



Currents of Knowledge: the Santo Daime bailado as decolonial dance

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ABSTRACT – Currents of Knowledge: the Santo Daime bailado as decolonial dance¹ – Santo Daime, an ayahuasca religion of the Brazilian Amazon founded in 1930, has as one of its major practices a dance called the *bailado* that generates energetic currents through collective rocking. Practitioners take on roles of both audience and performer when dancing the bailado and engage in transcorporeal discourse with various beings. Drawing from Santo Daime hymns, participant observation and personal journal entries as a daimista, this paper argues that the bailado decolonizes dance in three ways: as part of a unique caboclo knowledge system; through cultivation of collective subjectivities by participants; and by challenging Eurocentric definitions of dance.

Keywords: **Santo Daime. Bailado. Ayahuasca. Transcorporeality. Decolonial Dance.**

RÉSUMÉ – Courants du Savoir: le bailado du Santo Daime comme danse décoloniale – Le Santo Daime, une religion *ayahuasca* de l'Amazonie brésilienne fondée en 1930, a comme l'une de ses pratiques majeures une danse appelée le bailado qui génère des courants énergétiques par le balancement collectif. Les praticiens assument à la fois les rôles de public et d'interprète lorsqu'ils dansent le bailado et s'engagent dans un discours transcorporel avec divers êtres. Basé sur des hymnes de Santo Daime, de l'observation participante et entrées de journal personnel en tant que daimista, cet article soutient que le bailado décolonise la danse de trois manières: en tant que partie d'un système de connaissances caboclo unique; par la culture des subjectivités collectives par les participants; et en défiant les définitions eurocentriques de la danse.

Mots-clés: **Santo Daime. Bailado. Ayahuasca. Transcorporelité. Danse Décoloniale.**

RESUMO – Correntes do Conhecimento: o bailado do Santo Daime como dança decolonial – Santo Daime, religião *ayahuasca* da Amazônia brasileira fundada em 1930, tem como uma de suas principais práticas uma dança chamada *bailado* que gera correntes energéticas por meio do balanço coletivo. Os praticantes assumem papéis de espectadores e performer ao dançarem o bailado e se envolvem em um discurso transcorpóreo com vários seres. Com base nos hinos do Santo Daime, na observação participante e em registros pessoais como daimista, neste artigo argumenta-se que o bailado decoloniza a dança de três maneiras: como parte de um sistema de conhecimento caboclo único; através do cultivo de subjetividades coletivas pelos participantes; e ao desafiar as definições eurocêntricas de dança.

Palavras-chave: **Santo Daime. Bailado. Ayahuasca. Transcorporeidade. Dança Decolonial.**

The morning light moves shadows through the sparkling, starship salon while syncopated melodies of songbirds accompany our singing and dancing. Outside, oval green leaves of sprawling cashew trees bask in the light, hardly stirring as we rock back and forth. The music has gotten stronger throughout the night since we began well after sunset with our first dose of the daime sacrament. Three doses later, the dance steps feel effortless as we sing about the beauty of the early morning light, recalling a time many years before when a friend and I had sung this hymn together back in California. I feel her presence with me as I track my weighted parts pouring from side to side, swinging always back through center. The majority of us are still in our places, including some older members of the community. Most of the children have long abandoned their posts, though an infant is cradled against his mother's chest, rocking with her. My voice is almost unrecognizable to myself joined with the others. I have an urge to embrace everyone at once. I even feel love for myself!²

Santo Daime³, a Brazilian ayahuasca religion founded in 1930 in the Amazonian city of Rio Branco, includes a group dance called the *bailado*, which is performed on special dates throughout the year. As a form of corporeal knowledge, Santo Daime practitioners simultaneously assume roles of performer and audience when dancing the *bailado*, studying ourselves in corporeal dialogue with those that occupy the space with us, both producing and receiving knowledge through these relationships. In this paper I argue that as part of a religious doctrine⁴ of the global South the *bailado* decolonizes definitions of dance and reclaims dance as a universal practice available to all.

Ideological colonization of the concept of dance through centuries of codification, professionalization and copyright law has made dance forms that do not fit colonial norms illegible to some, myself included. I first drank daime while visiting the Northeast of Brazil in 2004. Working at the time as a dancer and pilates instructor in California, when I initially experienced the *bailado*, I did not find the movements very interesting. The three main rhythms of the *bailado* are the march, waltz, and mazurka, each of which has corresponding steps that rock the body back and forth. Performances include the singing of hymns and dancing while playing a *maracá*, a metal cylindrical instrument made from tin cans filled with pellets.

As a contemporary dancer, I was trained to take up space, extending my limbs in all directions, folding and twisting into a variety of shapes. When I first experienced the *bailado* I stayed in my place as I had been in-

structed, less than half a square meter of floor space, but found the staging rather limiting. I participated in works because I wanted to feel the awakened state I experienced from the daime medicine, but silently determined the bailado was not really dance. I was initiated as a daimista⁵ in 2009, but it was not until I had been drinking daime and participating in Santo Daime works⁶ for over a decade that I learned the bailado is indeed dance. As a form of dance with its own choreographic contributions and reflections, the bailado had flown under, or over, my radar.

The corporeal knowledge of the bailado is revealed through its kinesthetic simplicity, not despite it. The bailado breaks through colonial perceptions of a fourth wall that divide audience from performer, emphasizing acts of self-study. In Santo Daime works, a multitude of aesthetic stimulants engage the senses including taste, smell, visual effects, proprioception and sound. These stimulants emphasize corporeality as part of a spiritual school, decolonizing and liberating dance from commodification as an artistic product that can be abstracted from bodies.

