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Shamans, Visions and Ghosts: Exploring spiritual and Religious Experiences

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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



www.uwtsd.ac.uk

Ayahuasca, Peyote and other ingrediencies

- Is an experience under influence the same as a spiritual experience?



Huichol (in Mexico)



- yarn drawing of peyote by an Huichol artist
- Highlighting the traditional use of Peyote for shamanic journeys

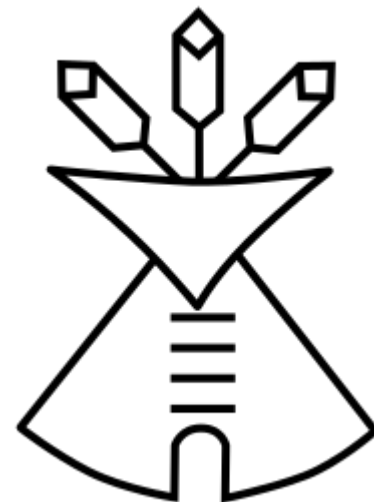
Peyote in the USA

- Use of peyote was widespread in traditional rituals in Mexico
- In 1870 recorded for the first time in the USA (by Mescalero Apaches) as means to reinforce traditional identity
- spread to other groups and became a Pan-Indian feature

- Growth of Peyote religion in the following decades
 - Despite of several anti-peyote bills
- In 1934 Peyote religion and the Native American Church had become the traditional faith of many Native Americans

The Native American Church

- Opposition against the Hayden Bill led to the establishment of the Native American Church in 1918
- Aim was to give the use of peyote a firm legal status



Peyote Today

- The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 and its amendments of 1994 legalised the (limited) use of peyote for Native Americans



Experience

- Among the Huichol only shamans took peyote
- Now in the Native American Church every member
 - But still not allowed to non-members

Ayahuasca

- tropical vine of the Amazon region
- Also called caapi, yajé, or yagé,
- Has hallucinogenic properties (in combination with other ingredients)



Traditional use

- For spiritual journeys
- Mainly for shamans but sometimes also for patients as part of the healing process
- Initiated visions



Visions



Santo Daime

- In the 1920/30 ayahuasca became popular in urban settings in South America
- outside indigenous communities
- -> development of new religions, some of them grew also outside South America
- The most famous one until today is Santo Daime

Mestre Irineu (1892-1971)

- Raimundo Irineu Serra
- Founded Santo Daime in 1930s
 - Daime = term for ayahuasca
- Registered as church in 1971
 - Centro de Iluminação Cristã Luz Universal

Other communities using Daime

- Capelinha de São Francisco, also called Barquinha, founded by Daniel Pereira de Mattos (Mestre Daniel) in 1945
- União do Vegetal, founded in 1961 by José Gabriel da Costa (Mestre Gabriel)
- *Culto Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra* (Eclectic Centre of the Universal Flowing Light Raimundo Irineu Serra) founded by Sebastião Mota de Melo (1920-1990)
 - The most successful group today

- App. 20,000 people regular involved in Santo Daime rituals in Brazil (number from 2012)
- Described often as syncretic (i.e., mixed) religion with elements from various traditions
- Core ritual – communal consumption of daime

Preparation



Ceremony



Daime altar



International spread

- Santo Daime groups can be found in the USA, Canada, Japan, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, the UK and many other countries
- -> problem with the legalisation of the use of Daime

Daime Tourism

- Can one have a sincere spiritual experience when visiting for a weekend?
- Example: online blog by Steve Boggan about his experience after taking Daime
 - <http://entheology.com/peoples/santo-daime-the-drug-fuelled-religion/>

Excerpt from blog

- I am deep in the Amazon rainforest, anxiously losing my mind as the world begins to disintegrate. Around me, all sense of distance is wrapping itself up like spatial origami, slowly shrinking until an entire dimension has disappeared. A moment ago, I was surrounded by 200 people dressed in white and singing like angels, but now they occupy the same space as me... if that makes any sense.

(cont.)

- I take my ayahuasca. It tastes awful, bitter and sour at the same time. And it is a fierce emetic, often making drinkers vomit and defecate. The Church, however, considers this a positive side-effect, a purging of negativity, darkness and malevolent spirits. In gaps in the singing – as beautiful as any choir I have ever heard – come the sounds of retching from the male and female toilets. I constantly feel on the edge of vomiting. And I wait.

- ...After about half an hour, I begin to feel distant and slightly paranoid, imagining that people are looking at me. Straight lines begin to bend and I feel heavy and very tired. After a while, I am advised that it is time for another drink. Almost immediately my shrinking space and red-door hallucinations take over. These last for perhaps two hours and I decline a third drink, retreating instead to my wooden guesthouse where the Daima makes me re-live journeys and conversations with friends, family and lovers. I wake several hours later with not the slightest hint of a hangover. I feel refreshed and strangely uplifted in spite of what was a largely unpleasant experience.

Wider Problem

- Experience after having taken a psychedelics
- Article on Moodle “Speaking to people who found god after taking psychedelics”

- Study by John Hopkins University confirms that people who are using DMT on a regular basis develops beliefs in some kind of higher power
- Reference also to other types of hallucinogen drugs

Roland Griffiths

- “Experiences that people describe as encounter with God or a representative of God have been reported for thousands of years. Although modern Western medicine doesn't typically consider 'spiritual' or 'religious' experience as one of the tools in the arsenal against sickness, our findings suggest that these encounters often lead to improvements in mental health.”