

THE BAILADO AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATORY LEADERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY SANTO DAIME COMMUNITIES

Applicant

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Stage of Project

This project is in the preliminary research stage. I am completing my first year towards a PhD in the Latin American and Latinx Studies Department at UC Santa Cruz.

Research Question

What is the role of the Santo Daime *bailado*, or danced work, as a psychedelic spiritual technology foundational to this Brazilian religious ayahuasca practice and how is its centrality entangled with gender relations, particularly women's participation and leadership, within Daime communities.

Study Proposal

By participating in a historic Santo Daime gathering to inaugurate a new church in Mapiá, a village in the Southern Amazon where this religious practice originated, I will conduct research among daimistas from various nationalities as well as throughout Brazil on the role of the bailado and the convergence of diverse cultural orientations concerning gender in the Santo Daime ayahuasca religious practice. Santo Daime was founded in 1930 in the state of Acre by Raimundo Irineu Serra, known as Mestre Irineu. The practice involves participation in regular rituals or *works*, as in spiritual work, together with members of one's community and often visitors. Santo Daime is a critical lens through which to view gender within psychedelic studies as its origin story revolves around the appearance of a feminine entity referred to as the Queen of the Forest. As told in interviews with several men who knew and worked closely with Mestre Irineu, it was through his interaction with Her that he received instructions for the fundamental Santo Daime practice, which includes ingestion of the psychoactive daime tea, singing and dancing (MacRae and Moreira, 2011). The dancing, referred to as the *bailado*, is conducted regularly in Daime centers.

This new church, called *A Igreja da Floresta* or The Church of the Forest, is being constructed to hold up to fifteen hundred people for a single work. This inauguration event will offer an opportunity to observe and participate in bailado works with hundreds of people from all over the world and gain insight into the value of this unique approach to working with the plant medicine, ayahuasca. Recent advances in research on the healing potential of ayahuasca and other psychedelics focus on clinical and therapeutic applications, (Ly et al. 2018, Tófoli, Araújo, Palhano -Fontes 2018, Sanches et al. 2016). Daime, (which I will use interchangeably with "Santo Daime" in this proposal,) is an important example of practices produced by grassroots

communities in line with types of knowledges analyzed in epistemologies of the South (Sousa 2016). Although Daime practitioners, or *daimistas*, have been central in the legalization of ayahuasca use in Brazil and internationally, (Labate and Feeney 2012), large gaps persist in the research on applications of religious ayahuasca practices which come from the people and places most associated with this plant medicine, the Amazon forest.

Background

Mapiá, a Daime village of about a thousand inhabitants in the state of Amazonas, has been the subject of several research projects (Schmidt, 2007; Assis, 2017). In 1983, Sebastião Mota de Melo, a disciple of Mestre Irineu's known as Padrinho Sebastião, led a group of Daime practitioners from Rio Branco deep into the Purus National Forest to relocate their community in the municipality of Pauini. Their new settlement became known as the village of Mapiá. Today the Mapiá-Inauini National Forest which incorporates Pauini has been recognized as an IUCN protected area, (International Union for the Conservation of Nature). Mapiá has become a popular tourist destination not only for daimistas but for spiritual seekers and conservationists from diverse backgrounds. This celebration will mark a milestone in the trajectory of this unique Brazilian ayahuasca religious practice as it comes to be practiced by more and more people from diverse backgrounds throughout the world. In his dissertation on the international Santo Daime diaspora, Sociologist Glauber Loures de Assis presents research on the trajectory of Santo Daime since its inception up until 2017, (Assis 2017). He dedicates several pages to his research on gender relations within the Daime community of Mapiá, describing the intersectionality with race and class resulting in unequal power dynamics he found there as reflections of "traditional" gender roles present in the historic rubber plantations of that region (Assis, 2017). From another perspective, Nikola Bulajić, who conducted two weeks of fieldwork in the village of Mapiá, wrote about the impressive degree of authority taken on by the women in the spiritual works conducted there, especially young women, through their role leading the singing and dancing (Bulajić 2018).

