



Is It Still Possible to Talk About New Age Therapeutic Religiosities?

Fátima Tavares^{1,2}  · Carlos Caroso^{1,3}

Received: 16 July 2018 / Accepted: 7 September 2018 / Published online: 20 September 2018
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Abstract

In this article, we propose to understand the specificities of the New Age therapeutic experiments, which characterize what is referred by Latour as a broader tendency for non-systemic, but as “network” globalization (not only globally or locally but intersecting the two dimensions). We understand that, on the one hand, globalization is not characterized as a systematic totality; on the other hand, the local context does not constitute a domain contrastive to the global, being marked by the ephemerality of the religious performances, and, at the same time, transforming itself and simultaneously resignifying the wider environment. As a means of elaborating and giving support to this research question, we will highlight some challenges which are faced by the studies on the New Age movement and, more specifically, by what we hereon refer as religious therapeutic experiments, which redefine New Age religiosities by its grounding on the therapeutic dimensions (with larger prominence of scientific arguments). In the end, we propose an articulation of these discussions with broader questions about the concept of religion and its relation to culture in global and local contexts.

Keywords New Age religiosities · Therapeutic religiosity · Alternative therapies · Traditional therapies · Spirituality and medical knowledge

✉ Fátima Tavares
fattavares@ufba.br

¹ Department of Anthropology and Graduate Program in Anthropology, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Rua Reitor Macedo Costa, 113/502-B, Salvador, Bahia 41815-150, Brazil

² (PQ Level 2) of Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico-CNPq, Brasília, Brazil

³ (PQ Level 1-B) of Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico-CNPq, Brasília, Brazil

Introduction

The studies on the New Age movement usually face a double challenge, which is to recognize the ephemerality of their local elaborations coupled with the perception that it is a “planetary” movement. The religious experience conveyed in the scope of the experiences and workshops is characterized by its autonomy, that is, it is deregulated from the institutionalized religious space, taking place through provisional performances, and being always subject to new productions of meaning.

In this text we seek, among the various possibilities, to find an explanation for the previous situation, for this we ought to understand the specificities of the New Age therapeutic experiments, which characterize what is referred by Latour (1994, 2006) as a broader tendency for non-systemic, but as “network” globalization (not only globally or locally but intersecting the two dimensions). This is so that, on the one hand, globalization is not characterized as a systematic totality; on the other hand, the local context does not constitute a domain which is contrastive to the global, being marked by the ephemerality of the religious performances and, at the same time, transforming and resignifying the wider environment. With the objective of addressing to this research question and elaborating an appropriate argument which supports an answer to this interrogation, we will highlight some of the challenges which have been faced by the studies on the New Age movement and, more specifically, those referring to what we have been mentioning as religious therapeutic experiments, defined as our pragmatic approach of the practices and experiences of the New Agers. We finish this article by proposing an articulation of these discussions with broader questions about the concept of religion, and its relation to culture in global and local contexts.

About the New Age Movement

The continuous production of new links in the New Age movement unleashes important differences in the contemporary religious “landscape” and, consequently, in the social such as understood by Latour (2006), as cartography of the heterogeneity of human-nonhuman associations. As suggested by Amaral (2000), the New Age is not structured in churches, nor in sects, composing “a spirit without a home”; it presents new forms of relationship between the participants, since it does not bind people or groups, much less places; it articulates a vast transnational network, but does not present institutional organicity. The New Age seems to play with sociological paradoxes.

Because it is refractory to an orthodox characterization, the New Age movement subverts the traditionally delimited boundaries which would characterize the “experience of the sacred” as separate, that is, “decontaminated” from other ties to the social: it appropriates itself of the scientific narrative, incorporating it into its own discourse, it disseminates and encourages the consumption of goods and services of its own, it elaborates a plethora of therapeutic experiments. It is a question of experiencing experiments, in so to say, which the religious is not a separate domain, but it is apprehended as a hybrid experience (Amaral 2003; Maluf 2005). The refusal of the doctrinal foundations of religious experimentations and the fluidity and hybridity of the movement have been a trademark of these religiosities. However, this is not to say that

these transformations leave no trace in the contexts in which the provisional and contingent syntheses of the “wanderers of the New Age”¹ take place.