In this paper I argue that the bailado decolonizes dance along three lines of reasoning. First, the bailado is part of a unique caboclo knowledge system constituted through Santo Daime practice. As an interspecies bridge between plant and animal kingdoms, the plant medicine popularly known as and reduced to the term “ayahuasca” is more than a medicine for many people of the Amazon forest. Many identify with this medicine, and the beings and forces it invokes, which are central to their culture and knowledge systems. Even writing about ayahuasca as something that can be observed is a form of colonial violence if it is considered separately from the particular culture it is part of.

Second, subjectivities are collectively established and individuals contribute to collective *currents* while dancing the bailado. The entry that opens this paper is from my personal journal and describes a bailado work in the Northeast of Brazil in June 2022. I was just starting field work for this project when I wrote the passage, in which I explain how I felt experiencing this collective current. The principle being evoked into the space during Santo Daime works is known as *Juramidam*. As a compound of *Jura*, which refers to God, and *midam*, referring to God’s family (Mortimer, 2018, p. 24) or God’s soldiers (MacRae, 1992, p. 55), this name signifies

relational and collective qualities of the divine, in distinction from notions of one singular and separate supreme being.

My third line of reasoning is that the bailado challenges Eurocentric definitions of dance and choreography, internalizing aesthetic processes that have been largely externalized and sexualized through centuries of colonization, commodification and nation building (Pinho, 2022). The Santo Daime bailado is contextualized within an aesthetic knowledge system from which it cannot be separated. Pedagogical functions of aesthetics in Santo Daime knowledge systems re-center the self within different kinds of artful stimulation that are both produced and received by practitioners.

Education scholar Maria Betânia B. Albuquerque considers aesthetics to be an important pedagogical category in her work on ayahuasca knowledge systems (Albuquerque, 2011). As a profound and multifaceted aesthetic engagement of the body through the senses, I include the senses in my choreographic analysis of the bailado, supporting my arguments with references to changes in my own ways of thinking and experiencing the world through Santo Daime study and practice.

In this paper, I draw upon observations from eighteen years as a practicing daimista, five of which I have spent engaged as a researcher and ethnographer. I draw upon writings from my personal journal over the years since I began drinking daime as an autoethnographic method to articulate my learning process. In my analysis of the bailado I support my observations with teachings from Santo Daime hymns, referencing experiences of those who have come before me through the musical messages they left behind.

I have conducted research for this project in the Northeast of Brazil, the southern Brazilian Amazon region, and the Bay Area of Northern California, USA. Through observations in these Santo Daime centers drawn from performances of the bailado as well as conversations with daimistas and participation in different kinds of activities, throughout this paper I narrate stories of knowledge production and exchange choreographed by the bailado. Through these stories and observations, I describe ways that performance of the bailado decolonizes dance as an eco-spiritual self-study contextualized within cultural relationships with the natural world and the natural tendency for all living things to dance.

Historical and conceptual background: sensorial corporealities of caboclo knowledge

Although I have read descriptions of the taste of the daime sacrament, which is usually liquid like tea⁷, in my experience, there is no one way daime tastes. A friend recently described the taste to me as that of dirt, though I think *soil* may be more appropriate as it recalls transformative processes of living organisms that support new life. Sometimes daime tastes sweet to me, sometimes bitter or fermented. A typical dose is anywhere from 20ml to 60ml, and is usually served in an elegant shot glass in Santo Daime works, though at times it is served with a spoon. It can be warm or cool, thin or thick, and the color can range from beige to reddish to dark brown. I almost always feel the sacrament as tingling in the back of my neck, even while waiting in line before taking my serving. I start this section with a description of the taste of the daime sacrament to foreground sensorial experiences that are part of the bailado and that help performers constitute the self in dialogue with the senses. This form of learning resists internalization of colonial violence that distances the self from one's corporeal senses.

Ayahuasca, which means *vine of the soul* in Quechua, is also known as *daime*, *nixi pai*, *huasca*, *uni*, *yagé*, *cipó* and has other names in different contexts and among different ethnic groups. Known as a *sacrament* in the ayahuasca religions, and regarded as possessing a sacred character, ayahuasca is also recognized as a *plant spirit teacher* that shares intimate knowledge with those who humbly seek it. Considered a classic *psychedelic* due to its psychoactive nature when ingested, in the field of psychedelic science ayahuasca is known to contain DMT (dimethyltryptamine) categorized as a schedule one drug under the United Nations 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, deemed threatening to public health internationally. Despite histories of defamation, persecution and criminalization that continue today, Santo Daime has persisted and expanded throughout Brazil and transnationally.

The original community of Santo Daime practitioners that formed in Rio Branco, Acre⁸, in the 1930s was made up largely of migrants from Brazil's Northeast, a region devastated by cycles of severe drought. From 1870 to 1912, Acre had been prone to speculation and conflict among nations

hoping to capitalize on the abundance of rubber there (MacRae; Moreira, 2011). Conditions in the rubber camps of Acre were extremely harsh, described as resembling those of slavery. Before arriving in Acre, many migrant laborers were indebted to their bosses for travel, housing, food, and tools (Fernandes, 1988, p. 21). Vulnerable to the voracity of capitalism and its consequences, these migrant laborers came together and formed a new doctrine and a new dance.

Santo Daime founder, Raimundo Irineu Serra, a Black man born just four years after slavery was officially abolished in Brazil in 1888, left his home in the Northeastern Brazilian state of Maranhão and arrived in Acre in 1912 having heard tales of riches in the rubber camps there (Mortimer, 2018). Working as a rubber tapper, Serra quickly learned that he had been deceived and took a position with the military police after paying off his debt to his boss. During his time working as a border guard in Brasileia, he worked with a Peruvian *caboclo* known as Pizango (2018).