More research into psychedelics which centralizes questions of gender, race and class will be crucial to decolonize this growing science. Daime works were originally held in poor, rural communities in Acre, but since the 1980s, Santo Daime has been growing and spreading throughout urban centers internationally, mostly through educated, middle class populations (Dawson 2013, Assis 2017). Although this research highlights the ways that the world has changed since Santo Daime was founded in 1930, the foundational practice of drinking daime, singing and dancing together continues. Santo Daime has served as a fortress against what Sousa refers to as epistemicide, (Sousa 2016), not only preserving these knowledges, but bringing them to other parts of the world. The *bailado* is an important mechanism through which these knowledges are not only preserved, but travel. In *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor presents the theory of performance as a kind of DNA (Taylor, 2003), stressing that cultural memory and identity are necessarily embodied:

The bodies participating in the transmission of knowledge and memory are themselves a product of certain taxonomic, disciplinary and mnemonic systems. Gender impacts how these bodies participate, as does ethnicity. The techniques of transmission vary from

group to group. The mental frameworks – which include images, stories and behaviors – constitute a specific archive and repertoire (86).

In the case of the Santo Daime *bailado*, performance is 100% participatory. More research into the principles of the Daime practice which remain consistent and maintain its epistemological wisdom are critical contributions to the burgeoning science of psychedelic medicines as new knowledges are produced and cultural studies advance. Maria Lugones' work on the colonality of gender articulates ways in which gender identity is constructed culturally (Lugones, 2008). In Santo Daime works, men and women sit on opposite sides of the salon and wear different uniforms, marking a clear, binary gender distinction which has been presented as problematic for some daimistas who identify as gay or non-binary (Cavnar 2014). These cultural gender norms, which were established along with the Daime practice in Northern Brazil in the 1930s, are being challenged by newer generations and more critical study of their entanglements with the Daime practice will produce important insights. In a recent paper about Indigenous Yawanawa women who confronted deep gender stereotypes in their culture and families to become the first two female *pajés* of their people, these women express that part of their motivation is not only self-empowerment, but a response to a growing international clientele with more egalitarian gender expectations, so that they can conduct ceremonies with *ayahuasca*, (or *uni* as it is known to them,) and access new markets as an opportunity to liberate themselves from oppressive gender relations (Thalji and Yakushko 2017).

Even in the times of Mestre Irineu, in which women were traded as goods on the frontiers of the rubber plantations, women held important leadership roles in the Santo Daime community. Percília Ribeiro, who served as Mestre Irineu's secretary and *zeladora*, (one who is responsible for knowing the hymns as a living reference of an oral tradition,) is named as the only person to whom Mestre Irineu taught and entrusted with the *chamados*, healing encantations inspired by indigenous practices of Acre (MacRae and Moreira 2011). The presence of women in leadership roles in Daime communities continues today, as the AMVCM, (The Association of the Residents of the Village of Mapiá), is run mostly by women, as is the *Santa Casa de Cura*, the healing house in Mapiá, where mediumship training and other healing modalities are applied and studied. Projects for a community kitchen, a music school, and a capoeira training center have all been initiated by women in Mapiá. These women, as well as all those who will be traveling to Mapiá for the inauguration ceremony, could serve as possible subjects for future research.

