the planet to a dynamic of 'learning' and transformation that goes from 'denser' ('less light') to the 'more subtle' ('more light'). On the other side, but in the same sense, it attributed the possibility of evolution not to intergenerational features acquisition, but to the recognition of spirituality, and the training to deal with its influence, and which was enshrined in Brazil by the notion of 'spiritual development'. Therefore, the expectation of the self-recognition as someone who shared the idea that the world is influenced by visible and invisible energies, the latter of which Kardec called 'spirits', meant to apply the principle that all human beings are able to be mediums. And in addition that mediumship development is a learning process. This perspective in Brazil is configured as a central reference in the life and thought of participants of spiritual centres, African-inspired religions, Kardecist and esoteric groups, and in the Daime religions, particularly in the Barquinha of Madrinha Chica. In this sense, the Umbanda religion is also fundamental.

A consistent perspective on the ideas and concepts on mediumship between the Barquinha of Dona Francisca Gabriel participants, can be encountered in the work by Cristiane Albuquerque Costa (Costa 2008), who is a researcher and member of the group, and she elaborated what she called 'auto-ethnography'<sup>12</sup>.

Costa also points out that in Barquinha there was a statement and postulation that all human beings have the 'capacity' of mediumship, although blunted, therefore there is a need for learning and development. This unfolds the notion that spirits influence the world, by 'incorporating' or 'radiating' their energy. When a person does not develop his/her mediumship, or s/he is 'not prepared' and is 'open' or 'sensitive' and so 'would have a *capacity* (...)', this unconscious, to 'capture a range of energies of the spirit, including negative energy.' (Costa 2008: 134). In this sense the spiritual plane permanently influences the lives of people and their becomings on the condition of existence. In Barquinha, the spirits influence the earth plane, may incorporate in mediums, or irradiate as spiritual plane masters, transmitting messages and instructing.

Working out from what I learned from participants of the spiritual line of Daniel Pereira Mattos, many of these messages are received by the people and so their preparation is put to the test. This preparation is, as already mentioned, somewhat checked on a personal level by the way the person reacts to the amount of Daime that is served.

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<sup>12</sup> The category 'auto-ethnography' was then not known in Brazil.

Although the person serving Daime may evaluate spiritually the person's 'spiritual degree', the personal experience is also mediated by irradiation of the entities that are present in the events with their spiritual phalanges and as are calls for the execution of psalms and hymns by the session leader.

In sum, the *incorporation* of spiritual entities in Barquinha cannot be characterised by the notion of 'spiritual possession'. Spiritual possession involves an ethnocentric and reifying experience, to classify a 'type' of mediumship. In the Barquinha when a person is considered to be 'subjected' by a spirit, what is referred is the deleterious influence of this spirit which/who has not passed the process of spiritual development. Therefore, it may be a spirit that does not know that it is no longer on the material plane, or the spirit that is 'commissioned' by enemies. These enemies can also be 'collectors' of personal debts, or misunderstandings which involve moral consequences.

### **Vó Nadir and the spiritual work**

Hita and Luis, the mediums I mentioned, were civil servants. Hita was at that time working as emergency staff at a General Hospital in Rio Branco, and Luis, in a governmental agency for land control and economic development. I interviewed Hita and Luis, and in one of our meetings they invited me to participate in a *special spiritual work*. In this spiritual work an entity called *Vó Nadir*, a *Preta Velha*, came from the spiritual plane to help young participants of the community of Barquinha. Very briefly, Barquinha rituals are held weekly, in general on Saturdays (Costa 2008), with a special ritual feature called *Obras de Caridade* (Charity Works), when spiritual entities incorporate in developed mediums to attend people in need. They do that in a separate space, but according to Cristiane Costa (2008) there is a continuum between all the ritual spaces. People have to leave the space of the main ceremonial activities to consult the entities.