The term *caboclo* commonly refers to people with combinations of Indigenous, European, and African ancestry, though in spiritual lineages such as Santo Daime it can also refer to a spirit guide, a disincarnate being who teaches and guides an initiate through spiritual dialogue. Although often used in a derogatory way in Brazil due to historically racist associations with miscegenation and peasantry (Schmidt, 2007), in Santo Daime, as in other Afro-Indigenous cultural practices of Brazil, the specialized knowledge of *caboclo* populations is recognized as foundational and is highly valued in the hymns⁹. Indicative of corporeal knowledge that synthesizes influences from different knowledge systems, the symbol of the *caboclo* threatens Eurocentric colonial norms, partly by absorbing different aesthetics into structures of resistance.

Though the march, waltz, and mazurka rhythms of the *bailado* recall colonial aesthetics of the courts of Europe, including their militaries, the rocking sensation they have in common when performed and the choreographic spacing in which each one stays in a clearly marked space in the formation present a different structure than those of court dances or proscenium theaters popularized during the Renaissance that separate audience from performer. The choreographic formation of the *bailado* absorbs European musical and visual aesthetics into an anticolonial structure of unity and cohesion in which each participant has a designated space and all face a

common center, providing vantage points from which all are seen. This structural defiance can feel threatening to those who might prefer to sit anonymously in the dark as an audience member.

As a contrary example, dances deemed culturally “ethnic” due to historical processes of othering are often presented on the proscenium stage, a classic symbol of Western theatrical traditions with its customary curtain calls and applause (Kealiinohomoku, 2001, p. 8). As a socially marginalized figure, the caboclo has historically been deemed especially threatening due to his or her ability to reverse power dynamics and accumulate diverse forms of knowledge. The revelatory staging of the bailado structurally hides in plain sight *for all to see*¹⁰ a strategic inclusivity that is associated with caboclo knowledge systems, which provides a sense of social transparency valued in the hymns.

The bailado was not originally part of the Santo Daime doctrine, which started as a healing practice. The caboclo Pizango trained Irineu Serra in the arts of *curandeirismo*, traditional healing practices of the forest, through work with plant medicines. In 1890, a law prohibiting these healing arts was passed in Brazil, and associated them with witchcraft and magic (MacRae; Moreira, 2011, loc. 3005). Despite repression by authorities, the young Irineu Serra and his companions pursued curandeiro knowledge to work with plant medicines. In 1930, he began to hold his own sessions with ayahuasca, initially working as he had learned from Pizango. Serra became known as Mestre Irineu, indicating one who has achieved a high level of cultural mastery.

For the first five years, Mestre Irineu whistled and sang *chamados* in the *força*¹¹ (power) of the medicine, songs that call in healing spirits (MacRae; Moreira, 2011, loc. 504). Five years later, he and several of his companions *received* their first hymns, which were sung in unison rather than individually. Mestre Irineu started using the name *daime* to refer to the ayahuasca medicine as a derivative of *dai-me*, which can be translated as *give me*, acknowledging receptivity to the practice. In 1936 the bailado was performed for the first time after he received instructions for the dance from his main spirit guide, a feminine entity named Clara¹².

As told by storyteller Saturnino Brito do Nascimento, during a Santo Daime work Mestre Irineu experienced a vision in which Clara took him to

the depths of the ocean where they encountered a grand dance hall, sparkling and beautiful. As soon as they arrived, all those present began dancing together in unison. Soon after this vision, Mestre Irineu taught his companions the bailado (Histórias..., 2021).

Santo Daime festival works, for which the bailado is performed, are comparable to Afro-Indigenous celebrations in Maranhão (Labate; Pacheco, 2002), the birthplace of Mestre Irineu. In a video about his research on the cultural roots of Santo Daime in practices from Maranhão, anthropologist Lucas Kastrup Rehen compared the bailado with a popular dance called the Baile de São Gonçalo (Santo Daime..., 2018), citing many similarities in the dance steps and costuming. Incorporating these influences, the story summarized in the paragraph above explicitly credits choreographic authorship of the bailado to a spiritual entity, Mestre Irineu's guide, Clara. These spiritual relationships with diverse beings are foundational to the Santo Daime doctrine and constitute caboclo knowledge systems of the forest from which it emerged, through which spiritual and cultural influences are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

As a historical and conceptual background to the emergence of the bailado in Rio Branco in 1936, this section highlights the importance of caboclo knowledge within the Santo Daime doctrine. Part of knowledge systems of the global South in which corporeal, sensorial and spiritual ways of knowing are honored and practiced as forms of resistance against colonial forces of marginalization and erasure, insights gained through histories of different cultural and spiritual encounters in Acre throughout the colonial period are mobilized through the choreographic structure of the bailado. The next section describes ways Santo Daime practitioners learn through corporeal, sensorial, and spiritual experiences that cultivate identification of the "self" as part of universal forces of nature through this caboclo knowledge system of ayahuasca.

Caboclo knowledge as a system of corporeal engagement with forces of nature

I like to spend my time here on the beach, especially at low tide. It's one place where I know we speak the same language, and over the last few years I've made a habit of going there to escape conversation, to dance around a bit. On the beach I am clearly part of infinity. The carefully organized world that usually wraps around

me disappears, and a less delicate truth is exposed. There is just internal and external with skin in between. The beach at low tide is God's ballroom, flat and endless. There are no walls or windows, just a densely packed, sandy dance floor, its watery curtain drawn back, a breezy hand extended in my direction. I walk towards the water, circle around and walk back up, advance and retreat. I start anticipating the moment when the water and my feet will meet. There is a mutual coming together and searching, flirtatious and engaging. I start out cautious, only up to my ankles, but each encounter is more familiar, draws me in deeper¹³.

