

# Cosmic and Comic: Jocosity and creativity as strategies to turn off boundaries in a Ayahuasca Religion in The Netherlands<sup>1</sup>

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## Samenvatting

*In dit artikel beschrijf ik de vorm en de praktijk van een bepaald ritueel, alsmede de gevolgen die het ritueel heeft voor de sociale betrekkingen tussen de deelnemers. Het gaat om een groepering in Alkmaar, die de zogenoemde Santo Daime religie aanhangt, een Ayahuasca Religie, afkomstig uit Brazilië. Ayahuasca is een psychoactief preparaat, dat ritueel wordt gebruikt om spirituele en sociale ervaringen tot stand te brengen. Met mijn benadering wil ik pogen bij te dragen aan het debat over het ritueel als een communicatief en dynamisch gebeuren. Daarbij geef ik aan dat het ritueel een essentiële functie vervult bij het instand houden en vormen van sociale betrekkingen tussen de deelnemers.*

## Introduction

One evident characteristic of religious phenomena in contemporary society is that ritual and impressiveness are searched in the religious performance. A great deal of motivational events at religious organizational procedures are to be conceived as impressive, or stimulated by an appeal that the force of the divine may be done and felt plausible and “real”, in the sense Geertz had pointed out (Geertz 1978). Religious agents are engaged in creating and/or renovating ritual structure and contents to emphasize the density of their relationships with the divine. Religious agents may also search for convincing participants about the repercussion of their ability to provide an efficacious and “highly spiritually” inspired intermediation.

To develop my analysis I will approach a “Santo Daime work”. In a summary, Santo Daime is a religious network emerged in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, in Brazil, which bases its ritual services on the use of so called “psychoactive sacraments”, or *entheogens*, as they have been called. Particu-

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larly the expression “Santo Daime” emerged from the experiences Brazilian citizens in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had with the psychoactive beverage known as Ayahuasca.<sup>2</sup> These citizens, who were circulating at the borders between Brazil, Peru and Bolivia in those days, started to organize the fundamentals of a collective organization. They also assumed that some substances known as psychoactive in fact originated from “sacred plants”, and must be treated with respect and used in a ritual context.

To give a broader view, the Santo Daime ritual format was developed primarily under the leadership of Raimundo Irineu Serra, a descendent of African slaves, who was born in Maranhão, a state of Northeast Brazil. In a period between the 1910s and 1920s, Serra went to the Amazon rainforest to work as a guard of the Brazilian frontiers, he then experimented with ayahuasca and had strong experiences, receiving from the spiritual plan, according to oral tradition, some sacred songs which were called *hinos* (hymns).

From his and others’ experiences, a ritual model was developed, including basically the collective singing and a synchronized form of dancing of the hymns, known as *bailado*. This format, the details of which I will approach later, has been maintained through decades, with some modifications made by his followers throughout time. One of those was Sebastião Mota de Melo, whose leadership has stimulated the re-designing and adaptation of the ritual. This adaptation implied openness and accessibility of ritual and religious organization, permitting and (perhaps) aiming at the adherence of people from different backgrounds. In fact, despite some modification, the ritual still has the same basic form: members may wear ritual uniforms, male and female participants stay separated. The ritual is considered a work, and the main activities participants may perform is to sing hymns, to do the *bailado*, ‘to concentrate’ and to use in established periods of the ritual the sacraments: *daimé* (derived symbolically from ayahuasca) and *santa maria* (cannabis), in order to contact the spiritual plan.

I went to the Netherlands in the second part of the 1990s to research Santo Daime established churches for my PhD. My field work was developed in Den Haag (The Hague), Amsterdam and Alkmaar. Regarding the religious services I attended and interviews I did to collect data, each Santo Daime church, even if it had the intention to cling to orthodoxy (Groisman 2000) following Santo Daime ideo-cosmology and liturgy, manifested a particular style of ritual conduct.

My focus here is on a particular event I participated in, in which jocosity, creativity and religious conduct and stimulation may exemplify a peculiar religious leadership design, regarding its character of challenging a sort of

“common sense statement” on the necessity to exclude humor and laughter when we are dealing with religious services.