The incessant transformations of this movement without foundations or doctrines permit the emergence of many landscapes through which the adepts circulate, this being a much-debated question among researchers, who seek interpretive models to understand the ways in which the broader (transnational) orientations articulate with national contexts (Carozzi 1991). By taking a critical review of the differences between the New Age movement in Latin America, published in this same periodical, D’Andrea (2018) claims that the specificity of New Age religiosities in Latin America would not be situated in community life and radical autonomy, but in the way that religions, science, and therapeutics are combined in the enhancement of the self.² The author understands those differences identifying three “modalities” of these religiosities in empirical contexts of Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil. About the Mexican experience, he considers that “[...] ancient traditions are activated at the interplay between local and transnational forces. Religious identities are thus reshaped as extensions or resistance to alien apparatuses, notably North-American and Spanish imperialisms” (D’Andrea 2018: 4). Contrasting with the Mexican experience, he presents the Argentinean experience as “[...] characterized by the pervasiveness of alternative spiritualities of the self amid educated urbanites. This space is significantly secular and psychologically oriented, resonating with countercultural appropriations of Asian and scientific views of the self.” (ibid). He considers that the experience in Brazil lays in between, and beyond, the two experiences: “[...] its spiritual universe comprises both nativist and autonomist poles, often rearticulated in carnivalesque fashion.” and considers it to be “a highly heteroclite universe of alternative practices that continuously interact and evolve.” (ibid).

In reality, many studies have been done on the dissemination of the New Age in contexts exogenous to the typical urban middle-class universe in the 1980s and 1990s, although researchers such as Guerrieiro and others (2016a, b)³ call attention to a decline in research on this subject in spite of its social relevance, which would be invisible by the spread of the new era in the wider culture. With reference to the transformations of the New Era in the Brazilian context, the studies by Oliveira⁴ point out to the indigenization of this movement in terms of a “Popular New Age,” in which new religious possibilities are created at the confluence of exogenous experiments (New Age) and endogenous (Brazilian religious traditions).

Considering the dissemination of the new referents in incessant translocal transits, would it still be possible to speak of the New Age from a historical or typological perspective, as a delimitable referent to other contemporary religious syncretisms? The question, which inspired the provocative title of this article, has been developed from the reading of an important collection of texts on the subject edited by De la Torre et al. (2013). In the first text of the book she claims that the growth of “traditional” practices

¹ This denomination first appeared in Brazil in a seminal article published by Soares (1990).

² Outlining the more general discussion of the New Age question, D’Andrea (ibid.) analyzes some of the studies that are also examined in the present text. However, we will not go in depth on this discussion because it goes beyond the limits of this article, which refers specifically to the therapeutic developments within the scope of the New Age.

³ Guerrieiro et al. (2016a, b).

⁴ Oliveira (2009, 2011a).

(ethnic and/or religious) comes to produce new syntheses within the New Age movement.⁵ This process of dissemination of new cultures was not (at least not exclusive) the homogenization of its referents in other cultures, but transformations from one side to another, indigenizing the New Age religiosities and re-exporting them to the first world countries.

For further problematization of what forms or what syncretic combinations may be considered New Age, we have taken the definition from Amaral (2000), who considers it as “syncretism in movement.” For De la Torre, despite the provisional syntheses, what characterizes the movement is it being an interpretative landmark anchored in holism. Thus, there would not be a New Age body of beliefs, but a hybrid sense-generating grammar. Analyzing the various interpretations which appear on the contributions to the book on the New Age in Latin America edited by her and associates, De la Torre affirms that in the view of anthropologists in Latin America, an important issue is the new/renewed meanings that new sensitivities can produce in the various religious and ethnic contexts. She also calls attention to another very important aspect, which is represented by the differences of this process in specific national contexts (Argentina, Mexico, Brazil). She concludes by affirming to be possible to identify a plethora of versions of what has once been the New Age movement.

Notwithstanding the point of view expressed by the organizer of the book, the chapter by Frigerio (2013), points out many caveats regarding the so-called syncretic capability of the New Age, indicating that it may obscure the analysis of its logics of exclusion, making it difficult to recognize its contours. The limits of the New Age are emphasized by the latter author, who questions the so widely accepted capacity for *eclecticism* and *bricolage* which is often attributed and characterized as New Age. For a better understanding of the appropriation logic of the New Age in different religious contexts, the first task would be to distinguish its syncretism from the “traditional” forms. In addition, it would also be necessary to differentiate appropriations from borrowings, and from New Age influences on groups in which some sympathizers adopt a new style; however, the group is not recognized as such.

