

## FAILURE AND MISTAKES IN RITUALS OF THE EUROPEAN SANTO DAIME CHURCH: EXPERIENCES AND SUBJECTIVE THEORIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS<sup>1</sup>

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So what can you do, when you fall down? Because, you know, then the rules fall as well, they are only [...] well, not 'only', but they are not absolute. Finally, the ultimate rule is the Daimé itself, the Juramidam—the spirit, the soul of the ritual. That's the ultimate authority, is God, if you want (quoted from an interview with a member of the European Santo Daime church).

Research into ritual rules, mistakes and failure, and consequently the analysis of ritual dynamics can be fruitfully undertaken within different paradigms, for example through ethnographic research of ritual performances (Schieffelin 1996), the application of speech-act theory (Grimes 1988) or textual analysis (e.g. Ambos and Stavrianopoulou in this volume).

Most theories of ritual are based on ethnographic descriptions of ritual actions around the globe. While many of these theories deal with performative aspects of rituals (the most famous being Tambiah [1981]) and even more with the occurrence of possession within these rituals (see Boddy 1994), there are fewer accounts of rituals in which the central aspect is the participants' experience under the influence of psychoactive substances.

This paper focuses on the representations of experiences during rituals and on the subjective theories about these rituals by participants of the European Santo Daime church. My research is concerned with substance-induced altered states of consciousness and this paper attempts to link the insights of psychological knowledge about these substances with social theories on ritual. This approach presupposes that

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an understanding of ritual, ritual action or ritual failure is only possible through the consideration of the participants' own understanding of it, especially as it is impossible to observe what is happening for the different participants during such a ritual as it all happens "in another world", namely in the consciousness of the participants.

According to Humphrey & Laidlaw (1994) a ritual does not inevitably require a set of fixed rules or of speech-acts and even the meaning and the individual interpretation of a ritual action can vary. To them, it is "ritual commitment", the voluntary loss of one's own intention and one's subordination to the higher intentions of the ritual without, however, having to give up one's agency, which defines a ritual action as such. It is therefore the inner state of a person, his or her "meaning it to mean", that makes a ritual action effective and its absence can lead to failure. In a similar, yet different vein will this paper explore the intentionality of the human agents involved. The individual intentions and the understandings of human and divine agency become particularly important when it comes to explain mistakes within the rituals or even the failure of a ritual event. Since the participant's ideas about failure and mistakes include attributions of reasons why something or someone is regarded as wrong or not, the interface between human and non-human or divine agency in relation to ritual deviation will also be discussed here.

### 1. *Ayahuasca and Santo Daime—historical background*

Santo Daime is a religious institution that emerged in the 20th century in Brazil. A central aspect of the rituals of this religion is the ingestion of a psychoactive substance known as Ayahuasca,<sup>2</sup> a concoction of plants that grow indigenously in the Amazon basin of South America. The two most common primary plant materials used in Ayahuasca are the bark of the large forest liana *banisteriopsis caapi* and the leaves of a bush, *psychotria viridis* (McKenna 1999: 187).<sup>3</sup> Ayahuasca is prepared by

<sup>2</sup> The term Ayahuasca is a Quechua word which can be translated as 'vine of the soul' or 'vine of the dead'. Ayahuasca is known under a variety of names, depending on the context and region of its particular use, e.g. *caapi*, *yagé*, *hoasca* or *daime*. In this article the term Ayahuasca is used when the psychoactive substance is addressed generally; within the framework of the Santo Daime church, the emic term *daime* is used for the substance.

<sup>3</sup> The active biochemical substances are separate in each of the two plants: *Psychotria viridis* contains dimethyltryptamine (DMT), which has structural similarities with the human neurotransmitter serotonin. *Banisteriopsis caapi* contains the MAO-inhibitor

boiling the bark of the liana and adding the leaves of *psychotria viridis*, and depending on the particular context, other plant ingredients may be added (McKenna 1999: 187). Ayahuasca, a thick, dark-coloured, bitter-tasting brew is mostly consumed as a beverage. However, long before this psychoactive substance became an essential part of Santo Daime, Ayahuasca had been used in traditional and indigenous Amazonian cultures for healing, divination and as a means to contact the realm of the supernatural (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972: 86).