### 1. A few theoretical, but relevant, remarks on jocosity, creativity and religious life

Victor Turner has approached the dynamics of ritual in terms of transformation and drama (Turner 1967; 1969). In particular, Turner recognized the density of jocosity in promoting transformation, self-consciousness and positioning people socially in a process. He also remarked the importance of human creativity in this process, as pointed out in Lavie (1993). Turner sought out social situations that enhanced full human encounters and understanding. He found that a range of ritual processes produced transformations that allowed the participants to rework their past and to move toward renewed expectations about the future. Further, Turner remolded the case history method central to his school of anthropological thought, by developing the concept of “social drama” (Turner 1969). The concept invokes a process of unfolding perspectives of human relations, regarding characteristic phases: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration or schism. As Turner tells it, the notion of social drama came to him not in the serious solitude of his study, but in the jocular give-and-take of conversation in a pub. For Turner the most creative human spaces were *on the margins* or along interstitial zones; these were sites of frolic, play and joking, as opposed to those of earnest workaday routines. For him – as a person and a theorist – significant human contact and creativity flowed from the margins to the centers more often than the reverse. (Lavie e. a. 1993, 1-2)

Following this argument, first of all, we can consider that creativity may be associated to a process of suspension of formalities. As defined by Lavie, creativity is related to the “human activities that transform existing cultural practices in a manner that a community or certain its members find of value” (Lavie e. a. 1993, 1-2). Furthermore the promotion of transformation, humor and jocosity may be also relevant, if we consider its eventual characteristic of changing dispositions.

On its side, humor has not been treated as a relevant subject on which social scientists would put their eyes on. If we consider the relationship between humor and religion this interest is far rarer: in many dimensions, religion implies seriousness, graveness, drama. In fact, at least if we consider the anti-structural role in a Turner’s sense (Turner 1976), humor and laughter are

daily life activities which can be at the same level of importance to religious practices than all other circumspect activities.

One contemporary stimulus to the reflection on humor, laughter and religion was triggered by Umberto Eco in his book *The Name of the Rose* (Eco 1983). In the book, Eco simulates in his narrative a dramatic situation in which humor is basically treated as a threat to faith. In a few words, the story tells a hypothetical possession by Benedictinian monks in an Italian monastery of a legendary (and lost) book of Comedy of Aristotle. The story tells the efforts to hide that paradigmatic book regarding its power to challenge the seriousness of religious thought. The book is seen by the Catholic Church establishment as a suggestion that contrary to Catholic common sense which stated that Christ had an unfortunate and permanent trajectory of pain and sadness, he was capable of happiness and laughter. Eco's account is constructed as a narrative about a serial killer whose motivation is to avoid the access of other people to the book. The consequences of such a mission being the diligent and ample burning of knowledge, represented in the Eco's text by the burning and conflagration of the imaginative and fascinating Benedictine monastery's library.

Regarding the role humor may have in social life, particularly in challenging fear and obedience, Branko Bokun (1986) takes the comic as a starting point:

Perhaps, it would be easier to explain the nature of humor if we were first to define the comic. The comic is whatever helps us to liberate ourselves from mind created fears and worries. Whenever physical laws or cosmic order degrade our mind's abstractions or beliefs, whenever nature deflates super-nature, whenever reality debases our pretentiousness, capricious expectations, or wishful assumptions, whenever material objectivity brings ethereal subjectivity and its poses, affectations or self-deceptions, to the ground, briefly, whenever our mind's world is shaken, the comic comes into existence. (Bokun 1986, 43)

This sort of phenomenological approach suggests that to the dense and profound sense of *cosmic* consciousness which may bring us to reflect on existence and the flow of human life, a "therapeutic" addition, synthesized by what we can call *comic* consciousness, may be alleviating, regarding that it provides a sense of "*earthiness*" and palpability. In other words, the sense of human condition portrayed by comic designers, may open spaces of self-awareness and reflexivity. Legitimacy and success in conducting religious groups has been attributed to the power of charismatic performance, with regard to the psychological effects it may have on susceptible people. One classic fundament

of this aspect of contemporary theory is still based on Max Weber's convincing argument, regarding his definition and localization of charisma in the context of religious establishment of power relations. So, in taking this focus as discussable, we can consider that the correlation between the sacred and the social was seen as a sort of relationship between "a social need" – of collective self-expression, or, of a way to compensate a "self-constitution lack", for example – and the establishment of order and domination. The emergence of charismatic individuals in this sense, who – powered by their special abilities – would establish and conduct religious practices in the context of institutionalizing their power, may be determined by their manipulative skills. In the same route, Weber associated charismatic phenomena with asceticism and "non-rationality" (Weber 1976), perhaps establishing a dense analytical frontier between rationality and the attribution of power in religious context. And, hardly again, social researchers – even working on pragmatic protestant groups – have not seen any dialectically dynamical relationship between rationality and charisma. Charisma in sum is seen as way to misguiding and it is rarely taken as a feature of a general process of negotiating power and socially successful volition.