They also told me about a situation which was relevant to understanding the context in which they decided to set up that special spiritual work. Hita told me he was perceiving his daughter was not having good experiences using her mobile phone. So, he decided so to apprehend the mobile. But one day, *Vó Nadir* was incorporated in the *Obras de Caridade*, and a young member of the community, his daughter, came to consult the entity about a problem she was confronting, actually complaining about her father (Hita), the medium itself, who had confiscated her mobile phone because he thought she was experiencing situations that he did not approve. *Vó Nadir*, according to Hita, pledged to resolve the situation, but also demanded that the girl would commit not to be engaged in the problems that her father thought she was getting involved. Hita's daughter agreed, and they have not had any problems after that.

That situation triggered the idea of giving the same opportunity of *Vó Nadir's* help to other young participants, mainly those who would be confronting conflictive situations. So the idea was to open a different ritual space to help and to make the Barquinha participants' life more fluent. Thus the interesting unfolding of this experience made Hita and Luis consolidate their idea about to organise the work with *Vó Nadir*.

It is relevant to remark that this shows what I would call a *clinical* approach to perhaps conflictive situations between, here at least, young people and adults in a given relational community. In this case, the use of a mobile phone triggers a quarrel involving situations of embarrassment and even difficulties in the relationship. These are the situations that we can say cause disruption and conflict and which often turn out into serious trouble.

In this event I remark that from my point of view, Vó Nadir incorporates *with* Hita. This means that following the Barquinha participants theo(lo)r(g)y, I think it is inconsistent with commonly held belief that says there is a control of the medium body by the entity. In fact, Hita relationship with Vó Nadir is in certain way negotiated and he may accept her presence in his body. So it is a sort of acquaintanceship, and not 'possession'.

### Vó Nadir in Earth

The presence of Vó Nadir in the Earth is generally facilitated by a ritualised event. The one I approach here occurred at Mutum<sup>13</sup>, an area in the rural outskirts of the city of Rio Branco. It was early evening. About twenty young people were there besides me, Hita and Luis. I wondered how they arranged to have twenty young people (from probably 15 years old to early 20s) there, on a Friday evening in a remote and not very comfortable place to take Daime, which has a bitter and most of the time unpleasant taste, and which can make you vomit or other undesirable effects. I was also wondering why these young people went there to confront their own concerns about things they do or did, just to be attended by an entity who may help to solve problems, but who can also tell them off.

We arranged the place, people put on white clothes, and afterwards, we waited. We drank Daime and sat down though a few of the participants lay down in the hammocks they brought. I positioned myself where I thought it would be better to follow the proceedings, taking as criteria the regularity of Daime works which is configured by a sort of *concentricity*<sup>14</sup>. Hita started to concentrate himself in a remote place and we started to pray. Then, following this moment, a voice that reminded me of a grandmother was heard, sounding strange yet tuneful. Vó Nadir had just incorporated.

In this moment, and having no plans to do it, as I was just there to have an idea of the Vó Nadir spiritual work, an imperative message which I think the origin may be attributed to the spiritual plane, stimulated me to film the events. I remembered that I had a photographic camera which was also able to film. It was not exactly prepared and I then experienced an ethical dilemma. I always may ask permission for image taking and use well in advance, making it very clear the terms of use and disclosure.

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<sup>13</sup> I keep here the original version of the narrative of this paper, because at that time I was still awaiting a response from Brazil to my request for the entity's permission. However, I realised I would have to go personally to request the permission of Vó Nadir. In 2015, I returned to Rio Branco. The events and implications of this period of fieldwork are explored in a paper presented at Breaking Convention 2015, *The permission of Vó Nadir: Daime religions and the consistency of relationships* (to be published).

<sup>14</sup> The concentricity of ritual space is a common feature among the Daime religions. A central table is always an important liturgical reference.

Also, I had not checked the camera's memory space and battery life. But the 'message' was too strong to be ignored. And thinking that it was a justified exception I called one of the organisers and asked if I could film. He signalled immediately and simply with a gestural 'yes'. Starting to hear an ancient voice chanting, I switched on the camera. Vó Nadir arrived singing her *ponto*, or a chant which identifies herself and tells a little bit about who she is.