Although much research has been done on the ethnomusicology of the Daime hymns (Assis 2017, Oliveira 2008, Rehen 2007), very little research exists on the role of the *bailado*, which has been a fundamental participatory aspect of the practice since its inception, and is part of what makes Santo Daime, as well as other *ayahuasca* religions which emerged out of the Southern Amazon region in the early 20th century, so compelling as examples of highly structured healing practices which engage with psychedelics. In Barquinha, ("Little Boat,") an *ayahuasca* religion which engages with mediumship practices in which trained mediums channel benevolent spirits and perform spiritual tasks, its healing potential is directly related to participation in the social context of the works (Araújo 2006, Frenopoulo 2006). As Assis observes in his fieldwork, women's leadership in Santo Daime communities is often associated with mediumship practices, on which the integration of Santo Daime with the urban Brazilian practice of Umbanda is based (Assis 2017). Guimarães' research on the integration of Umbanda and Santo Daime in urban centers in the South of Brazil in the 1980s focuses on the integration of body centered,

alternative healing therapies practiced in these terreiros. She describes the *miração*, the Portuguese term for the altered state of consciousness induced by the daime tea, as an expansive but lucid state in which the participant is aware of their physical circumstances but able to access memories and insights inaccessible in normal states of consciousness (Guimarães 1993). As part of the healing potential of the Daime and Umbanda practices, she emphasizes that this state is engaged and realized through the body which acts as a socially inscribed conduit between the material and the spiritual realms (Guimarães 1993). The bailado is an example of social and spiritual technology of the Santo Daime practice that integrates healing principles into the social realm as embodied, participatory action.

Research Aims

Santo Daime is known as a healing practice, renowned for its therapeutic potential. I aim to conduct research into the fundamental principles engaged through the Santo Daime bailado as a collective religious practice and its social complexities in relation to gender. By focusing on behavioral traits cultivated in communities where Santo Daime works are a central priority and around which the community is based, this research will offer insights into diverse ways of working with plant medicines. Although these religious and spiritual technologies may be incorporated into therapeutic application, through my research I hope to bring more understanding of their cultural, historical and social implications as providing the context through which these medicines have come to urban centers. By examining Daime community members' relationship to the bailado as well as within the collective, I will gain new perspectives on the bailado as participatory, corporeal spiritual work and gender relations within Santo Daime communities, particularly the roles of women.

Although set and setting have been part of the psychedelic science vocabulary since the 1960s (Hartogsohn 2017), and longitudinal use has been found not to have adverse effects on subjects (Gonzalez et al. 2012), lifestyle integration which involves regular ingestion of and practice with psychedelics is less studied. Santo Daime, approaching its centennial anniversary in 2030, is practiced in at least twenty countries, has more than a hundred and twenty centers in Brazil alone, and is practiced by upwards of a hundred thousand people worldwide, (santodaime.com), warranting further study. I aim to contribute new knowledge on underrepresented subjects and practices through this study.

Hypothesis

I suggest that the socio-spiritual technology of the Santo Daime bailado lends itself to participatory practices which cultivate community and harmony not only within local Daime communities, but across an international network of Daime practitioners, as well. The bailado, a fundamental principle of the Santo Daime religious practice, incorporates subjective healing and harmonious leadership through equalizing forces evident in the Santo Daime foundational principles. The only publication that I have found presenting work explicitly about the Daime bailado focuses on its sacred symbology, in an analysis based on Bernhard and Maria-Gabriele Wosien work with European folk dances (Mendonça and Trabulsi 2012). Although this paper presents some interesting observations about the bailado as sacred dance, I am interested in the universality of the dance as it is performed by “all” practitioners while simultaneously singing

the Daime hymns and playing the maraca, a hand held shaker instrument, as well as its implications for promoting harmony and collective healing through active participation. Santo Daime is essentially an oral practice, to be sung and danced. In her work on Afro-Brazilian feminisms, Cláudia Pons Cardoso looks to oral history and tradition as dislocated from the position of “absence of the written language,” which involves the negation of skills, and instead becomes complementary, acquiring centrality (Cardoso 2016). I propose that the bailado incorporates Afro-Brazilian knowledges which cultivate inclusivity and the central doctrinal principles of “harmony, love, truth and justice,”^{vi} through an intelligent, corporeal psychedelic practice. The central Daime qualities of harmony, love, truth and justice are from a Daime prayer called the *Chave da Harmonia* or Key of Harmony, adapted from the *Círculo Esotérico Comunhão do Pensamento*, (Esoteric Circle for the Communion of Thought,) an esoteric study founded in Brazil in 1909 by Antônio Olivio Rodrigues, a Portuguese intellectual who migrated to Brazil in 1880, and which Mestre Irineu practiced. I reference it here to demonstrate how the historical and political circumstances in Brazil around the turn of the 19th century created an environment of cultural encounters from which Santo Daime emerged, and Mestre Irineu’s upbringing as a Black man in a state where Afro-Brazilian cultural practices proliferated have been researched as cultural influences found in the Santo Daime religious practice (Labate and Pacheco 2004).