In fact, the emergence of religious practices in the Twenty First century has shown that rationality may not be found in charismatic groups in terms of theological matters. However, the fluency of social relations in contemporary religious contexts motivated by charisma, may be also scrutinized regarding a fairly rational social-symbolic negotiation. In this sort of contexts, the quality of both ritual performance and socio-political reciprocity are basically two parts of the same key. In this route, religious agents should be efficient in to exercise a prerogative of *animating* religious life, beyond constructing exclusively dominance and dependency. This may express what researchers have argued about the so-called *post-modern forms of religiosity*, or their appeal on offering a *relativization* of any monopoly of the sacred. In other words, the religious dynamic in such contexts may be result of a constant confirmation of a positive evaluation of creativity, efficacy, sense of opportunity and usefulness. Charisma therefore would be actually weighted and legitimized only if satisfying some "rational" expectations. It may be obtained from the necessity of consistent knowledge demonstration (1) on manipulating successfully the recognized forces of the spiritual world, and (2) on demonstrating it in an expressive and efficaciously transformative ritual performance.

Furthermore, reflecting on a slightly speculative and hypothetical questioning of Weberian statement on the tension between charisma and rationality, my perspective here is to present and discuss design, performance and so-

cial relationships involved and expressed in a particular ritual I witnessed in the Netherlands, in the event of a research carried on among participants of Santo Daime, originally emerged in Brazil. The study I am about to present may contribute to the reflection on ritual performance as a communicational event, dynamic and, at the same time, constructive, in terms of a sort of “rational” establishment of sociability and fluidity of social relations.

## 2. Relevant notes regarding peculiar religious services

As I already mentioned, the Santo Daime ritual is considered a “spiritual work”, and the participants may perform, singing hymns, doing the *bailado*, ‘to concentrate’, and to use the psychoactive sacraments: *daime* and *santa maria*, around a central table, in order to contact the spiritual plan.

The ritual format basically seems expected to be a way to enable participants to focus on some thematic contents which can be of their intimacy, for example, a moral reflection, a memory from the past, a revision of a personal act, or a cosmic vision about the existence or future of the planet, stimulated by the performance of singing and meditating on the contents of the hymns.

The contents, the instructions of the ritual “commander” and fiscals (people responsible to help, instruct and organize participants), and other affirmative discourse are expected to be considered ‘from experts’, and because of that, to be followed as they signify the relevant knowledge accumulated about the experience. Individual interpretation is therefore considered valid when it does not threaten this statement and the order of the ritual. The power of religious experts is, in this way, reinforced.

It can be said that the format of the ritual has no explicit contents.<sup>3</sup> However, it should be observed that, at least, to be positioned in front of the inside space stimulates comparison and scrutiny, and reinforces the idea that in the central field of visual focus are those who had shown “merit to be there”. In other words, and rigorously, the “content” of the format is the idea that centrality and importance are co-related to the expression of power relations. In fact, this dynamic is mediated by an assertion that Santo Daime is a “spiritual school”.

In order to reinforce the view of Santo Daime as a *spiritual school*, rituals are treated as didactic events, in which the rite is an established frame allocated to the learning process. In this sense, the ritual is a space in which it is expected that a ‘contact’ with a ‘master’, or with the teaching and healing spiritual forces may be established to benefit all participants and, in extension,

the whole humanity. In the visibility of the ritual format participants share their experiences. In this way, on one hand, the visible dimension of the ritual works as a reference for the collective performance, and on the other, as it is stated in the cosmological view, it is a “physical” manifestation of the spiritual forces. In the sacred presence of these spiritual forces, and in the sequence of ritual events, a process involving memory, moral values, social performance may be dominant over the hermeneutics of a solitary elaboration. There is a totality formed by humans and divine beings in searching for communication and knowledge. Providing a way to deal with different dimensions of human interaction, the ritual constructs an arena in which – and when – unspeakable things can be expressed, and furthermore, symbolic parameters can provide structure for the experience.

### 2.1 *Ritual Format*

I describe below the ritual in a synchronic form, which does not differ significantly from one Santo Daime church to another. My aim is to show the general grammar of the ritual, in its formal appearance, rules and implications, to describe afterwards the ritual action itself and its semantics.

The Santo Daime rituals comprise a program of *hinários*, or specially selected hymns. The hymns, as I already mentioned, are considered to have been received from the spiritual plane, and are treated as sacred songs. They are sung from rustic books, photocopied or handwritten. Daimistas are supposed to collect and carry them and may also be expected to have a basic collection of books containing the *hinários* of the principal leaders (the *hinários* which are performed in the official dates) and books with the selection of the most frequently performed hymns.<sup>4</sup>

The structure of the ritual is “simple”, but this apparent simplicity contrasts with the complexity of the social interaction. The lines of participants are organized by gender. Basically, young and mature women are located separately, and young and mature men also are separated in their own spaces. The rows are organized by height, from the right to the left, from the tallest to the smallest. It is said that this arrangement facilitates singing and listening, but a political factor is also involved, as basically the hierarchy in the church (or in the ritual) is represented through the positioning of the ritual participants. Those who are placed at the central table, or in the front lines are usually those in higher hierarchical position. In this way, the board of the “church”, as daimistas call their more organized centers, can re-arrange members’ position in each ritual. This criterion of positioning is also applied to the situation in which there are members of different churches. In the latter, the

general hierarchical position in the Santo Daime network may be respected and expressed. So, the position of each person and the composition of the ritual scene communicate “hierarchy”.