Santo Daime was founded by Raimundo Irineu Serra, a rubber-tapper of African-Brazilian descent who came to the Brazilian Amazon state Acre to participate in the flourishing rubber industry in the 1920s (Shanon 2002: 21). Under the influence of the psychoactive drink he experienced a vision in which a female figure appeared. The visionary entity instructed Serra to prepare for a vision quest in the rain forest and to drink Ayahuasca alone and consecutively for eight days. The mission he received was to call the substance Daime<sup>4</sup> and to create a new church, in which the brew would be administered and play a dominant role as the sacrament—Santo Daime. In the 1930s Irineu Serra started his mission in Rio Branco in the Brazilian state of Acre and assembled his first congregation. Besides drinking the psychoactive brew another pivotal part of Santo Daime rituals, called *trabalhos* (works), became the singing of *hinos* (hymns), which were not composed but ‘received’ under the influence of the psychoactive drink. Since Irineu Serra was illiterate his followers wrote down the *hinos*. After Serra’s death in 1971, Sebastião Mota de Melo led the Daime movement (Rohde 2001: 55). Santo Daime was initially established in the outskirts of Rio Branco and registered as CEFLURIS (Centro Eclético da Fuente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra) in 1975. Later the small church moved further into the Amazonian jungle to establish the settlement Céu do Mapiá, a village which is the main seat of CEFLURIS to the present day. While Santo Daime initially was a rural phenomenon consisting mainly of farmers from poor socio-economic backgrounds as followers, it expanded in the last two decades of the 20th century. Nowadays

harmín, which enhances the effects of DMT. For significant psychoactive effects it is necessary to combine both plants (for details see Callaway 1999).

<sup>4</sup> The word *daime*—a colloquial phrase from the Portuguese word *dar-me* (‘give me’)—became the name of the movement as well as the name of the psychoactive drink. In some hymns the words often occur as a prayer: *da-me força, da-me amor, da-me luz*—‘Give me strength, give me love, give me light’.

there exist several communities of Santo Daime in major Brazilian cities as well as in smaller settlements. Since the 1990s congregations of Santo Daime were also established in several European countries (Rohde 2001: 64). While the psychoactive chemical DMT has an illegal status under international drug laws, the religious use of Ayahuasca is presently permitted in Brazil, the Netherlands and Spain.

Before introducing the rituals of Santo Daime, the spectrum of the psychoactive effects of Ayahuasca will be outlined. This is essential because Ayahuasca is not merely one of many symbolic elements within the Santo Daime system—comparable to wine in the Eucharist but the central core concept around which the doctrine and practise of the rituals revolve. Thus, mistakes and failure of Santo Daime rituals cannot be analysed without addressing psychoactive effects and socio-cultural meanings that are attributed to the substance and its effects within Santo Daime.

## 2. *Psychoactive characteristics of Ayahuasca*

Ayahuasca is often classified as hallucinogenic drug, since the effects partly resemble those of classic hallucinogens such as LSD. However, I follow Shanon (2002: 28) who uses the neutral term 'psychoactive substance'. He demonstrates that the spectrum of Ayahuasca experiences is significantly richer and more complex than merely non-ordinary perceptual effects. Moreover, the term 'hallucinogenic' may evoke negative connotations which mirror dominant frames of pathology and criminality in which hallucinogenic substances are currently discussed in public and in the medical sciences.

The effects of Ayahuasca—as with all psychoactive substances—are profoundly influenced by extrapharmacological factors. Elaborated as the theory of 'drug, set, and setting' (Zinberg 1984), this approach holds the central assumption that experiences with psychoactive substances are influenced by individual variables, which are denoted as the 'set' (e.g. expectations, prior experiences with psychoactive substances, emotional states, and belief systems), and context variables, the 'setting'. According to this model the setting not only denotes the actual physical surroundings of the experience but also the wider socio-cultural context, e.g. particular assumptions about reality, abnormality and epistemology. It should also be noted that no average or typical Ayahuasca experience can be delineated, particular qualities can vary inter- and

intra-individually. Shanon (2002: 56) concludes: "No two Ayahuasca sessions are alike. Even very experienced drinkers fail to predict what might happen to them in a session, and the experience may surprise or stupefy even them". Although the effects of the substance depend on the specificity of individual and contextual factors, the variety, and to some degree the commonalities, of Ayahuasca experiences have been classified systematically by Shanon (2002).