*Eu venho de Aruanda nestas matas trabalhar  
Eu venho de Aruanda nestas matas trabalhar  
Só se vê a quebradeira, é fogo no canaviá  
Só se vê a quebradeira, é fogo no canaviá  
Chegou a Preta Guerreira eu chego prá trabalhar  
Eu sou a Preta Guerreira que cheguei prá trabalhar*

*Preta Velha Vó Nadir, quando eu boto é prá lascá  
Só se vê a quebradeira, é fogo no canaviá  
Só se vê a quebradeira, é fogo no canaviá  
Eu chamo a todos os pretos para vir me ajudar  
Eu chamo a todas pretas para vir me ajudar*

*Eu chamo todos caboclos para vir me ajudar  
Eu chamo todos os encantos para vir me ajudar  
Eu chamo todas crianças para vir me ajudar  
Chamo as benditas almas para vir me ajudar*

*Meu pai Oxóssi Guerreiro vós venha me ajudar  
Meu pai Oxóssi Guerreiro vós venha me ajudar  
Só se vê a quebradeira, é fogo no canaviá  
Só se vê a quebradeira, é fogo no canaviá<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> I come from Aruanda to work in these forests  
I come from Aruanda to work in these forests  
Only see the crash, the fire is at the canaviá  
Only see the crash, the fire is at the canaviá  
Came the Black Woman Warrior I am here to work  
I am the Black Woman Warrior I am here to work

Black Granny Nadir, when I put it is for chipping  
Only see the crash, the fire is at the canaviá  
Only see the crash, the fire is at the canaviá  
I call all blacks (black grandads) to come help me  
I call all blacks (black grandads) to come help me

I call all *caboclos* (indian spirits) to come help me  
I call all the enchants (\*\*\*) to come help me  
I call all children to come help me  
Call the blessed souls to come help me

My father Oxóssi Warrior you come help me  
My father Oxóssi Warrior you come help me  
Only see the crash, the fire is canaviá  
Only see the crash, the fire is canaviá



Now, Hita-Vó Nadir wore a skirt, and then put a stole around her neck. She continued singing and chirping choreographically, in a rhythmic dance like movement in the yard.

Vó Nadir was on the earth. I have to tell that I filmed her arrival, but cannot show the film at the Breaking Convention 2015, because even having the permission from Hita and Luis, two months before the conference, when preparing the paper presentation, I realised that to be consistent about the anthropology I practice I needed also Vó Nadir's permission to show the film. And it has not arrived yet. And I thought I had to return to Rio Branco for it as the entity cannot call me or email me. So, imagine a six foot tall man, wearing a skirt and speaking as a grandma. Then they put a stole around her neck. Now it is only Vó Nadir we can recognise as present. She continued singing and dancing. Soon, she challenged aloud yet individually some participants, mentioning things about their lives in an enigmatic way to those who did not know them, but in a direct and really affective way for those who already knew that she was referring to the recurrence of their 'faults'.

Vó Nadir particularly mentioned events in which the person was neglecting relationships with those closest, as well as their faults to 'get' that they were neglecting, particularly those which she raised in the last session. She continued challenging participants, citing things so puzzling to those who did not know them but in a direct and clear way to each participant and always with 'affection' and familiarity. The entity referred publicly to each particular individual suggesting that she knew each personally and followed what they did.

Afterwards, Vó Nadir started an individualised care. Vó Nadir attended a young man asking questions and also giving passes with her ritual stole, which are called by Daniel Pereira de Mattos line participants a 'sword'. In this case, her proceedings were generally in silence, eventually with short dialogues and controlled gestures. She passed her stole-sword around each person's body, as if pulling off something she was perceiving and which needed to be pulled off. She acts as a cleanser, disposing what may need to be disposed. She also asks sharply how things had been going since their last conversation.

My impression was that another spiritual entity, perhaps of a 'visual anthropology ethnographer' had taken place in my body. I who never had used filming in my fieldwork before, could keep filming almost in a continued movement for almost one hour.

By the end of Vó Nadir's incorporation, and immediately after the entity had 'risen' to the spiritual plane, the battery of the camera was run down.