Another feature of positioning in Santo Daime ritual is that it is recommended that attention be directed to what is “beautiful”, what is “harmonious”, what is “perfect”, thus normally it may be only the successful performers, as musicians or singers, who are encouraged to show their skills.<sup>5</sup> A good performance can be recognized and someone’s expression of suffering, divergence or inability may be accompanied by fiscals, in order to avoid disturbance of the ritual.

## 2.2 *Ritual Dynamics*

The Santo Daime ritual format triggers firstly a process of what can be called “mutual acceptance”. The appearance of the ritual scene is considered as part of the process. Men and women, who before were dressed in casual clothes, change rapidly into school-like or tidy and decorated dress. Some ritual participants I interviewed commented that, at the beginning, the uniforms, Christian prayer and rigidity impacted them negatively, and only after listening to the hymns did they become more comfortable. In fact, it combines an expected *libertarianism* associated sometimes to the use of a psychedelic substance, with the formal structure of a conservative and old-fashioned school. The tension between this libertarian psychedelism and the old-fashioned school formal structure seems to be a trigger to experience paradox, evaluation and focus, regarding that ritual participants are confronted with the interplay between their wish to have the experience and the formal and institutional requirements for ritual participation. This tension appears to have a relevant role in stimulating ‘self-examination’. New participants therefore may have a great deal of reflection on what they are doing in such ‘exotic’ ritual. But for newcomers the effects of the sacraments themselves and the self-containing appeal of the ritual discipline may overcome the weird sensation, re-directing focus and interests.

Still on the spatial format of the ritual, it has an “outer” dimension. The approach of people interested in a Santo Daime group is basically established by its image and prestige in the social networks of potential ritual participants. So a tension can be felt in the organization of rituals in the Netherlands, on which I focused my attention here. And despite a “religious” motivation, practical and also cultural obstacles are confronted by the groups. In this sense, the groups construct these “obstacles” to avoid problems. They stress the seriousness of the ritual scene, aiming to communicate, to consolidate and



to search for a legitimization of purposes, deterring undesirable participants, for example, on one hand, junkies or hedonistic trippers, on the other hand people who are mistaken about what the ritual is about in terms of the use of psychoactive substances. In this way, the use of the sacrament is expected to be more likely kept for those who are respectful, serious and 'spiritually' developed, or "in need" of spiritual healing.

Multi-meaning visions are usually told by participants and the variation of sentiments and moods is considered "therapeutic" as they are expected to let emerge emotional memories, unresolved or traumatic subjects, issues to be confronted, and also beautiful visions of divinities, angels, wonderful places, mythical beasts and guardian spirits. In synthesis, daimistas attribute this variation to the quality of social and ritual performances, which may interfere in what daimistas call "karma". In this sense, the effects of the substances and the ritual performance are directly associated as two sides of the experience, and only can be separated for heuristic purposes.

The Santo Daimé ritual dynamics imply therefore a constant shifting in the perspective of participants. People are stimulated to look 'inside'. Good control of the experience is given by a 'right' preparation for the ritual. The contents of this model are elaborated from reading or sharing with other participants what they do. Personal contacts are established. Expertise is also exchanged. A whole system of 'internal' communication is created. All participants can be considered 'performers' and, at the ritual setting, different inputs are processed.

Therefore a variability of experiences also can be expected from the different combinations in the perception of these inputs. Daimistas say 'each ritual is different'. Difference is sometimes described didactically by leaders as a result of the preparation of participants, and their dedication to improve ritual performance. It is expected that people come to the ritual "not carrying unresolved" problems (in this category it may include for example conflicts with other members, or with relatives, doubting, or other thoughts that would threaten harmony), which in this sense may interfere negatively with their individual participation, and so in the collective performance. People have to practice the ritual skills, such as singing and dancing, regularly<sup>6</sup> in order to improve performance. According to daimistas, a successful ritual performance is what enables the contact with the spiritual beings who protect, teach and heal the participants. Thus improving ritual performance is an issue of self and social control.