The dancing works, in which official uniforms are worn by all members, can last up to twelve hours, and multiple servings of the daime tea are consumed throughout the works. The steps are simple and repetitive and the community is organized in a circle in which five-year-old children sing and dance alongside eighty-year old elders. Centralizing the bailado in my research, I plan to expose ways that Santo Daime establishes a different, participatory model for work with psychedelics through which the potential for full recovery from illness, addiction, depression and trauma can lead to full integration and participation in community.

The inclusion of the bailado in the Santo Daime religion reflects cultural beliefs and practices fundamentally African or Afro-Brazilian, as Daime founder Mestre Irineu Serra was a descendant of African people brought to Brazil as slaves. Further reflecting a history of cultural resistance, survival and radical defiance of institutional racism and oppression, accounts of African dance and ritual as a means to build and strengthen communal bonds are described by Kwame Gyekye in *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*:

Art in traditional African cultures has both functional and purely aesthetic dimensions. One outstanding feature of artistic performances such as music and dance is their participatory character: music-making and dancing are communal activities, aimed – apart from their purely aesthetic qualities – at deepening communal sentiments and consciousness (Gyekye 1996).

My research will be aimed at identifying and analyzing specific aspects of Daime practice which may cultivate behavior favorable for building community, equality, and collectivity. I suggest that the bailado, as an embodied, rhythmic, inclusive practice is central to this inquiry.

The bailado consists of forming a living mandala in which participants follow figure eight patterns on the floor with their bodies via three principle dances - the march, the waltz and the

mazurka. In a short documentary about the Afro-Brazilian religious practice *O Baile de São Gonçalo*, (The Dance of Saint Gonzales,) filmed during a trip to Mestre Irineu's home state of Maranhão, Lucas Kastrup Rehen identifies twenty four different dances within the tradition, including the three that make up the Santo Daime bailado (Rehen 2018). Considering the ubiquity of references to walking, stepping firmly on the ground, and "the path of life" in official Daime hymns, of which there are upwards of a thousand, I argue that Mestre Irineu's inclusion of dancing in the Santo Daime works, as well as the marking of the rhythm by playing a maracá, came from a cultural intelligence that has not been significantly researched or recognized for its therapeutic potential. Knowing how to stay in one's place, (i.e. stay in one's body,) and at the same time put one foot in front of the other even when challenged by the force of the medicine, are valuable skills, strengthened over time through regular practice. In this sense, Santo Daime works are a good example of what Richard Sosis describes as "costly signaling" in his article *The Adaptive Value of Religious Ritual*, (2004). The only signal that can be believed is one that is too costly to fake, which Israeli biologist Amotz Zahavi referred to as a 'handicap' (Zahavi 1997). Everything is magnified in the Daime rituals under the influence of the tea and disharmonious intentions often are embodied and become more apparent.