This passage is from my personal journal, written in Ceará in the Northeast of Brazil in 2007. I include it to share my process of opening to Santo Daime before I officially became a daimista. I was working as a professional dancer but spending months at a time in Ceará with my Brazilian husband. I felt isolated from my dance community and alienated as a foreigner, just learning to speak Portuguese. My relationship to dance started unraveling without the rigorous routine I was used to, rehearsing, performing, teaching, and taking class. The local Santo Daime church provided a place to direct my creative energy and I focused on learning the hymns and prayers. Through Santo Daime I learned and am learning of the corporeal depth of caboclo knowledge as a system of self-study and meaning making through engagement with natural forces.

Santo Daime practitioners refer to their "caboclo" when talking about what I interpret as deep corporeal agency. A primary sense of this agency is gained through consciousness of the force of gravity on one's corporeal self. Having danced for most of my life, I remember experiencing the weight of my pelvis for the first time when I was rolling on the floor during an exercise in a contemporary technique class. Though the force of gravity had always been there, the horizontal orientation of rolling and the emphasis on releasing different parts of the body rather than fighting against its constant pull resulted in a profound experience that would change the way I moved. Though we experience gravity as corporeal violence when we slip or fall through the pain of sudden unexpected impact with the earth's surface, release techniques that emerged throughout the twentieth century embraced corporeal relationships with gravity, challenging illusions of weightlessness associated with classical ballet. By working with gravity's pull and accepting its constancy, we perhaps develop healthier movement patterns; healthier because they are more truthful.

Along with cultivating more truthful corporeal orientation to the earth, corporeality constructed through acceptance of gravity's pull cultivates states of being through which slips, falls and the shock of sudden impact may be less severe. Though we perform the Santo Daime bailado in a vertical orientation with the soles of our feet connecting to the earth and the crowns of our heads towards the sky, the pull of gravity that allows us to achieve this orientation is the same. It is our experience of it that differs. Practicing the bailado, repetitive choreography performed for hours at a time, we can cultivate deeper consciousness of the profound effects of this force on and through us. As another kind of natural force, teachings from plant medicines like ayahuasca are also subject to the different ways we interact with them through our consciousness. As a way of orienting the self to diverse ways of being that make up natural worlds, work with the plant medicine ayahuasca potentially opens our consciousness to the nature of ourselves as part of these worlds, making them less shocking or threatening.

Santo Daime is known by practitioners as a school; as a cultural and spiritual practice, its skills can be learned. However, as part of ayahuasca knowledge systems, the pedagogical processes involved in this learning defy those of state-sanctioned classrooms (Albuquerque, 2011). Albuquerque asked whether the knowledge of ayahuasca can even be evaluated and validated by modern Occidental epistemological understandings from the global North, and defended consideration of the epistemology of ayahuasca to achieve a post-colonial knowledge community (2011). Though the plant medicine ayahuasca is increasingly available for consumption in urban settings far from the intense heat, downpours, and insects of the forests it came from, it may be extremely rare for the socially elite, who are accustomed to occupying spaces of safety and comfort, to obtain caboclo knowledge described in this paper.

Experiences of marginalization have been described as opportunities to gain knowledge not available to those unable to “slither through the bars of time”, which is a skill that education scholar Luiz Rufino (2019, p. 45) associates with the Afrodiasporic spiritual entity Exu and exusiactal knowledge. Rufino describes inventive forces capable of reconstructing life as an opportunity produced in the cracks, in the midst of scarcity, and in transgressions of a disenchanting world (2019, p. 15). He affirmed that questions about knowledge necessarily permeate recognition and credibility

of the body, pointing out that all knowledge manifests itself when incorporated and put into practice (2019, p. 146). As a practice of re-enchantment, Santo Daime practitioners both receive and produce knowledge by immersing ourselves somatically and spiritually through performances of the *bailado*.

The practice of Santo Daime and performance of the *bailado* recenter the self as the source of all knowledge, reclaiming epistemological agency through multidimensional corporeal engagement. Along with the force of gravity, this corporeal agency occurs through various aesthetic stimulants that practitioners contribute to and receive from during works. Different plants such as *palo santo* and *copal* are often burned during Santo Daime works to engage olfactory senses. Practitioners wear special uniforms, and the uniform usually worn for *bailado* works is white with touches of green and blue, colorful streamers hanging off the left shoulders of womens' dresses that sway along with our movement, and sparkling crowns on our heads that catch the light. Much care and creativity are put into decorating the ritual space, which is well lit, and a central altar is ornamented with flowers, crystals, candles, and meaningful images, stimulating visual senses and coordinating spatial and subjective visions.

Aesthetic ritual elements emphasize corporeal receptivity experienced by practitioners in Santo Daime works. The most powerful aesthetic forces in the works are the musicality and the dancing that animate the space through our bodies. Singing, dancing, and playing instruments engage receptivity, listening and feeling. While singing and dancing, active engagement with the receptive acts of listening and feeling is often necessary to become or remain conscious of these receptive acts, more so than smelling or seeing. Convergences of receptivity and expressivity in the *bailado* center different kinds of subjective corporeality than those often associated with dance.

As a receptive practice, Santo Daime mobilizes knowledge through our corporeal *receptacularity*, the generally receptive nature of all bodies regardless of gender or sex (Strongman, 2019). This receptivity occurs through corporeal discourse as described by cultural studies professor Roberto Strongman who applied the term *transcorporeality* in his research on the Afro-diasporic religious practices Vodou, Candomblé and Santería. Strongman defined transcorporeality as an outward orientation of the ego, soul, or

anima in relation to the physical body (Strongman, 2019, p. 2-3). Together with his concept of receptacularity, Strongman's work is applicable to multidirectional corporeal dialogue that occurs through performance of the bailado stimulated in various ways through the senses. I experience the multidirectional orientations described in the previous paragraph through communion with forces that govern the natural world, especially the force of gravity, which orients the self within natural systems that encompass the sun, moon, and stars in gravitational discourse with the earth through me.