That author claims that the problem of conceptualizing the New Age, and of its definition, which seems to be extremely difficult because of the intrinsic *bricolage*, also occurs with other religions, being, in a way, a false problem. After all, in “traditional” religions there are also similar difficulties in stabilizing concepts for religious phenomena of great internal diversity such as Catholicism and evangelicals, for example. Hence, the author contends that there is an “illusion of homogeneity” for the religious contexts to which are applied concepts of church and sect; while for the New Age, there is an “illusion of heterogeneity.” He ends up by indicating that the “sense generating matrix or grammar” which is presented by De la Torre as characterizing the New Age is not satisfactory, and, finalizes by affirming that the purpose of her prototype emphasizes some characteristics of these religiosities, with the objective of substantiating their specificity in the local contexts and religious crisscrosses.

However, if we follow the author’s line of argument, recognizing that the illusions of homogeneity and heterogeneity are false problems reifying immeasurable differences

⁵ De la Torre also argues that until a few decades ago, indigenous and Afro-American religions were considered as cultural practices of ethnic groups, and often seen as object of folklore, but, currently, they serve as paradigm of authenticity and ancestry.

between the New Age and other religions, we will have difficulty distinguishing effectively New Age practices from those only “inspired” by the New Age. This means that just like other religions, the New Age also presents specificities that are not given once and for all, but, are redefined in the environments in which the practices take place. In other words, New Age religiosities are also transformed, not only in substantive terms (the contents are always changing), but in the grammar of their syntheses, as Amaral (2014) suggests in a review of the book organized by De la Torre.

Partial Connections: New Age Therapeutic Experiments

The specificity of New Age religious experimentation has been understood as facilitating the intensity of therapeutic transits in contemporaneity, since it is not anchored in the substantiality of the practices and techniques used. Consequently, for the therapeutic experiments of the New Age, the investigations also point to the problematization of a strictly “substantivist” (of contents) approach for following a mix of discursive possibilities (a translocal sense matrix) and performatives (resignifications in the context of its use).

However, instead of insisting on the production of new classifications anchored in the recognition of the old dilemmas between globalized discourses versus local re-significations, we would like to seek other approaches, such as highlighting the shared dimension of the experiments, which recognize continuities and variations which unleash other transformations, differently from those of the “traditional” frontiers: scientific, religious, ethnic, alternative, conventional, etc. We believe that understanding the specificities of the New Age is perhaps not exactly privileging the delineation of frontiers, but, following, as Goldman proposes (Goldman 2005) for the case of *candomblé*, other form of description seeking to highlight neglected aspects. That is to say, other possible interpretations, that is not in the sense of being deeper or more suitable, but which permits new forms strategies for understanding and approximation, as the author stresses.

Consequently, we consider that our approach to those questions has strong affinity with other issues brought up by Goldman (2014), such as those related to presence of *Afroindigenous*,⁶ with the objective of denying the conception of syncretism, and recognizing the existence of a conjunctive dimension both empirical and projective (political and/or intellectual), which points out towards what is coming to be (as conceived by Deleuze 2000). We can make an analogous movement to that suggested by the author, considering the heuristic potentialities of taking seriously the consequences of the “meeting” of large populations (involving deep processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization), which has always been disregarded by anthropologists (and other researchers) accustomed with the theoretical distributions of the studies of indigenous ethnology and Afro-Brazilian populations. If we agree with this point of view, we need not lose sight of the precise delimitations of the New Age based on genealogical principles (of the origins of the movement) or typological (defining characteristics of the movement, differing from those that are related to the movement but do not confuse with them). In this perspective, it would not be

⁶ Goldman (Ibid.) and other researchers in Brazil have adopted the neologism *Afroindígena*, which is translated here as *Afroindigenous*.

productive to compare traits or aspects or empirical groups to identify or contrast the “pure” to the syncretic. Bypassing these pretensions, the “transformational” approach pointed out by the author seeks to elicit “[...] epistemological, ontological, cosmopolitan, immanent to the native discourses [...]” (p. 217), which are capable of producing heterogeneous connections, syncretism (in the mixture of different types) or in holism (in the infinite undifferentiation of reflexivities). In the case of the New Age therapeutic religiosities, i.e., practices that are grounded on the therapeutic dimension (Tavares 2012), this transformational model helps us to meet the challenge of understanding how the natives connect and not only juxtapose (or syncretize) different referential, in a movement of becoming (Deleuze, *Ibid.*) in conjunctive relationships, being simultaneously New Era and other possibilities.