Although when adults first drink Daime there is often a process of individual, personal transformation and "awakening," the Santo Daime doctrine strongly emphasizes collectivity, unity, and the importance of community. According to Elizabeth Marshall Thomas' observations living among the Ju/wasi of West Africa as recounted in her book *The Old Way*, individuals in the tribe who would try to stand out or set themselves apart through dress or behavior would be disciplined and such behavior frowned upon. In Santo Daime works a common uniform is used by members for this purpose, further evidence of the presence of African cultural influences in the Santo Daime practice according to Gyekye, as the uniform signifies clothing "appropriate to the occasion" and worn by all initiated participants:

Among the criteria of aesthetic value and judgment are appropriateness and fittingness. Music, dancing, and even clothing must be appropriate to the occasion. Beauty is seen not only in works of art and in the human figure but also in human conduct, in humanity itself, and in a person's character (Gyekye 1996).

Each individual must be healthy and well in order to work and participate as a community member, bringing their skills and talents in a way of service. This is practiced and manifested in the works in which, although each one is encouraged to strive for their personal best, the highest achievements are realized through collective action and by working together cooperatively. Sosis also emphasizes the benefits of group ritual. By engaging in religious work the member communicates identification with the group. Through its ability to signal commitment, religious behavior can promote cooperation within the group. Adherents signal their commitment to the group not only by participating in ritual, but by proving their dedication through their performance within it. The more costly the participation, the more effectively the ritual bonds the members and cultivates solidarity (Sosis 2004). This accomplishment of participation and belonging lends itself to the healing process.

In Maria Lugone's work on the coloniality of gender, she emphasizes that in Yoruba society, gender was not an organizing principle prior to colonization by the West (Lugones 2008). She

cites Oyéronké Oyewùmí whose work shows how Yoruba life, past and present, has been translated into English to fit the Western pattern of body-reasoning (Oyewùmí 1997). Lugones also points out that, although there were obvious racial and ethnic hierarchies among European colonists, Indigenous and Black people in the Americas during colonization, European gender hierarchies actually left women in a lower social category than did Indigenous and African societies, whose women therefore enjoyed higher status within their respective communities than did the white women who identified with their oppressors (Lugones 2008). These entanglements are important insights in consideration of gender roles in the Santo Daime religious ayahuasca practice, which incorporates the three main racial, ethnic and cultural categories of Black, Indigenous and European.

Methods

For this research I will be conducting interviews with members of the Mapiá community and visitors, especially women, of all ages and nationalities. My interview questions will focus on the bailado and other corporeal practices, and on roles of participation and leadership. I have many contacts in Mapiá and with the community association, AMVCM. Living and working within the community during and after the inaugural season will give me insights into current concerns and relations between the Mapiá community and international Daime members. I will also be participating in works and building relationships with members of the community in Mapiá as well as with visitors from other churches and Daime centers, laying groundwork for future field study. Through my personal relationship with and regular practice of the Santo Daime doctrine as an “insider,” I have access to the relational nuances in the communities of which I am a part, and familiarity with the rigor of a life invested in a regular psychedelic religious practice. In his 2017 dissertation on the international Daime diaspora Glauber Loures de Assis explains in detail how his relationship with methodology researching Santo Daime changed once he became a member or practitioner of the religion, becoming an “insider,” concluding that to drink daime and participate in Daime works is in fact an important methodological tool not only to experience the object of one’s study subjectively, but to build trust and harmony within the community in which one is studying (Assis 2017).

I participate regularly in Daime works and have been in a leadership role in Daime centers both in California and Brazil. My role as daimista-researcher affords me a variety of perspectives through which to understand the different epistemologies across which I am treading with this research. Most of the research being done on Santo Daime and other ayahuasca religions is by social scientists who are also Daime practitioners. Santo Daime is emblematic of this bridge between different epistemologies as it deeply entangles performativity with altered states of consciousness, and therefore any study which objectifies the practice would prove very limited. I have received exemption status from the IRB to conduct preliminary research this summer in the Northeast of Brazil and in São Paulo and will be applying for IRB approval as I further develop my research questions and methodology the coming year in preparation to conduct this research. In the Fall 2019 I will be taking a course in Fieldstudy Practices in the Sociology Department at UCSC. I plan to return to Mapiá to conduct further field study upon qualification, as well as researching in the Northeast of Brazil, São Paulo, and California. Daime centers in these diverse geographic regions will provide a wide spectrum through which to engage with questions of gender, corporeality, and the participatory practice of the bailado.