Ayahuasca may change the perception of the general atmosphere and give participants the impression of being in another reality, whose primary characteristics can be beauty, enchantment, deep meaningfulness and sanctity. Shanon (2002: 59) introduces the term 'otherworldliness', a state in which "things are not as they used to be and one has the sense of entering into another, heretofore unknown, reality." Within this 'other world' sensations of a powerful energy are reported, which is often referred to as a divine force that sustains and permeates all creation. Affective states can range from love, elation and awe on the positive side to immense horror, anxiety and fear. Of the five perceptual modalities, in the Ayahuasca experience the visual is the most prominent: complex visualisations with open or closed eyes are common, and may include jungle motifs such as snakes, jaguars, birds, rain forests, or celestial scenes, ancient civilizations, cities, palaces, human and nonhuman beings such as deities, angels and demons. Ideational effects under the influence of Ayahuasca can vary from personal reflections and biographical insights to existential religious, philosophical and epistemological issues. Particularly important are changes in one's subjective sense of identity. Under the influence of the substance, occurrences of involuntary transformations are reported regularly. Effects range from a dissolution between internal and external reality, impressions that sensations, cognitions and actions are not self-controlled (e.g. in the phenomenon of receiving hymns) up to complete transformations of identity, e.g. dissociative episodes or transfiguring into animals. Although this article focuses on psychoactive effects, one major physiological reaction that should be mentioned is vomiting. Under the influence of the substance people regularly report nausea and a proneness to throw up that Shanon (2002: 57) characterizes as "a vomit like no other—drinkers often feel that they are pouring out the depth of their body and their soul". He points out further that these moments are said to be a transition from struggling with the effects to coming to terms with the experience. Within Daime rituals this procedure is also regarded as a physical and psychological cleansing process.

Despite the profound effects of Ayahuasca on the human psyche, people are able to participate in social activities. Complementary to periods when participants are completely absorbed by their experiences or even have to sit or lay down, the focus of attention can also be shifted away from the visions to the actual ritual scenery. Participants who are more experienced are better able to navigate and control the non-ordinary state of consciousness.

In summary, Ayahuasca can cause non-ordinary states of consciousness with significant changes in perception, emotion, cognition and modes of being in the world, states that are interpreted as religious experiences within Santo Daime.

### 3. *Cosmological elements of Santo Daime*

Santo Daime can be denoted as a religion integrating traditions from the Catholic Church, with indigenous Amazonian concepts and Afro-Brazilian elements (Larsen 1999: xii). Already in Serra's initial Ayahuasca vision a female figure appeared as a double-identity. The woman revealed herself as a plant being, Rainha de Floresta (Queen of the Forest), as well as Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Holy Virgin of Conception).

Ayahuasca is seen as a sacred drink, which both represents and embodies the divine aspect. Daime or Juramidam, as Ayahuasca is called within the church, refers to an animated force, residing in the substance, and beyond this, as a divine being and the source of life and knowledge. In several hymns Daime is understood as the 'teacher of all teachers'. Larsen (1999: xvi) points out that Sebastião Mota de Melo regarded Daime as well as nature in general as a body of knowledge and lessons for followers of the church. The visions induced by the substance, called *miração*, as well as other individual experiences are thus conceptualized as divine revelations. The substance is seen simultaneously as an intelligible being and a gateway for direct experience with the divine.

The concepts of illness and healing are closely related to the above. Illness is seen as an imbalanced state between the individual and the environment, while healing occurs when the individual corrects this imbalance (Rohde 2001: 58). Daime is seen as universal medicine and a pivotal key which offers insight into causes of the particular disease (physical or spiritual) as well as possible solutions. Larsen (1999: xv) characterizes this rather broad and dynamic concept:

Enterprises that fail to inquire into divine intentions are doomed to failure—not through divine displeasure but through estrangement from the flowing source of all life, and failure to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all things.

Another influence upon Santo Daime is the cult of Umbanda, itself a system containing elements from various African and Brazilian religious traditions. One major feature of Umbanda and subsequently of Santo Daime is spirit possession, a concept that is applied in the Daime doctrine to dissociative episodes that occur especially during healing rituals. Animated individual entities or spirits are considered to enter humans under the influence of Daime. Healing of the spirit as well as the participant can occur when these entities are brought together with the positive and curative powers of the divine drink. Alverga (1999: 160) points out:

These 'negative' spirit beings, if we can call them that, enter into contact with the 'positive' forces that are mobilized by the true self to help fight the fear, doubts, and seduction into sin, the favorite tricks of these demons. And this ends up making possible the healing inside the person, the dialogue between the positive and negative forces thus coming into the light. These are also the spirit beings or entities that 'having not prepared the ground, the spirit remains wandering,' as Mestre Irineu's hymn says. All of them are attracted by the quality of our vibrations and by our own inherent weaknesses that open our flanks to them.

The Santo Daime cosmology is mainly presented through *hinos*, hymns, which are sung during rituals. Hymns are relatively simple texts. They consist of several repetitive stanzas covering themes such as prayer, reports of visionary scenes, ethical and health related narratives, or references to Christian mythology. The hymns are the only teaching documents of the religion; apart from them the doctrine of Santo Daime is orally transmitted (Rohde 2001: 59).