With the aim of clarifying the terms of the question which is posed by this article, we present two directions in which the therapeutic itineraries of the New Age have been resignified: in the first, in religious, popular, and/or ethnic contexts, in which indigenization of culture occurs; in the second, in medical and public policy contexts, which present a social legitimacy of a New Age culture. Both directions seem to implode the image of a discursive matrix that is “disseminated” by other fields of the culture without transformations.⁷ This is so because, if in the work of mediation of the New Age networks “everything” is capable of being brought into relation, then we must follow precisely this “middle world,” which is producing continuities and inflections (simultaneously), in which the indigenization of experiences is not opposed to the universalization of the New Age referents. One can follow this path rather than insist on the recognition of the New Age only in situations already stabilized, in this case, as religious expressiveness of urban middle strata.

a) Therapeutic iterations New Age “in culture”

The case of the *Vale do Amanhecer*, in *Brasília*, which has later spread to other parts of Brazil (Carvalho 1999; Cavalcante 2000; Galinkin 2008; Oliveira 2009, 2011b; Siqueira 2013), is especially paradigmatic because it is dealing with a new religion at the confluence of the New Age with the Brazilian religious traditions. These encounters, confluences, superpositions, and religious hybridization stimulate the intense debate over the interpretative limits of this movement, leaving the question whether the *Vale do Amanhecer* would be an unfolding of the dissemination of the new referential, and in the extreme, one can consider this form of religion as “popular New Age” (Oliveira 2009), and, possibly an expression of indigenization in the Brazilian context. On the other hand, those challenges are posed not only in the new religions; but also, for the “traditional” religions, because the confluences of therapeutic-religious experiments may be noticed in some of them, such as in charismatic Catholicism in Brazil (Steil 2013), in Mexican popular Catholicism (Zúñiga 2013), among Brazilian evangelicals (Fonseca 2010), or in the religions of Afro-Brazilian matrices (Oliveira 2014, 2016).

“Therapeutics of religion” (therapeutic efficacy anchored in religious worldviews) and “therapeutic in religion” (autonomization of therapeutic efficacy) were the expressions used by Tavares (2006a) for categorizing these movements of greater or lesser

⁷ Such as considered by Latour (2006).

autonomy of the processes of therapeutic legitimacy stemming from the new religiosities, considering that the “widening” of new therapies to other religious contexts may re-signify both the New Age referents and other religiousness in question, however in different ways. Thus, in an ethnography on the work of a health ministry group and a Umbandist center, Tavares (2006b) observes, in the first case, the centrality of the new therapeutic framework as the foundation of the healing experience, incorporating new techniques, practices and procedures, legitimizing the religious work from the point of view of the “intrinsically” therapeutic benefits. Despite the clearly observed contamination of that umbandist context by New Age elements, the introduction of new therapies reconfigured religious experiences, but without attributing an “exogenous” character to therapies.

We take as an example, the case study by Oliveira in two esoteric Umbanda centers in the city of *Florianópolis*. The first one had incorporated the use of reiki, and the second, apometry. The author points out to the existence of intensive exchange flows involving neo-esoteric, popular, and New Age circuits. Further, he considers this umbandist “modality” as a locus of creation and not only of reception of the New Age references. In our conception, in the therapeutic practices, those characteristics shared by New Age and popular religious traditions are carefully reinterpreted and reelaborated. This is so much so that, the New Age style has been disseminated by other religious “landscapes,” such as in the experiences of “modern” *benzedadeiras*,⁸ resulting in the intensification of the transits among them, and turning more complex the analysis of the universe of transit from alternative therapies to the field of official medicine. It is also noticeable the increasing revitalization of many therapeutic herbal practices, represented by the use homemade remedies under various forms (teas, infusions, and others), and using both elements of the native Brazilian vegetation and exogenous ones brought in from different parts of the world, which are regrouped under the designation “phytotherapy.”