### **Vó Nadir's Spiritual Work: about the 'don'ts' in relationships**

About the setting up of those spiritual works, I can say that Hita and Luis have shared the same theory, on why that work was relevant.

Hita said:

*Tem (...) um povo assim que tava muito, assim, com essa coisa do mundo ou metido com algum espirituinho aí, alguma coisa, que andaram beliscando algumas coisas aí, então a gente, preocupado com isso (fazendo os paliativos, as preces, as interseções) aí caridade dos pedidos (...) justamente esse cidadão que recebe essa Preta Velha, e ela veio pra acolher os filhos, né, acolher como mãe mesmo, com todo o amor, com todo o carinho, quebrar aquela coisa do não, não pode isso, não pode aquilo. Quer dizer assim, abriu um momento, um espaço pra que eles se sintam úteis, valorizados, confortados dentro do trabalho e estarem no trabalho. Toma o Daime se querem, na hora que querem tomar, quantas vezes querem, desde que acompanhados por ela; quer tomar mais um pouquinho, vamos tomar, ela dá o tanto certo, tira o tanto, como está, tá cansado? quer dizer, ela (a Preta Velha) tá ciente de tudo o que tá passando; rede armada, ela atende e faz aquela parte do trabalho, viu que ele tá um pouco já desgastado, ela vai lá, e bota pra ele. É um trabalho bem (...) esse trabalho de desobsessão<sup>16</sup> (...); a coisa de tratar bem o psicológico, aquela da crítica (...) que muitas vezes nós cometemos determinados desatinos, tipo assim, que os nossos filhos podem ter ficado machucado com alguma coisa, traumatizado, quer dizer, ela trata tudo isso. Ela trata os traumas, os desprezos do fulano, a indiferença nossa mesmo de não saber lidar. Quer dizer, o momento de mim mesmo dentro desse trabalho, quer dizer, nós temos sete sexta-feira.*

Hita said, and here I do a rustic but approximated translation:

There are (...) people (...) too influenced, well, by the 'things' of the 'world', and who become stuck or influenced by a *espirituinho* (pejorative - 'very little spirit') there... something that walked tweaking a few things (...), so we, became worried about it (...), and feeling that charity<sup>17</sup> was requested (...) So this *Preta Velha*, (...) she came to welcome the children, embrace as a mother, with all the love, with love, breaking that 'cannot be' thing, or 'this cannot be', 'that can also not'. I mean, well, (she) opened a moment, a space for them to feel useful, valued, comforted inside the spiritual work. They can take Daime if they want, when they want to take, how often they want, provided they are accompanied by her... (She may conduct...) want to take a little bit more? to take as much as they want. Are you tired?... I mean, she (Vó Nadir) will be always aware of everything, you're going through; You have only to install the hammock, she also assists oneself and makes that part of the work. She saw that someone is a little worn now, she goes there, and gives a little bit more Daime. It's a job (...) a work for a disobsession (...), the right thing to treating the psychological, that criticism (...) that we often commit some blunders, like with our children, who may have been hurt by something we did, traumatized, I mean, it is all about it. She treats trauma, the contempts, our indifference in not even know how to deal. And also, I mean, the moment of myself into this work we have for seven Fridays.

And Luis added:

*...E essa confiança também é o que permite a esse adolescentes, a esse jovens, a abertura pra que eles possam conhecer, cada vez melhor, as entidades da casa. Isso é um ponto muito bacana (...) São da casa. Ainda são jovens.*

<sup>16</sup> The category 'desobsessão' (disobsession) is widely used by spiritist groups in Brazil. It evokes a procedure to undo a situation of 'obsessão' (obsession), in which a spirit force influences negatively the flow of life of a person.

<sup>17</sup> The category charity here may refer to particular approach to Christian charity. In Daime religions it is a cosmic obligation to assist people in need of spiritual help.

And that confidence is also what allows these adolescents an openness, so they can know, even better, the entities of the house. This is very nice (...) They are from the house (referring to Barquinha). And are still young...