The constancy of gravity's force on us does not necessarily make it a conscious experience in the same way smells, sights and sounds are experienced. Santo Daime hymns instruct us to *examine our consciousness*,¹⁴ turning attention inward to internal dialogues. In the bailado, internal dialogues with celestial beings are danced through our performance of movements that rock our bodies back and forth in our designated spaces. Dancing works can last up to twelve hours, a significant expanse of time that allows practitioners to go deep into altered states of consciousness within the force of the daime sacrament. I often close my eyes when performing the bailado as I have seen others do. As both audience and performer in this dance, this allows me to focus on my inner experience of the bailado, a kind of self-hacking (Paxton, 2018).

Contact improvisation founder and dance researcher, Steve Paxton (2018) wrote about *self-hacking* as the inquisitive drive to understand one's consciousness in relation to their movements. This relationship between consciousness and physical movement is underwritten by the force of gravity. In Paxton's mini-book *Gravity*, the inter species depth of subjective experiences of gravity is portrayed by three black-and-white photos; the first, of a baby elephant discovering herself with her face buried in white sea foam; the second, of two elephants happily playing together; the third, of an elephant who has died, her skin sagging towards the ground. The cover of the book has the color and consistency of elephant skin. These images and textures express the knowledge that the same forces that allow us to stand upright and move about, to see, hear, taste, smell and feel, will ultimately consume us as they consume everything that lives. Santo Daime hymns include instructions to *step firmly on the ground*¹⁵, accepting the earth's pull by dropping down into it *so that* we can rise up out of it. As in

contact improvisation, our first dance partner is always the earth and its gravitational pull.

Spiritual realms become present for practitioners through performance of the *bailado*, not through our conscious thoughts alone, but through accessing knowledge that mobilizes our bodies. We have access to this living knowledge through lifetimes of learning in concert with spatial and ecological forces to which we all owe our corporeal existence. Combinations of relationships with these forces and with other beings that share the space, both human and non-human, contribute to the calling in of energetic currents in *bailado* works, evoking visceral spatial fluidity through which everything is connected. This fluidity recalls historical and mythical scenarios of oceans and forests, enchanted spaces that are also living beings.

Philosopher Christine Takuá (2020) wrote about creative beings of the forest who constitute a kind of “metascience”, as the ways of the forest cannot be known through what is referred to in the global North as science. In Takuá’s experience studying philosophy at the State University of São Paulo, she noticed there was no consideration for creative dialogue with beings not considered human, even though she was among professors and students in a “university” implying universal knowledge. She affirmed that the great complexity that exists in the forest has been in dialogue for many centuries with a strong creative power of plant and animal beings, which like us have resisted for many centuries and created formulas to continue walking on this planet (Takuá, 2020, p. 2).

Takuá’s and Paxton’s ideas call attention to ourselves and our orientations within living knowledge systems like those of the forest with its plant medicines and the earth with its gravitational pull. Intersections of knowledge systems have historically caused conflict, not because we are not able to understand difference, but because foundational beliefs of knowledge systems of the global North do not allow for harmonious cohabitations of difference. *Caboclo* knowledge synthesizes different processes of learning through corporeal engagement inextricably linked to forces of nature.

The figure of the *caboclo* resists dominant and restrictive beliefs emergent throughout the colonial period up until the present that value one way of knowing over others. This figure embodies knowledge of self in relation

to competing knowledge systems. As part of caboclo knowledge systems, this kind of self-study cultivates abilities to perceive the self in corporeal dialogue with a vast and diverse range of different kinds of beings within expansive astronomical relationships experienced as gravity through our bodies, bodies that feel, smell, hear and see through this gravitational pull. In the next section I articulate how this collective self-knowledge contributes to the calling in of currents from which each individual may receive benefits of learning and healing.

Collective self-knowledge: the Santo Daime current

Hymns, teachings, healings, and other benefits are received in Santo Daime practice through discourse across species, spaces, and times, crossing through our corporeality and revealing the relational nature of knowledge. Communication with the pantheon of diverse beings of Santo Daime cosmology occurs while dancing as a single body within an energetic current constructed expansively through our transcorporealities, a characteristic Rufino (2019, p. 45) associates with the character of Exu as the manifold in the one or the one multiplied in the infinite.

As collective practice, bailado participants dance next to each other in rows arranged from front to back in the shape of a rectangle or a hexagon depending on the space and the specific lineage, with a table in the center that serves as the main altar. Women occupy one half of the space and men the other half, divided into sections according to age and experience. Precision in the spacing, movement, and singing are emphasized in the bailado, providing an important structural foundation for the work. The synchronization of moving bodies and voices, along with the pulse of the maracá, results in an expansive fluidity in the space perceived by practitioners performing the bailado.

Currents evoked in Santo Daime works are not performative ends in themselves, but transcorporeal and spatial expansions through which knowledge is received, shared, and deepened. Practitioners engage in corporeal dialogue with spirit beings in concert with our singing and dancing through transcorporeality as described and applied by Strongman. In ritual performances of the Afro-diasporic religions Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou, individual acts of transcorporeality are achieved through spirit in-

corporation¹⁶, whereas in Santo Daime, transcorporeality is experienced by participants in the bailado as collective incorporation of Juramidam, the principal spirit being of the daime sacrament.

Contesting notions that hymnals sung in Santo Daime works serve as linear biographies of important individuals, Rehen (2007, p. 486-487) points out the multiple relationships also present in the hymns and their importance as pathways to spiritual realms, relationships with both human and non-human beings. On a recent research trip to Acre I experienced the transcorporeal power of this relational and collective knowledge, participating in a bailado work at *Colônia Cinco Mil* (Colony Five Thousand), an important Santo Daime center in a rural area at the margins of Rio Branco founded by Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo, a disciple of Mestre Irineu, along with his family and community.