The New Age therapeutic practices also circulate in different ethnic contexts, especially in shamanistic experiments, either in the circuits of urban neo-shamanism described in the studies by Magnani (1999, 2005, 2013), or in the indigenous and *Daime* traditions, which has been producing important transformations in interethnic encounters, as Cunha (1998: 8) points out in a critical tone:

The extraordinary flowering of shamanism has often been observed in situations of colonial domination, or more precisely, when people are captured in the gears of the world system [...] It has also been observed that this flowering has not only affected the peoples subjected to domination: the shamans’ clientele is, in most cases, regional, if not broader, without distinction of ethnic origin [...] In the present days, another example would be in New Age urban groups. The presence of Shamanism can thus manifest itself within certain indigenous groups, in millennialist movements, but also in the urban environment, more often so - and this is my third observation - appropriating themselves of heteroclite techniques that are self-proclaimed traditional.

⁸ *Benzedadeiras* is a category of prey healers present all over Brazil. Their healing tradition comes mainly from the rural catholic environment, and from Afro-Brazilian matrices religions.

As pointed out by De la Torre (2013), New Age cultures and traditional religions (with their collective experiences) are phenomena insufficiently studied in their mutual influences (a gap that the collected book organized by De La Torre et al. (2013) seeks to minimize). Thus, the ethnologists who have studied traditional cultures have often come across transformations in these contexts, which have occurred as a result of their direct or indirect relations to the New Age religiosities, whereas scholars who have studied New Age religiosities remain positioned in their contexts of origin, without paying due attention to its permeability. De la Torre also emphasizes that for the first group, interpretations of the influence of New Age religiosities in ethnic contexts may vary, ranging from denouncing the loss of authenticity⁹ to reinventing the authenticity of tradition.¹⁰

b) New Age therapeutic itinerations in science and politics

The emergence of so-called “alternative therapies,” starting in the early 1980s in Brazil, has been associated with the rise of this new style of spirituality that has developed more intensively among the urban middle classes. After a few decades since the start of a therapeutic movement that has consolidated itself and whose social visibility no longer causes so much estrangement, we continue to associate, rather hastily, the use of therapies such as Bach flowers, crystals, reiki, and past life therapy, to the New Age movement. On the other hand, from the 1990s onward, the use of alternative therapeutic resources has been configuring a new modality of professional specialization within the scope of the New Age universe¹¹ that causes transformations beyond itself.¹²

This change in position may well be illustrated by the admission of the Study Group on Cardiovascular Medicine and Spirituality (GEMCA) as a member of the study groups of the Brazilian Society of Cardiology in 2013 (Toniol 2015). It is important to note that this is not an isolated event, but it is part of a movement that crosses different professional medical spaces in many countries. He further develops his argument, by indicating that those transformations are in line with the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO), which has among its published principles recognized the importance of spirituality for health and well-being.

In order to follow the “power effects” (Toniol 2015: 14) of the growing social legitimacy of the relationship between spirituality and health, Toniol seeks to understand what is happening within the medical sciences, rather than prematurely inferring that it is (exclusively) a phenomenon of dissemination of New Age referents to other fields. With the objective of strengthening his argument, he further presents a brief genealogy of the research on spirituality in the field of health since the 1970s, for demonstrating how this term is increasingly present in a certain type of medical literature. Based on results obtained by those studies, he affirms that they are no longer

⁹ Chapter on “exochamanisms” by Galinier (2013).

¹⁰ Chapter by Ros (2013).

¹¹ In Tavares (2012), the author already pointed out that these unfoldings make up an alternative therapeutic network in which it does not coincide with the circuit of the New Age religiosities, composing what she called “therapeutic spirituality.”

¹² Toniol (2016). See also, Saizar et al. 2013 and Bordes 2018 for the use of alternative therapies in the Argentine hospital context.

only a research question, because spirituality, as a concept detached of the New Age referents, has been transformed into a referent of the “human” itself, and recently incorporated among the principles and recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO), in such a way that it amplifies the conception of health and health care. In a subsequent development of this recommendation, it is possible to observe its unfolding in public policies in Brazil under the form of the PNPIC.¹³

It is important to recognize that these are not simply enlargements (of the New Age referential) and unfoldings without transformations and/or discursive syntheses. Quite to the contrary, the resignifications and multiple ways of understanding holism and spirituality make possible exactly the availability of these referents in heterogeneous contexts. These ideas lead us to problematize the discursive matrix of the New Age as an exclusive referent for understanding alternative and/or complementary therapeutic experiments, as the author emphasizes (Tonio 2015: 139).