Hita also said

*depois desse trabalho com essa entidade eu comecei a ver determinadas faltas nossas, falta de atenção, falta de cuidado, de amor, de carinho, de zelo com as nossas famílias(...). Talvez esse questionamento abriu margem pra ação desse espírito benfeitor que se apresentou de uma maneira ó: 'Vai conhecer essa preta velha'. (...) esses dois encontros de duas pedras preciosas, (...).*

...after this work with this entity, I started seeing our faults, our lack of attention, our lack of care, of love, of tenderness, of care with our families (...). Perhaps this questioning opened margin for action this benefactor spirit, who presented herself in a way: 'Look, you will meet this old black woman.' (...) These are meetings of two precious stones (...).

He refers to having realised that they were not doing well, and the idea of having Vó Nadir helping in a more settled and frequent way. It is also important to note here that the contents of Luiz and Hita's accounts communicate an interesting process of interaction which may be that between the contingency of the participation of a medium in the social-political-spiritual daily life of a religious organisation, and that has to be with the incorporation of *pretos velhos e pretas velhas* (black old (wo)men)<sup>18</sup>, and an ability to deal let's say social-ritually with personal social problems.

That is the 'social place' where the relationships with the spiritual entities is central, dynamic and ultimately establishes conditions for the quality and the dynamic fluency of social-political-spiritual life. And within expectations which would not be necessarily established by the religious hierarchy, or by centralised leadership, but by a circumstantial and located intervention. Moreover, it is interesting to note that at no point in their accounts remains that the initiative of setting up these 'works' was at stake determined or assigned by the initiative of spiritual forces, explanation which could be expected from an institutionalising initiative. The process of formation of this ritual space is presented as a combined set of fittings and articulations, that eventually consolidate it, and that can be assigned either to an intervention, even if somewhat diffuse and 'misexpressed' by the entity, as to the application of the creativity of the mediums, which indeed were those who put the work with Vó Nadir into operation.

In fact, I think this articulation between ritual and social life as a way to deal with daily problems does not constitute a huge novelty for researchers who work with spiritual healing and mediumship. However, what it is very interesting is, first of all, to perceive how a ritual ceremony is set up by the combination of demanding and related circumstances, and also by a consistent articulation between self-consciousness/self-criticism and the most intimate relationship with a spiritual entity, which is to 'incorporate' her in different dimensions of life. Here I am considering that 'incorporate' an entity of the spiritual plane is not just a ritualistic event, but a full attitude toward the spiritual world, in which one assumes that the messages and guidance received from

<sup>18</sup> Which may be perhaps its most significant distinction in relation with other ayahuasca organisations, particularly those related to the tradition of Daniel Pereira de Matos. See Costa (2008).

the consultation relationship with the entity may reverberate in one's life. In other words, there is a whole continuity between ritual life and social/personal life.

## A few brief concluding notes

### 1. Science and Mediumship

It is relevant to consider first, that the use of Daime and other similar substances in Brazil, particularly the so-called religious ones, has great potential to attract people, especially those who are looking for experiences that suggest will be a 'benefit' to their health and lives. It may be also relevant in this attraction the expectation that joining a religious group would eventually lead to the expansion and fluency of social relationships, and to the access to new social networks. In general, in a cultural context in which religion is not generally rejected, and where it is actually stimulated, it is not difficult to imagine that the role ayahuasca religions in the Brazilian religious landscape will increase significantly.

Second, even among those who may consider themselves opened to different points of view about the world, there may be many who think mediumship is just a psychological problem of dissociation, or a theatrical strategy for religious conviction. This skepticism with mediumship comes probably from the 19th Century, (...) when leading physicians, for example in the US (Alvarado & Zingrone 2012), engaged to elaborating criteria to perceive the limits between normality and abnormality in human behaviour. And mediumship, or 'mediomania', as it was inconsistently called, was considered a 'pathology' to be treated, as many others peculiarities of human behaviour were, and still are, considered diseases.

