

Ecstasy and rationality in the context of the “burracheira”¹

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The main purpose of this speech is to debate the central aspects of the Udevist religiosity based on the interpretation of the ritual and trance, the so called “burracheira”, expressed by the ethos of the group. I understand them as the articulators of the religious and non-religious elements of the institution and therefore responsible for the powerful growth of the religion among the medium urban extracts. When José Gabriel da Costa created the UDV, he established a ritual centred on the notion of “spiritual growth that emphasizes “self awareness” as the value by which the follower is promoted through the different steps of this stratified society. This is why UDV is more a progress and evolution based religious enterprise than a forest religion.

This is due to its two historical formative periods: the first set by Mestre Gabriel and his first disciples who performed several activities, not only in the jungle as rubber latex gatherers, as well as workers in the capital of the state of Rondônia from the 40’s to the 60’s. They were under a swift change in the rustic culture they lived in. After the death of the Master in the 70’s, the influence of young middle class people starts the second historical period, which is extended to the 80’s. The ambiguities in this context and the rising legitimisation of a modern order midst a developing amazon capital explain the valorisation and incorporation of the non-religious elements such as the military and state organization into UDV’S ritual and hierarchy. During the 80’s, these youngsters became more influent in the higher ranks that finally favoured an increasing bureaucratization.

There are three core elements to the UDV: the magical religious, the stratified religious order and the developing of the self. The coexistence of these three axes allows a theological analysis that gathers the magic of the spiritualistic medium trance with the rationality of Christianity.

There are meaningful differences between the Udevist trance and magical religion trances such as shamanism and African voodoo. The “burracheira” is

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originated from the contact of the individual, in the awareness, with the Master's dimension. This contact translates the rise of the spirit in the direction of the self, defined as a "mental focusing" category. In the UDV, the follower is taught to "look within" and "look after oneself".

The "burracheira" consists of the mediation of three elements: the individual, the Master and the unusual awareness, highlighting the Christian opposition between good and evil in the holy experience. I understand the "burracheira" as the main relation between the mythical and the ritual, from which there are two fundamental principles to the religious operation according to the sociologist Roger Bastide: the mystical of the wild sacred (sacrée sauvage) and its taming under the doctrine. The mysticism of an enchanted nature and the knowledge of a doctrinarian Master symbolize these religious principals.

This dualistic relation supports the purpose of the brew and therefore the source or the systematization of the behaviour necessary to self-knowledge as the key to spiritual evolution. The "burracheira", as the Master's action on the awareness of the individual, is an unnatural principle learnt by the follower as a religious enterprise committed to specific values that represent self-awareness. The evolution of the individual who is aware of oneself is similar to the behavioural regulatory goals and progress anchored in the ideological tripod: "religion, family and labour".

The Udevist's notion of the way of the righteous suggests moral regulation as the foundation to a strong individuality. It is similar to the Christian Pentecostal model, extremely influential in the group's place of birth, Rondonia. Its principals are based on abstinence and constancy expressed mainly by the injunction of heterosexuality, labour, and the constitution and maintenance of a nuclear family.

In this symbolic exchange, I emphasize that, in the private sphere, UDV outlines a conservative moral behaviour of Brazilian medium class of great urban centres. In the public perspective, the group sustains a rational and legalist practice, if compared to other ayahuasca-user groups, very similar to the hegemonic profile of modern urban society. This trend originates a sophisticated juridical and political apparatus that supports an international expansion capable of defying national legislation opposed to the substance.

In my opinion, the Udevist ritual and trance can be understood within the religious logic based on modernity without forgetting its mystical origins. I see the brew as a tool aiming 3 main purposes: a bureaucratic organized moral, the so called

self-knowledge, and an evolved link with extraordinary powers. Thus, the “burracheira” is an interesting religious tool, constituted by rationality, subjectivity and enchantment, whose theology represents a model of progress and development.

The identity of the group questions dualities and therefore I want to outline the symbolical output resulted from the gathering of what the modern order disconnects: the secular and the religious. A recent institutional proposal on a symmetric dialogue with the sciences, explicit in the book “ Hoasca, Science, Society and Environment, seems to indicate a change on UDV’s profile. Once self-assessed as discreet in relation to society, it now seems to represent itself in the public sphere, in a academic and political initiative which makes explicit the relevance of the legality and legitimacy achieved by secular means.

I understand the burracheira as a meaning under which we can understand how the native ethos blurs modern ontological boundaries. In this way it unites faith to the State; magic to political power; visionary power to self-knowledge. It synthesizes the meaning of trance, the values of a religious morality, the enchanted, the State bureaucracy and subjectivity into different power spheres in one operation. This leads us to the teachings of Louis Dumont on the dual internal tensions, which far from being unproductive, establish a hierarchical coexistence of opposites.