When I participate in works in California, there are often only a small number of daimistas present. Though we do our best to call in and sustain the current in our works, we are always working with visitors who know little about Santo Daime or its origins and have little practical experience of the doctrine. In contrast, during my time in Acre, I was the visitor. I sang and danced together with dozens of practitioners whose lives have been deeply informed through Santo Daime practice and study and through relationships with those who founded the doctrine.

During a work commemorating one hundred and two years since Padrinho Sebastião's birth, I experienced the collective somatic potency of the bailado. In the historical space of *Colônia Cinco Mil*, a space of living history inhabited by generations of daimistas, we sang Mestre Irineu's hymnal, *O Cruzeiro Universal* (The Universal Cross), the best known hymnal for most daimistas. Musical and spiritual knowledge of Santo Daime is gained over expanses of time and through much repetition. Each time I sing these hymns, deeper levels of meaning are revealed. New associations with hymns or with particular lines or phrases also emerge as every work is different, layering in new histories and memories.

For this work, I abandoned my tattered old hymn book to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in the presence of so much historical and corporeal knowledge. I was not responsible for *knowing* the words, how they translated or how they were to be sung. With no book in my

hand, I was no longer bound to the space between my eyes and its pages. I felt wholeness through the current, liberated to listen and feel the hymns with my whole body, inside and out, accessing knowledge gleaned by the others in the current over many decades of experience.

Through the collective presence of so much lived experience of Santo Daime, I felt myself being danced and sung, held up and moved by this current of knowledge. My legs, the legs that are also me, supported my passage through space rather than taking me there. I witnessed and participated in this transcorporeal transformation within the ordered and synchronized choreography of the bailado, opening myself as audience to the performances occurring all around me, inside me and through me.

Separation between identification as *audience* or *performer* has occurred over centuries, dating back to the rise of proscenium theatres in Europe and their imaginary fourth wall. Challenging this separation can be experienced as so radical that movement designed rhythmically in space and performed to music may not be recognized as dance. Denying ourselves the right to feel, taste, listen, observe, receive, to dance, we internalize what sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000) termed coloniality, social structures that continue colonial domination through specific rationalities associated with Eurocentrism. As a dominant ideology, coloniality is experienced corporeally. In the next section I track some of the histories of violence and exclusion that have colonized definitions of dance and choreography, arguing that the bailado decolonizes dance through aesthetic and transcorporeal experiences of the divine Santo Daime professor, Juramidam.

Decolonizing dance through transcorporeal aesthetics of Juramidam

Recently, working as an academic researcher, I was reminded of my own previous misperceptions about the bailado not qualifying as dance. During a visit to Mapiá, another important Santo Daime center in the state of Amazonas in Brazil, also founded by Padrinho Sebastião along with his family and community, I met a contemporary dancer from Rio de Janeiro. She had traveled extensively as a dancer, spoke five languages, and was familiar with the contemporary technique I was trained in. I had gone to talk with her to learn about her experience teaching contemporary dance in the local community, which she told me had garnered little interest. I told her

about my research on the *bailado* and she replied that the *bailado* is not dance, but simply movement. I did not discuss the matter with her, remembering my own learning process and healing as a “professional dancer” and my own aesthetic rejection of the *bailado* as a form of dance.

The name *bailado* translates to English from Portuguese as *dance*. It is a generic term from the colonial period no longer used colloquially in Brazil. *Barquinha*, another *ayahuasca* religion from Rio Branco founded in 1946, also has a *bailado*, though different from the Santo Daime *bailado*. For a simple dance from the past that gets overlooked even by those of us who consider ourselves *dancers*, research on the Santo Daime *bailado* reveals colonial influences on perceptions of dance and choreography. These perceptions reflect biopolitical violence of coloniality inflicted on our bodies in different ways through global power structures that marginalize corporeal knowledge systems.

Dance scholar Susan L. Foster traced histories of the terms choreography, kinesthesia and empathy, arguing that they were mobilized, in part, to rationalize operations of exclusion and othering throughout the colonial project by differentiating between those who feel and those who feel for them (Foster, 2011, p. 11). The term choreography emerged in conjunction with efforts to codify steps of popular European court dances in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries so they could be printed and distributed among the colonies, cultivating homogeneity through imperial aesthetics (Foster, 2011, p. 17). These codification systems flattened and abstracted notions of the floor on which members of the court would dance, tracing floor patterns along reference points in these abstracted spaces.

Geometric designs of floor patterns were eventually transformed into geometric patterning within the body, internalizing these abstracted reference points (Foster, 2011, p. 40). Rather than presenting the body in relation to its placement within a particular environment with which it identified, by the beginning of the 18th century the body was traced and abstracted through these processes. The mutual indebtedness dancing had previously engendered was replaced by individuated figures displaying proper carriage performing for one another. The body was slowly drawn away from communion with nature and society and towards a presentation of the self as a singular entity to be observed by others (2011, p. 95-96). The brief vogue in committing dance to symbols was replaced by sequenc-

ing feelings and arranging the responses of others to those feelings, as dance made its way onto the proscenium stage, painting pictures representing passions (Foster, 2011, p. 37).

It was through these colonial processes of codification and presentation, projecting new ideologies constructed through emergence of different sciences of the colonial era onto bodies, that dance came to be defined as the translation of emotional experience into external forms. This new conception of choreography emerged as an exclusionary force by securing a special place for dances authored by a single artist as distinct from forms of dance practiced worldwide that could not be traced to a single creator (Foster, 2011, p. 54-55).