One of the main arguments was that strong emotional experiences could cause a disruption on a supposed existent mental equilibrium, producing dissociation, exaltation and the emergence of different personalities (Alvarado & Zingrone 2012). So people were not entirely ill, but induced to have different, 'disruptive' or 'dissociative' behaviours in situations in which emotional exaltation was provoked. Furthermore, these rustic, but considered 'scientific' views on mediumship phenomena were unfolded to become more explanatory sophistications, as for example when spirit possession was regarded as a resource for empowerment, particularly for women in 'lower' social positions. Regarding openness, even the acceptance that not all comes from our 'brain-mental' experience, it does not take into account the emic or native point of view, and still looks to translate these phenomena into supposed scientific idioms. This reflection on science leads me to think about the relationships between medicine and science and further about the relationship between medicine, health and mediumship. Whilst the focus here is not primarily the discussion of the debate on mediumship, I should point out that there is a great gap in the research on psychoactive and psychedelic substances with a lack of an appropriate epistemology. One which at least would consider seriously the research that refuses any intrinsic harmfulness. In this sense, I think mediumship deserves the same epistemological consistence. Indeed, the negative term referring to a diagnosis

of dissociation and consequently to schizophrenia, became popular to classify the mediumistic experience. Therefore, once related to dissociation, mediumship was characterized as problematic, pathological and associated to a sort of perturbation. However, to sum up my position, here I tried to show that even if one regards mediumship as dissociation, the kind of dissociation promoted is actually a structuring one. Thus, supposing that there is a dissociation, this dissociation is actually structuring social life, as it provides a plausible and efficient framework for the fluency of social and cosmic relations at least among Barquinha participants.

## 2. The daimista notion of person

The notion of what is a person, or what is a human being, which I gathered from my encounters with daimistas, offers a peculiar perspective about people considered 'disturbed' that affects the cosmoideology of what might be called generically as Brazilian Spiritism. What I may call Brazilian Spiritism would be characterised by various religious segments which call themselves *espíritas* (spiritists), and in an analogous way to the theory Allan Kardec established on the existence, presence and influence of spiritual beings on human beings and vice versa. This is a cosmoideology that understands the existence of the human beings as intensively related to a world, or plane of existence, 'visible' with a world, or 'invisible' plane, from where other forces influence human life. In this sense, some of the people regarded as having mental disorders are considered to be in fact more susceptible to the influences of the spiritual world. This leads us to think about indigenous groups which consider people with more unusual behaviour candidates to be shamans. This approach, on the one hand, is recognised as relevant in an intense exchange system, and, on the other hand, in the same direction, it may imply that the experiments that daimistas usually do in parallel with their regular religious services, for example using different techniques in order to modify the relationships with the world, would amplify their capacity to be receptive to the relationship with the 'invisible'. To accept this perspective and to live according to it constitutes a huge epistemological change which impacts significantly their daily life.

### Final Note

I think that it is possible to evince from the work of Hita, Luis and Vó Nadir, as well as in other Daime religions contexts, first of all, an articulation between knowledge on the use of Daime, mediumship and health, which leads to what I think are the most relevant 'healing properties' of Daime. This articulation is a way to constitute legitimacy and fluency on social relations, pointing to elements which have been remarked as therapeutically relevant, and so thinking about Daime's 'therapeutic' properties not from a simplistic and industrial-pharmacological point of view - a perspective which has grown in recent years - but actually from a complex and creatively crafted management of social-religious life, framed by the implications, contents, accumulated knowledge and circumstances of ayahuasca/Daime use. What I tried to show here is that the spiritual healing in Daime Religions has been seen in a 'psy' reifying view as related to 'individual problems' solving, and too conditioned by



the Western perspective influenced by psychiatric and psycho-analytic points of view, which have been able just to approach the individual, letting social and cosmic relationships as secondary for problems solving strategies.

I want also to remark that I am not attacking abstractly science as a form to approach the use of Daime, ayahuasca or other psychoactives or even anything in the world, but trying to argue that a perspective which considers pharmacological, or laboratorial based studies on psychoactive substances as being the only valid ones is very problematic. It is not just a naïve and perhaps hypocritical way to deal with the politics of the scientific experience, and with research agendas, but also an incentive for pharmaceutical industry and commerce enterprise to take action and to dominate the existence and circulation of these substances. I hope we can find a way to approach and engage with the knowledge of Daime religious participants and other groups and people who use ayahuasca in a symmetrical, respectful and consistent epistemological way.