### 3. Santo Daime Ritual in the Netherlands

In very brief, the introduction of Santo Daime to the Netherlands was carried out in the beginning of the 1990s, when the Brazilian Santo Daime organization *Cefluris* (*Centro Eclético de Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra* – Eclectic Center for the Flow of Universal Light Raimundo Irineu Serra) started consolidating its international expansion. A Dutch woman, who had a diagnosed brain tumor and was skeptical about biomedical possibilities of curing, was participating in New Age healing activities in the Netherlands and heard about Santo Daime. She started to search for a way to participate in a Santo Daime religious service. She succeeded and started to reunite people in Amsterdam to share *daime*. Her initiative originated the *Céu da Santa Maria* (Heaven of Saint Mary) Santo Daime church of Amsterdam. In parallel, a group of people in Wassenaar, who were involved in the past with conviviality communities for healing and using psychoactive substances in their communal experiences, also knew about Santo Daime, coming collectively, after contacting participants from the Amsterdam group, to organize their own Santo Daime church in Den Haag, called *Céu dos Ventos* (Heaven of the Winds). After that, in the mid-1990s, a Brazilian daimista, after a vision, decided to move to the Netherlands to found his own church, which later he called *Céu da Luz da Floresta* (Heaven of the Light of the Forest), in Alkmaar. During the period of my fieldwork, from 1997 to 1998, these three Santo Daime churches were active, promoting their religious services supported by Brazilian instructors, who went periodically to the Netherlands to teach and supervise ritual and doctrinaire conduct. The rituals were performed in a combination between the structural model of the format Santo Daime-*Cefluris* had developed during its trajectory as a religious organization, and an idiosyncratic approach each church established from the experiences and particular ideocosmological approach its participants had shared and reproduced.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, the performance of Santo Daime rituals in the Netherlands at the time of my fieldwork maintained the basic format in terms of its constituent elements – the use of the psychoactive sacraments, singing, dancing, praying – has been throughout time subject of re-invention. In particular, organized Santo Daime groups following Santo Daime-*Cefluris* tradition have combined an innovative approach to ritual with a ‘religious’ emphasis. Religious in this case may relate to a trend of millenarian motivation, and as a way for demarcating the frontiers of spiritual searching from what can be called ‘hedonistic’ use. Hence, the commitment of members, the organization of

each group – and the ritual execution – are likely to be inspired by a sense of ‘collective duty’, or “mission”.

Ritual innovation in Santo Daime, however, is not exclusively a matter of religious inspiration, but also an issue of attraction and social inclusion. As well as the group can include new elements from different religious traditions, more people are likely to join and find a place within. That’s not to say that Santo Daime is a “mass religion”, but even in the small scale of its development, with this inclusive dynamic, the group may confront the consequent diversity. And in this way mechanisms of mediation, as ritual rules and moral codification, are applied to establish a social order, and promote cohesion. In sum, this religious emphasis provides Santo Daime’s institutional organization with a consistent strategy to support the expansion of its cultural frontiers, as newcomers may find easily a place in the whole set of symbolic possibilities.

### 3.1 *Céu da Luz da Floresta: A Santo Daime Church in Alkmaar*

Now, I will approach particularly a ritual I witnessed at *Céu da Luz da Floresta*, the Santo Daime church of Alkmaar.<sup>8</sup> In majority, members of the church were residents of the same area of Alkmaar, six of them living nearby the house of the CLDF “commander”.<sup>9</sup> This area is located on the periphery, in the surroundings of *Rekerhout* Park, cut by placid and narrow canals. A quiet place, it evokes the contemporary urban design of the periphery of the big cities: a huge set of patterned houses, surrounding a shopping area, where there are supermarkets, small shops, photo-services and pharmacies.

The name of the church is a reference to the LDF commander’s worshipping of the “forces of nature”, frequently mentioned in his narratives, both in rituals and in other meetings, but particularly evoked in his hymns: *Viva o Sol, viva a Lua e as Estrelas, viva o Vento, viva a Terra, viva o Mar, viva a Céu da Luz da Floresta e viva Deus eternamente a brilhar* (Viva the Sun, viva the Moon, viva the Stars, viva the Wind, viva the Earth, viva the Sea, viva the Light of the Forest, and viva God eternally shining). The name of the church also indicates his relationship with *santa maria*, which is metaphorically mentioned at a SD hymn for closure of rituals, as the ‘light in the forest’.

The funding of the church in the end of the 1990s came from donations and payment of monthly fees (NLG 70 (non-*fardados*<sup>10</sup>) and NLG 60 (*fardados*)). The fees were charged at the beginning of rituals<sup>11</sup>. The tasks of the church were divided informally. Members were expected to volunteer for the practical arrangements of rituals. The LDF commander was responsible for the supervision. He was also responsible for serving *daime* and *santa maria*,

and for conducting the ritual. In rituals, his wife translated his instructions, lectures and jokes, from Portuguese to Dutch, or eventually to English. In the rituals, the SD hymns were usually sung in Portuguese, from books copied in manuscript or heliographic copying from those edited by other centres. Singularly, there was no displaying or selling of books, or any other goods in rituals, which was common in other rituals, I participated in the Netherlands. This was, in part, due to the fact that the church had no official permission from *Cefluris* to reproduce the books. To compensate the lack of books, a system of borrowing and copying was applied to support ritual participants.