This exclusionary process also constituted the emergence of “ethnic dances” that could easily be drawn from as raw material for the artistic expression of the singular modern choreographer by assimilating their differences into its colonial economies of meaning (2011, p. 72). The individual choreographer, an exclusively elite white subject until the mid-twentieth century, became known as having authorship over a dance, even if it was created through collaborative processes (Foster, 2011, p. 52).

It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that individuals claimed choreographic authorship of dances. Early efforts to copyright dance required that performances include a clear dramatic narrative, relegating the actual dancing to an inferior position in relation to the stories that could be published as words (Picart, 2013). Later in the twentieth century through a series of precedents that abstracted dances conceptually, non-narrative dances were successfully copyrighted, though only by those who could afford the legal services necessary to lay claims to authorship. The singular genius of Euro-American artists like George Balanchine and Martha Graham are now enshrined as heroes of the dance world, their work protected by legal coding (Kraut, 2016; Picart, 2013). Collateral damage of these histories includes the belief that those who do not participate in this dance world do not have the right to dance in any meaningful way.

People in all places and times have danced. The twentieth century was a unique historical period through which power was funneled into the hands of the elite as intellectual property. Despite cultural experiences he may have had in his youth in Maranhão, Mestre Irineu credited the revela-

tion of pre-existing choreographic authorship of the bailado to his spirit guide, Clara. The significant role his companions played in this spiritual process is also recognized as part of the formation of Santo Daime. For example, Mestre Irineu never received a hymn with the mazurka rhythm, which was instead presented through hymns received by his companions, and is known today as one of the three principle rhythms of Santo Daime.

Rather than working as an individual spirit guide through a single initiate, the bailado multiplies and expands spirit presence in the space of the salon through the bodies of performers. Moments of consecration when the daime sacrament is ingested into the body are part of the choreography, entering into a dance with the plant spirit teacher *Juramidam*, the *professor of all professors*¹⁷. Juramidam, known through the daime sacrament as an ancestral deity of the Inca with whom Mestre Irineu was identified during his lifetime (Fernandes, 1988, p. 22-23), permeates and inhabits the space like a current through collective ritual performance. Juramidam occupies the space by entering the bodies of practitioners upon ingestion, and then expands through the salon as we take our places in the formation. The spirit presence of Juramidam is mobilized transcorporeally as a current of prayer, song, and dance throughout the work. Many Santo Daime hymns directly call Juramidam¹⁸ who teaches by engaging students in self-study within the current.

Authorship of the choreography of the bailado is credited to the spirit world, a world made up of historical and ecological beings constituting Santo Daime cosmology. Within this cosmology, ancestral beings of the original people inhabiting the forest of the southern Amazon are in relationship with beings that have personal meaning to practitioners constituted through familial and community relationships, relationships with deities, saints, plant spirits, animals, insects, mountains, rivers, the sun, moon, and stars, many of whom are called upon directly through the hymns. Central within Santo Daime, the bailado anchors these dialogues in moving bodies that commune with nature and with each other through dance.

In precolonial times as well as in points of cultural resistance throughout the colonial period, singing and dancing have cultivated collective identities as part of corporeal knowledge systems. The cultural hegemony co-constituting forces of coloniality that marginalize and erase these forms of knowledge wields power over individuals by defining what dance is and

who gets to dance, distorting an otherwise enchanting activity so it is no longer recognizable *as* dance.

The Santo Daime bailado re-introduces the pleasure of singing and dancing together to many for whom these activities may not have been a meaningful part of life. As cultural knowledge, Santo Daime structurally remembers practices killed off through colonization, processes that have been naturalized through colonial strategies of subjectivization. The violence of coloniality continues to invade our bodies in the twenty first century in multiple ways. Mobilization of both audience and performer in the bodies of those who dance the Santo Daime bailado potentially decolonizes understandings of dance, what it is, and why we do it.

Conclusion

Journalist and Indigenous activist Ailton Krenak (2020) wrote that the times we live in are expert at creating absences, sapping the meaning of life from society, and the meaning of experience from life. In his book, contemplating the end of the world, Krenak (2020, p. 32-33) explained how the absence of meaning generates stringent intolerance toward anyone still capable of taking pleasure from simply being alive, from dancing and singing.

As an interspecies bridge, I cannot help but see dance when I watch my dogs playing with each other or observe schools of fish and flocks of birds navigating space together on cue. As part of integrative caboclo knowledge systems, multiple senses are implicated in the Santo Daime bailado as part of collective self-study oriented to forces of nature not just as a species, but in step with living beings. As a practice of re-enchantment, the bailado liberates dance, challenging deep and ongoing histories of colonization.

The following passage from my journal describes an encounter at the seashore from my first years in Brazil, a continuation of an earlier entry in this paper. Encounters like this coincided with and were informed by my early experiences drinking daime and performing the bailado. Throughout this period my dance practice transformed through new spiritual relationships with forces of nature mediated through work with the daime sacrament and Juramidam. Juramidam teaches from the inside out, helping us to recognize ourselves in nature. Though I was describing the emergence of a

new relationship with the ocean as my dance partner and teacher, Juramidam's presence is expressed in this passage as the one who mediates, who translates, going between and slithering through the cracks, filling the space with different kinds of knowledge.

I close my eyes and the ocean hides from me, so I seek her with my toes. The little baby waves sweep the sand out from under me and I lose my balance, tipsy and loose. If the beach is my ballroom, the ocean is to be my partner. How can I resist her push and pull? Soon my knees are more or less under water and I am getting the rug pulled out from under me. The waves become more mischievous. I guess I deserve a little pummeling. It feels so personal. When she pulls it's gentle, but firm. And sometimes when I'm looking away, she smacks me from behind to make sure I'm paying attention. 'What?!'