This approach is very relevant when exploring the potentialities of ritual-religious life regarding the help they can provide to the involved community. I had the opportunity to accompany Vó Nadir's dislocation among the participants and, as I noted earlier, she answered to the problems of a couple, the health of a young man and how all participants were doing in their lives with a few short sentences.

Vó Nadir did question the attendees about aspects of their personal lives - of those who she attended for the first time, or what happened to those already seen since their last meeting. She instructed them to do further work, as to make *oferendas* (offers) to the spiritual entities who can help them in their needs, or to take further treatment with herbs and other plants she would tell them how to prepare.

Moreover, from the point of view of mediumship, Vó Nadir religious or spiritual agency demonstrates a structuring way to build more consistent social and cosmic relationships, through her interactional intervention, whose 'effects' I could already observe afterwards, when returning to city centre of Rio Branco with the participants. They remembered carefully what she said and did, even her jokes and telling offs, consolidating their relationship towards sharing its contents. In this way, and taking the pejorative category of 'dissociation' which characterises most of the so-called scientific approaches to mediumship, I would say that if there is any dissociation it serves to improve attention and to structure social, emotional, and cosmic relationality.

From a point of view which may combine the notions of spiritual healing and therapy, the process as a whole reflects what many authors have said about the relational nature that involves the so-called spiritual healing. It fits particularly to those religious groups that have a cosmoideology which comes from a self-attributed African inspiration, and which claim that human life is in constant and intense relationship with spiritual entities.

Still, the events organised to meet Vó Nadir in Barquinha also contrast dramatically with the mental health policies which have been developed by the Brazilian State in particular, but I can imagine in many other countries. In front of the conflicts and tensions brought by patients to the system of mental health attention, intervention is almost exclusively done based on the managing/mediation of medication, in general commercially valued bio-chemical agents.

So yes, Daime/ayahuasca can be a pharmaceutical tool. But to reduce its impact just to psycho-neurologic effects in fact reifies the incredibly rich and interesting repercussion of its use by the Barquinha participants relegating it exclusively to a pharmaceutical or even to a psychotherapeutic point of view. In sum, as it has become an increasing trend, it may be regarded as an inconsistent, epistemologically speaking, problematic reification. I would like also to remember that the articulation I presented here between different aspects of a relational helping, is a way to constitute legitimacy and fluency in/of social relations, and bring us to think about ayahuasca's 'therapeutic' properties as also a result of a complex and creatively crafted management of social-religious life.

Last but not least, I conclude this contribution to a Special Issue dedicated to approach bodily experience and ethnographic knowledge by taking into consideration primarily a sense of body conditioned by the Cartesian mind-body fragmentation. In this discussion I have not mentioned experiences of tingling in the limbs, nausea, tachycardia, sensation of external entities presences that seems to come from other dimensions of the cosmos. All these perceptions can be felt when doing research in empirical situations as that found in the field research that inspired this text. However, these 'bodily' ways of knowing the lived experiences and the lives of others include here another 'bodily experience.' That is, how the formulation of ethical and methodological attitudes is effectively a body processing. These experiences inform us of our 'productivist' inconsistencies even before we have to listen to other colleagues' warnings about involvement in the fieldwork experience. In short, I am proposing the construction of an embodied epistemology which draws upon and stimulates our attention also to our existential discomforts, as fundamentally relevant to establish the consistency of our 'scientific' contribution.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude for all participants of Daime Religions who have collaborated with my research project, for their generosity, their time, their interest, but mainly for their consistent and genuine interest on the knowledge that academic and ethnographic research can provide. I am also grateful to the organising committee of the BC 2013, particularly Ben Sessa, Anna Waldstein and David Luke; Emily Pierini for the opportune comments; and Bettina Schmidt for her sensibility and support.

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