### 3.2 *A Profile of Ritual Participants at Céu da Luz da Floresta at the end of the 1990s*

During my fieldwork, around fifteen people participated more regularly in the rituals of *Céu da Luz da Floresta*. I did a summarized survey to get a general profile of ritual participants. Ten (eight *fardados* and two non-*fardados*) respondents were between thirty-five and fifty years old. From the twelve respondents, nine were women and three, men; eleven were Dutch and one Belgian. Five declared that Santo Daime was their religion. To the question about 'religious background', five answered Roman Catholic, one Jewish, one Protestant, and five none.

When asked about their occupation, eight mentioned professions of the "health field" (like working with handicapped people, occupational therapist, psychiatrist and psychologist) and one mentioned to be a "social worker". About their level of education, ten mentioned higher education degrees (HBO, WO), including the non-*fardados*, and two mentioned education up to secondary school and technical training. Particularly peculiar, eight of the respondents were single women living alone or with their children. Eight respondents declared that they had used at least one psychoactive substance before; four mentioned three or more kinds, and two (including one non-*fardado*) claimed never to have used psychoactive substances before. The most mentioned substances were *cannabis* (five) mushrooms (three) and LSD (three).

### 3.3 *A Ritual in Céu da Luz da Floresta*

I turn now to approach the ritual life of *Céu da Luz da Floresta*, focusing a ritual I witnessed. That was the Easter ritual. The LDF ritual has the same basic elements of all Santo Daime rituals: praying, use of daime and santa maria, and singing. It was around five o'clock p.m. when I went to the place with a member of the church. On the way, I was told about the difficulty of finding an adequate place to do rituals in that town.

We arrived on time to see LDF people starting the ‘make-up’ of the place. The room arranged before like a school class was gradually transformed into a “ritual space”. The walls were covered with white sheets. The central table with chairs around it was arranged and decorated. My description of the ritual may reproduce its dramaticity.

The ritual started at early evening. The rosary (Catholic prayer composed by a set of Ave Maria’s and Holy Fathers) was recited in Portuguese, with a part in Dutch. After that, LDF commander positioned himself behind the daime table and his wife started to sing a “daime hymn”.<sup>12</sup> The hymn says: *O Santo Daime, veja como é, é maravilha para todos tendo fé* (The Santo Daime, see how it is, it is wonderful, for all, who have faith). Although participants were not fluent in Portuguese, they know what the hymn is communicating: this is “daime time”. The LDF commander called those who are not moving, humorously, “exorcising” weakness, laziness and fear. The climate contrasted with the atmosphere of the rituals at other Dutch churches. During the hymn performance other things were arranged. While people were still drinking daime, some announcements and instructions about the ritual were given. The LDF commander announced then that the *hinário* to be sung was ‘from Germano Guilherme’, changing a previous plan. In doing so, he forced people to search for the appropriate book, testing if they had observed the instructions to have all books of hymns on hand.

At some moment, the commander announced that this would be a dancing ritual. Concentrated on singing correctly, and in tune, the Dutch participants had starring expressions. The hesitant music playing, and the eloquent singing, joined the firm and repetitive performance of a *maracá*<sup>13</sup> and a tambourine. The periodic percussion suggested an army marching in the battlefield.

After the second serving of daime, everybody sat down, when the LDF commander then said in Portuguese: “*Agora silêncio que eu vou fazer a ligação com a santa maria*” (Now, silence I will make contact with santa maria). His wife translated it into Dutch. He said again: *Agora silêncio que eu vou telefonar prá nós podê pitá, tá?!* (Now silence, I will phone. Then we can smoke, ok?!) Another instant of tension, then the sound of a telephone ringing is heard. It was the commander’s new lighter. He lit the *pito*<sup>14</sup> up and inhaled deeply, laughing.

The solemn atmosphere was transformed. People laughed and smiled. The humorous man dominated the scene. Some of the tension dispersed. The *pito* went around. At some other times during the ritual, the commander repeated his humorous and paradigmatic performance. He was relaxing the serious

and grave participants, bringing “*alegria*” (happiness) to the ritual. *Viva a santa maria! Viva o padrinho!* He shouted, inviting the others to answer: *Viva!*

Suddenly, a sharp strident sound was heard. The smoke alarm was switched on by the smoke. The commander did not lose the opportunity for a joke. He suggested in Portuguese: “*vamos trazer um ventilador prá na hora que tiver pitando tiver direto aí, ou então nós sai pitá noutra canto que não é debaixo!*” (Let’s bring a ventilator, during the time we smoke it will be switched on, or we have to go smoking in another place, which may not be below (referring to the alarm)). His irony was promptly understood. His jokes were directed at the person who rented the place. He laughed abundantly and asked a male participant: *tá com medo?* (are you afraid?), and finishes: *homem fraquinho...* (weak man!) His irony and tranquility contrasted with the apprehension of some of the other participants. The alarm sounded loudly. Again, he said ironically: *sopra aí!* (blow it!).