The importance of giving centrality to this associative chain, which articulates integrative/complementary science/practices/spirituality, is central to the study of alternative therapies, insofar as it implies a rupture with the dominant perspective. [...] the insistence on making the New Age the main analytical key to understanding alternative therapies has concealed important empirical transformations in this field.

Considering the two movements mentioned above, we have, on the one hand, the transformations of the New Age referents “in culture,” intensifying diversity, in minority and/or alternative contexts (religious/spiritual and ethnic). But new therapeutic itineraries present “vanishing points” beyond the world of culture—as a place of difference and resignification—to become legitimate knowledge in the medical field and in public health policies, under the auspices of WHO.

Considering this movements to the “inside” and to the “outside” of culture, would it be possible to speak of centrifugal agencyings, which increasingly implode these referents, by promoting partial connections (Strathern 1986) with other forms of therapeutic experimentation? The directions pointed out (for the indigenization of culture and beyond culture) suggest that New Age therapies present a strong decentralization in relation to their context of origin, making it difficult to place these experiments in degrees of greater or lesser proximity to the “original” context and, consequently, of greater or lesser affinity with the ideas of the New Age. But this problem does not appear to be unique to the New Age therapeutic experiments; on the contrary, one can suggest a shift of the concept of religion from systemic approaches of

¹³ The National Policy on Integrative and Complementary Practices, Interministerial Ordinance 971 dated 03/05/2006, regulates the practices offered in the Unified Health System in Brazil. Formerly, this Ordinance provided only for five practices: traditional Chinese medicine; homeopathy; phytotherapy and medicinal plants; thermotherapy and craniotherapy and anthroposophic medicine. In subsequent ordinances, other alternative therapeutic practices were added, so that we currently have a total of 29 practices being offered in the country. In addition to the five initially made available, the following practices have been added: art therapy, ayurveda, biodance, circular dance, meditation, music therapy, naturotherapy, osteopathy, chiropractic, reflexotherapy, reiki, shantala, integrative community therapy, yoga, apitherapy, aromatherapy, bioenergetics, family constellation, chromotherapy, geotherapy, hypnotherapy, ozonotherapy, floral therapy. For more information on the various policies implemented by the federal government, see Andrade and Costa 2010.

understanding of belief to the question of the rooting of the being (*dasein*) in experiments or therapeutic assemblages (Maluf 2011; Tavares 2017).

Between Local and Global: Old Dilemmas of Religions

When we move the question to the broader terms of religion, we will necessarily have to bring in old established concepts of the discipline tradition, such as modernity, culture, and global and local referents. The terms in which Velho (1994) places the relations between religion and modernity, despite the antiquity of his text, are still very contemporary, especially the contributions of anthropology in the broad debate of the sciences of religion, in which the differences between theologians and social scientists coalesce, are often difficult to distinguish one of the other.

The aforesaid Velho mentions two situations in which anthropological contributions are clearly visible: pilgrimages and conversions. In the first case, he builds his arguments based on the findings of Eade and Sallnow (1991) on the power of modern sanctuaries, in which universalism is based on a religious gap that enables plurality rather than a unification of discourses. Likewise, in approaches to conversion (to Christianity), there is a distrust of totalities and a commitment to follow the traces of concrete experiences.

He also points out to another important issue represented by universalisms versus localisms, which has become an increasingly problematic equation for understanding the modern dynamics that are expected to interest anthropologists. These are constituted by doubts that problematize old essentialisms such as “metropolitan Christianity,” relativizing the holism of transcendence, and indicating the contingency of the relationship between Christianity and individualism. Quoting the theologian Michael Amaladoss, instead of universalism, we have, in the Indian experience of Christianity, a holism in which unity and totality are not coincident. For Velho, these experiences can help us to understand better the “experiences of the self beyond individualism” (Velho 1994: 81).

Universalisms, grand narratives, and globalization are all terms under suspicion and much worn out, if contrasted with the grammar of diversity of local traditions, a dichotomy that is highly misleading to understand religious transits in the past and present, as the author warns, quoting a passage from Ranger’s work, which we reproduce here (Ranger 1993: 69 apud Velho 1994: 85):

Thus, Indirect Rule ethnography privileged the “tribe” and “tribal religion.” Tribes were ideally defined as uniting language, culture, self-identity, polity, and religion. Where religious rituals involved people from various linguistic and culture groups - such as in the initiation rituals of southern Tanzania - ethnographers strove to disentangle the “mixed elements” in such “impure” ceremonies, to notionally reconstruct the original ethnic religion. The interaction within one cult of people of different ethnicities was thought as a product of tribal breakdown and thus deplored.