Potential Impact/Implications

Very little research exists on the Santo Daime bailado, nor on gender relations in psychedelics in general, nor specifically on women's leadership in Santo Daime communities. The relationship between the centrality of the bailado, despite the lack of research on it, and some of the unique kinds of women's leadership found in Daime communities, offers fertile ground for research into relationships between corporeality and gender as embodied in the Santo Daime practice, usually identified with the feminine, as in mother earth, matter and material practice. As Assis observes in his fieldwork in Mapiá, women's leadership is especially identifiable through mediumship, as in syncretic practices of Umbandaime (Assis 2017). I suggest there are implications of this relationship between gender and spiritual-corporeal healing in the bailado itself. Observations that it is usually women who lead the singing and dancing in Daime works is also suggestive of a centralization of the feminine in the foundational Santo Daime practice (Bulajik 2018). This is a significant observation considering recent attention to biases concerning gender and sexual identity in psychedelic research institutions, as evident in the new Women in Psychedelics Forum (2018) at the California Institute of Integral Studies and the Queering Psychedelics Conference (2019) at the Brava Theater, both in San Francisco. This project promises to fill in long existing gaps in research on gender and corporeality in psychedelic practices by focusing on an underrepresented application of knowledges based on a plant medicine.

projeto

A IGREJA DA FLORESTA

Vila Céu do Mapiá, Floresta Nacional do Purus, Amazonas



Photos used for this proposal courtesy of santodaime.org

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VIDEOS AND WEBSITES

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1xNAYg92OM>

<http://www.santodaime.com>

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CONTEMPORARY SANTO DAIME COMMUNITIES**

Proposal Stage

Ana Flecha

STUDY BUDGET

Roundtrip Airfare	San Francisco/Rio Branco	\$1300
Roundtrip ground transportation		
	Santa Cruz/San Francisco	\$100
	Rio Branco/Boca do Acre	\$150
Roundtrip River Transportation		
	Boca do Acre/Mapiá	\$300
Hotel		
	Rio Branco – 2 nights	\$100
	Boca do Acre – 2 nights	\$50
Mapiá: One month		
	Housing	\$400
	Food	\$300
TOTAL		\$2700

BUDGET JUSTIFICATION

Travel to Mapiá, a remote village in the Southern Amazon forest in Brazil, gets more expensive every year, and as the inauguration festival for the Santo Daime Church of the Forest in 2020 will attract many Daime practitioners from all over Brazil as well as from international centers, travel and accommodation costs will rise during this time. For this reason I have limited my budget to travel expenses. This event will take place during the Fall quarter of my third year of graduate school, and I will take a leave during this time in order to travel, meaning I will not have a TA-ship and will not receive regular funding. This event will bring an unprecedented number of Daime practitioners together in the village of Mapiá, offering a historic juncture of time and place to conduct this preliminary research in the forest where this plant medicine originates and proliferates.

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Proposal Stage

Ana Flecha

Planned Dissemination:

In the Winter and Spring quarters of 2021 I will return to UC Santa Cruz to complete the qualification process, at which time I will also present my preliminary findings and apply to present at conferences such as: Horizons Perspectives on Psychedelics, the Women's Visionary Congress, Breaking Convention, Psychedelic Science (MAPS), the International Ayahuasca Conference (ICEERS), and the Women in Psychedelics Forum and Queering Psychedelics Conference at the California Institute for Integral Studies. Since its inception in May, 2018, I have been part of a Santo Daime research group based out of Brazil, *Pesquisa Santo Daime*, consisting of twenty members, most of whom have publications based on Santo Daime research. Some members will be attending the inauguration event on which this proposal is based, providing an opportunity to develop collaborative research plans, and organize a conference on Santo Daime research in Brazil.