*O Mestre que me ensina...* (The Master who teaches me...) The 31st hymn came... the alarm was forgotten and the ritual went on. Like a benign and inexorable whirl, the hymn said: *As portas estão abertas, deste divino poder; Enxerga quem procura, quem não enxerga não vê.* (The doors of this divine power are open; who searches will see, who does not search does not find). A feeling of belonging and complicity marked the scene. In the implicit logic applied, those depressed or excessively concerned with the sacredness of the ritual and the plants or with the risk of a bad experience, could relax. So, the unexpected action of ‘ringing’ to *santa maria* produced relaxation and the feeling of *alegria* (happiness) the commander was pursuing. *Santa maria* should be respected, but with happiness. *Viva a Alegria!* (viva happiness), shouted the commander enthusiastically. A few faces continued to look serious, but the Brazilian commander seemed to be satisfied because he had given his lesson on ‘*santa maria* and happiness’ successfully.

This ritual performance suggests that there are moments in which social interaction is focused at instructing people about the parameters of mutual and institutional ‘acceptance’. This ritual didacticism may socialize participants and may reinforce the authority of the ritual experts. However, as the dynamic of the ritual is given by the visibility of the performance, ritual authority is constantly subject of social scrutiny, giving to its ‘didactic’ quality a level of imponderability which can prevent perhaps the ‘absolutism’ of the leadership’s craft. In sum, the space of the ritual is also ‘didactic’ about mutual expectations.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

The tension between keeping traditional features and performing rituals in a specific cultural context, as in the *Dutch* one, may take us to consider a fundamental dimension of religious searching and expression in the Netherlands as observed by Watling (Watling 1999), a strong appeal to experimentation of both ideological and social fundamentals. In this way the forms religious expression and performance assumed in terms of ritual are influenced by an interest in innovation and creativity. In this sense one main point is to reflect on the social construction of a sacred dimension for the use of their two plants'-based daime and santa maria, as it is proposed by Santo Daime.

Santo Daime religious services therefore are performed with a general preoccupation to reproduce what is considered traditional ritual format, but mediated by the interest on what tradition implies in changing the established and pointing to new forms. Although each Santo Daime church in the Netherlands has its own interpretation of 'what' is traditionally to be kept (Groisman 2000), diversity although not having challenged the basic ritual format, led to an openness to particular versions, which we can call 'styles of conduct'. These styles express the institutional intention of the church's leadership, and also the background and choice of participants on the specific setting they prefer to have daime. However I'm not sure if the case study I presented here may be taken as a microcosm of Santo Daime presence in the Netherlands. Only perhaps if we consider that seriousness, orthodoxy and tradition are motivational parameters among the churches, aiming to attract people by differentiation. In other words, if the potential participants in the Netherlands – from their own religious-spiritual trajectories – expect seriousness from religious services, it may be stressed to legitimize and facilitate participation, particularly in a "hallucinogenic taking" religious service.

Or following Turner's approach to creativity (I referred to in section 1), which establishes that it may be a matter of margins, the tension of "being at the margins" – status which may be expected for *Céu da Luz da Floresta* from the Dutch cultural locality and particularly from other "Dutch conducting" churches – would stimulate creative solutions for the lack of mutual full idiomatic and cultural comprehension.

On the other hand, this case is related to what we have seen in contemporary forms of religious expression, mainly among the so called New Agers, in which the frontiers between the human and the divine are established, not from institutional commitment and formal construction of hierarchical structures. It is actually established much more from the facilitation of ex-

perience, and in this way, elaboration and fluency of personal and collective performance, aiming basically at the construction of informality, intimacy and control of spiritual forces.

Particularly in the *Céu da Luz da Floresta* ritual style of conduct, “transgression” is regarded to overcome a sort of *obsolete distance* between the human and the divine as part of the sacred. It is in this sense, possible to play with the divine and, in doing so, bring relaxation and intimacy also to the social relations. Seriousness, responsibility and perfection, in many senses expected by religious agents, are dissolved in jocosity in order to empower and legitimize leadership. In this route, authority is not in promoting structure, but in the personal ability to dissolve structure, personalizing in this way the fluency and efficacy of power relations. The impressiveness of the performance in *Céu da Luz da Floresta* ritual, the ‘search for happiness’ and the interest in “playing the game” by other participants lead to a tension from the fusion of the serious and the jocose, constructing the sacred and the expression of power from this tension.