She's offering me rides and then wrestling me to the ground. Vertical is now only one of many options inside a kaleidoscope of vectors. Up and down seem less urgent, though they keep falling back into place, the sky where he belongs. I surrender to her conspiracy with the sun and moon to teach me something real. I want to understand, but it has to be on my terms. I want so badly for something to make sense, to arrive at a truth I can take back to the house with me like a sea shell. I can't think of anything, so I stay there, rolling around in the waves. It feels good. The water feels even warmer now. I can stay here if I keep listening. Then it's not so foreign.

Our experience of and relationship with nature is mediated by our consciousness. By behaving as if we are separate from these forces we cut ourselves off from vast sources of knowledge, but by dancing with them there are no limits to our experience. The bailado is this dance.

Notes

- ¹ Research for this project was supported by the *Source Research Foundation* and the *Tinker Foundation*. The author received support from the *Santa Cruz Summer Publishing Institute*, UC to write it as part of a *Hispanic-Serving Institution Doctoral Diversity Initiative*.
- ² Excerpt from the author's personal journal describing a bailado work in the Northeast of Brazil in June 2022.
- ³ Currently there are debates among scholars of the ayahuasca religions as to when it is appropriate to refer to the practice founded by Raimundo Irineu Serra as "Santo Daime", as originally just the name "Daime" was used. In this

paper, I will use the colloquial “Santo Daime” as this is how the practice was originally presented to me in both California and the Northeast of Brazil.

- ⁴ Though Santo Daime is often referred to as a religion, it is known among practitioners as a *doctrine*, referring to a more general symbolic and religious framework encompassing spiritual and metaphysical principles mobilized through regular practice (Hartogsohn, 2021, p. 3).
- ⁵ Those who practice Santo Daime and wear the uniform are referred to as *daimistas*. See: Groisman (1991).
- ⁶ Santo Daime rituals or ceremonies are referred to as *works*, encompassing various different kinds of work, especially spiritual works. There are different kinds of Santo Daime works, one of which is the *bailado*. Religious scholar Andrew Dawson (2013, p. 65) described the designation of rituals as works as a form of “symbolic regulation through which the ‘obligations’ implicated in daimista ritual space are driven home”. In this paper, I focus on the work of knowledge production that occurs through the practice of Santo Daime.
- ⁷ Though the daime medicine is usually served as a liquid, referred to sometimes as a *tea* or a *brew*, it can also be thick like honey or solid as a gel, in which cases it is usually served with a spoon. Daimistas refer to the daime tea as a *sacrament*.
- ⁸ Rio Branco was founded in 1909 and established as a county in 1913. The state of Acre was incorporated into the Brazilian Republic in 1962.
- ⁹ Some hymns that refer to caboclo knowledge include: *As Estrelas*, hymn #75; *O Cruzeiro Universal*, Mestre Raimundo Irineu Serra; *Caboclo Guerreiro*, hymn #6; *Caboclo Estrada Frente*, hymn #19; *Caboclo Afirma o Ponto*, hymn #24; *Caboclo Bom*, hymn #34; *Caboclo Guerreiro*, all hymns received by others and offered to Padrinho Manoel Corrente.
- ¹⁰ Hymns that include the line *para todo mundo ver* (for everyone to see): *A Minha Mãe me Mandou*, #38; *O Amor Divino*, Antonio Gomes; *Aonde Vou*, #112; *O Cruzeirozinho*, Padrinho Alfredo Gregório de Melo; *Para Todo Mundo Ver*, #13; *O Sino do Teu Estudo*, Tio Chico Corrente.
- ¹¹ Altered states of consciousness achieved through ingestion of the daime sacrament are referred to among daimistas as a force. See: (MacRae, 2006, p. 106; Perlongher, 1990). Hymns that refer to this force include: *Chamo a Força*, hymn #80 and *Esta Força*, hymn #121; *O Cruzeiro Universal*, Mestre Irineu

Serra; *A Meu Pai Eu Peço Força*, hymn #4, *Lua Branca*, Madrinha Rita Gregório de Melo.

- ¹² The origin story of Santo Daime associated with Mestre Irineu's spiritual guide Clara is well known among daimistas and anthropologists who study ayahuasca religions. For accounts of this story see Couto (1990), Fernandes (1988), Goulart (2004), MacRae (2006), Monteiro da Silva (1983) e Mortimer (2018).
- ¹³ Excerpt from the author's personal journal, written in the Northeast of Brazil, January 29, 2007.
- ¹⁴ Hymns that include instructions to examine one's consciousness include: *Examine a Consciência*, hymn #71; *O Justiceiro*, Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo; *Eu Vivo na Floresta*, hymn #25; *Lua Branca*, Madrinha Rita Gregório de Melo; *A Magia da Oração*, hymn #9; *Presença Transparente do Beija Flor*, Madrinha Nonata de Melo e Souza.
- ¹⁵ The act of stepping firmly on the ground is emphasized in hymns #96 - *O Cruzeiro*; #99 - *Em Pé Firme na Floresta* and #139 - *Cadê Eu, O Cruzeiroinho*, Padrinho Alfredo Gregório de Melo.
- ¹⁶ Also referred to as "spirit possession" (Dawson, 2011), I use the term incorporation as it implies two-way dialogue as part of corporeal relationships with spirit beings rather than top down "possession" through which someone potentially loses a sense of agency within their body.
- ¹⁷ The line *o professor dos professores* is found in the hymn *O Daime, É o Daime*, hymn #84 in *O Cruzeiroinho*, Padrinho Alfredo Gregório de Melo.
- ¹⁸ The first hymn to include the name Juramidam was *Estou Aqui*, hymn #111, *O Cruzeiro Universal*, Mestre Raimundo Irineu Serra. Many others have followed.

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