This is a very productive remark for our objectives, for Ranger (1993), at the very beginning of the text quoted by Velho, proposes as a challenge to trial the necessary identification of African religions with the dimension of the microcosm, in contrast to

Christianity as a narrative of the macrocosm. With this objective, Ranger sustains that this relationship stems from a twentieth Century colonial invention, by reaffirming that “Construction begins with classification” (Ranger 1993: 68). The classification of the African traditions made by the early missionaries put them outside the religious sphere, erroneously considering that they have no religious sense. In a second moment (for missionaries and administrators), the classifications served to operate a separation of the religious domain from the other spheres of social life. In the midst of these transformations, African religions were distorted and minimized. Ethnographic orientations stabilized social life in the tribe, with the pan-tribal movements being viewed in a suspicious way, as a new event, as a reaction to the transformations of the colonial world. These creations were made not only by Europeans but also by African intellectuals (“organic intellectuals” as defined by Gramsci 1975) in the creation of tribal ideology and identity. Colonialism, therefore, not only imagined religious tribalism but also helped to create it. An alternative concept, proposed by Ranger, replaces the model of religion contained in the tribe by the model of resilient pluralism. The author asserts that local communities were of great importance but were embedded in broader networks, providing other understanding of the effects of entry into Christianity and colonialism in African societies. Based on this model, African religions were adapted to the reception of new religious ideas and already expressed multiple identities. The locus of symbolic innovation was the macro region and not the tribe. Finally, what the author offers us is a perspective of understanding the African religion in terms of movement, that is, in the opposite direction to the predominant approaches that tend to encapsulate the religions in the tribe understood as the totality of culture, ethnicity, and localism, by opposition universalist religions.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have attempted to bring up some clarification to two questions assumed to be very important. One is that of understanding in what way the critique to the assumption that religion, culture, and ethnicity form an indivisible whole that can help us to understand this matter. The other is clarifying what we have been repeatedly calling religious therapeutic experiments, defined as our pragmatic approach of the practices and experiences of the New Agers. Taking this explicit endeavor as the point of departure, we have sought to expose two apparently antagonistic movements: the first, represented by the increase of cultural specificities; the second, constituted by the universalizing movement of a certain scientific “culture” and politics. However, in both cases, they are indicative of the “detachment” of the New Age therapeutic cultures, and, consequently of the religious therapeutic experiments, of their contexts of origin. Even so, what assures the vitality of these transformations is precisely the plurality of both practices and meanings, which transpose and transform themselves in heterogeneous contexts.

As we come to the final considerations in this article, we return to its title, which is also a question to be answered: Is it still possible to talk about new age therapeutic religiosities? Certainly, the answer will not be in the sense of searching for types and/or characteristics or redrawing genealogies seeking greater conceptual rigor. What we propose, exactly, are new ways of constructing concepts inspired by the philosophy of Deleuze (Ibid.). Our understanding, as anthropologists, is that our task is to follow up the movements and learn from and with our “natives.” The previous considerations certainly stimulate powerful

deconstructions of problems accumulated in layers: religion and culture, transits between the global and the local, indigenization and universalism, they all seem to be embedded in mutually referenced presuppositions. It would be good to unearth some of these anchors to approach new therapeutic experiments without classificatory temptations that rank authentically New Age at the top, as superior or separate, from those often seen as local syncretic forms/experiments. At this point, we come back to reaffirm our agreement with the aforementioned conceptions of Goldman (*Ibid.*), recognizing that those events which are commonly considered syncretic have empirical and/or projective conjunctive dimensions, which points out towards what is coming to be, that is to say that they are dynamic and carry a vision of future.

Last but not least, we may provisionally finalize this analysis by reaffirming that we consider of good scientific practice to suspect of globalized referents as universal dominium matrices and pay more attention to the sanctuaries of partial encounters, and of production of pluralisms and differences. In the same way, we consider important to suspect of holism as a coherent whole, and to recognize other inventiveness of wholeness which transgresses and remake continuities and boundaries between the specific and universal.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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