There also was a tension between tradition and innovation. Regarding this tension, when the Dutch groups started to perform their own rituals in 1994, a trend to restrict innovation was therefore already working in the Santo Daime network. However, still motivated by a more explorative ethos stimulated continuously before as I had pointed out, in *Céu da Luz da Floresta* church, the ritual setting focused in this article, which innovation was a matter of confirming existence. Every ritual had a new element added and every member was expecting news at the ritual performance. This was a paradox because *the Céu da Luz da Floresta* leader’s agenda was composed mainly by a goal of showing his “traditional” knowledge, and doing so promoting tradition through the introduction of unknowable ritual techniques. In many ways, and in many of the events he participated, he reported his relationships with Mota de Melo and their intimacy. However, in accordance with all the daimista’s ideology, he considered implicitly that intimacy with Mota de Melo was as well as intimacy with the divine, and that it is enough to legitimate his leadership. So, *Céu da Luz da Floresta* leader invested in this election firmly, sustaining and having been sustained by a motivation which led him to perform different types of acts considered by other daimistas as authoritarian, but considered by him as based on a legitimate prerogative. His self-confidence was explicit and effective in terms of providing a “sense of competence”. His “charismatic” control of the ritual scene was eloquent, but mediated by the acceptance of his ability in conducting the ritual, in dealing with the the effects daime and



santa maria may have on participants, and finally in reproducing successfully and creatively his sense of humor.

To conclude I may say that in *Céu da Luz da Floresta*, it was significantly relevant to show that the divine is closely and personally treated. In this way, religious practices (cosmic or comically conducted) would be 'relational', in the sense that the notion of human is constructed in relation to the notion of the divine. Furthermore that this relationship is dynamic, implying to recognize divinity also in the humans. With this motivational content, a sort of 'familial' atmosphere may be constructed to address this relationship, and the sacred is not absolutely distinguished from the profane. There were demarcated frontiers but in instead of related to the theoretical attribution of a divine quality, they were much more associated to the successful and *performative* achievement of happiness.

## Notes

- 1 Reviewed version of a paper originally presented to the *30th Conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion*, Santiago de Compostela (Spain), 27-31 July 2009, with the title "Jocosity and creativity as strategies to turn off boundaries in a Ayahuasca Religion". Acknowledgements: Erik Sengers, participants at the ST 47 in Santiago de Compostela, and Lammert Gosse Jansma, for the attentive hosting and opportune comments; the Santo Daime informants for their availability and kindness to participate in the research. CNPq-Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico and CAPES – Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior, Brazil, and my colleagues at Departamento de Antropologia, UFSC, Brazil, for the funding and support.
- 2 Ayahuasca, which in *quechua*, the idiom traditionally used by indigenous population in South America, and particularly in Peru, means *wine of the souls*, is a beverage, usually made by the indigenous and riverside population in the Amazon, from the preparation – most of the times ritually organized – of two alkaloid-containing plants, *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*. Immemorially, local Amazonian population discovered that the preparation of these two plants together produces a very potent substance with psychoactive properties.
- 3 For an analysis on meaning and ritual see Boyer 1994: 193.
- 4 For example, books with hymns sung in *Cura* works (healing rituals).
- 5 It is an honor for example for a visitor, musician or not, from another church to be invited to play or to participate at the central table.

- 6 For this, churches in Brazil organise the *Ensaio*s (Practice), and the Dutch churches have the *introdunctieavond* (introductory evening) (Céu dos Ventos) or “training session” (Céu da Santa Maria).
- 7 For more, see Groisman 2000.
- 8 Alkmaar is on the ‘peninsula’ of Holland, north of Amsterdam and Haarlem. Its population is about 100 000, and it is an urban centre serving a region (town and other municipalities) with more than 500.000 people.
- 9 The position of “Commander” of the Church is one of the traces of a residual influence in the liturgy, of the military trajectory of the Santo Daime founder, Raimundo Irineu Serra.
- 10 *Fardado* is a term in Portuguese which refers to *farda* (usually in Brazil to designate military uniform) is another trace of a residual influence in the liturgy, of the military trajectory of Santo Daime founder, Raimundo Irineu Serra and identify the participant of the ritual formally associated to the religious organization.
- 11 This system of funding is one of the reasons why Céu da Luz da Floresta is not connected formally with CEFLURIS.
- 12 The “Daime hymns” are a set of hymns considered to be directly related with daime itself. This is an arrangement influenced by the expansion of Santo Daime.
- 13 Maracá is a percussion instrument, made with a can with metallic spheres, the sound of which – as daimistas use to mention – remembers an army on marching.
- 14 Pito is a sort of kind and personal way to treat the so called “joint” of cannabis.

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