Taking into consideration the model of 'drug, set and setting' (Zinberg 1984), the substance induced experiences and the cosmology of Santo Daime can be regarded as closely interrelated and recursively having influenced each other. Dobkin de Rios & Grob (1994) point out that through the use of Ayahuasca a hypersuggestible state is induced in which religious beliefs systems and culturally constructed narratives are reinforced, collective cohesion is strengthened and revelation, healing and ontological security are provided.

#### 4. Rituals of Santo Daime

*Trabalhos*, the rituals of Santo Daime are conducted indoors, usually in bright illuminated rooms and churches. On average Daime is ingested every two hours. There exist different types of ritual. *Concentrações*, meditative rituals, are held on the 15th and 30th of each month. Central to these sessions are periods of concentration, lasting between 30 minutes and an hour. In the concentration periods all Daimistas, as the members are called, sit silently in chairs, focussing on the substance-induced inner experience. Legs and arms should not be crossed to avoid any interference of the energy flow, a rule which stands for the other Daime rituals as well. *Trabalhos de estrela* (works of the star) are explicit healing rituals, sessions with a small number of participants that are held on special occasions decided by the *Padrinho*, the leader of the ritual. In healing rituals the participants sit on chairs and there is singing but no dancing. Festive Daime sessions, called *hinário*, analogous to the name of the hymnals, are held on fixed dates such as Catholic holidays, Christmas, or special days in the biographies of the founders of the church. These rituals start in the evening and last between 6-12 hours. During a *hinário* the participants stand aligned in ordered formations according to height. This alignment means that everybody is able to see the table in the middle of the room. Set on the table are a wooden cross and three candles, symbolising sun, moon and stars. Around the table sit the *Padrinho* and musicians. In general, guitars are used but other instruments may be played as well, for example flutes. Several participants play the *maraca*, a small rattle instrument. During festive rituals the *bailado*, a synchronized dance is performed by participants. This highly formalized dance has the purpose of establishing harmony within the congregation and enhancing the flow of energy between participants.

During *trabalhos* women and men are separated and it is a strict rule not to move to the other's side. In the rituals participants are dressed in uniforms: novices in white, *fardados*, registered members of the church, according to the particular ritual type and gender in blue-white or green-white. Members of Santo Daime who have greater experience work periodically as *fiscal*. The task of a *fiscal* is to keep ritual order as well as to protect and assist participants (e.g. showing which hymn is presently being sung). *Fiscals* are not supposed to intervene with the participants' experience or address visions and unpleasant episodes directly. Their responsibility is just to secure the basic needs and the



safety of the participants, for example to hand participants water or blankets if necessary, or direct them to the bathrooms. Usually there is one female and one male *fiscal* on the men's and women's side of the central table. At larger rituals a *door fiscal* makes sure that nobody leaves the *salão*, the building in which the ritual takes place.

5. *Methods: participant observation, interviewing, qualitative content analysis*

Within the research project 'Dynamics of ritual, Salutogenesis and the Use and Abuse of Psychoactive Substances', under the auspices of the collaborative research centre (*Sonderforschungsbereich*) 'Dynamics of Ritual', 22 people taking Ayahuasca are participants in the study, the majority of whom being members of Santo Daime. In this integrative longitudinal study, focussing on medical and psychological questions as well as ritual related research; interviews with participants have been held twice a year since 2003. As a subset of the sample twelve members of Santo Daime were explicitly interviewed about their experiences of failures and mistakes during their lifetime attendance of Santo Daime rituals. While questions concerning mistakes and failure were only a part of the second interview in a longitudinal sequence, a large quantity of interview data giving contextual information about biographical aspects of the interviewees has been amassed within the narrower context of specific Santo-Daime rituals as well as the wider socio-cultural context of the European Santo Daime Church.

The 'issue-related interview' ('*Problemzentriertes Interview*', Witzel 1982: 67) can be classified as a semi-structured interview that allows information to be obtained when certain topics of social reality are focussed on. An integral part of the interview is a set of questions, the '*Interviewleitfaden*' (topic guide), which covers these topics of interest. This differs however from a standardized interview and the questions can be used flexibly to fit the interviewee's narration. The following questions were asked as part of the interview:

- What mistakes have the interviewees experienced in Santo Daime rituals?
- What are the experiences of the interviewees concerning failure?
- What reasons led to the mistakes and/or failure?
- Who was responsible for them?
- How were mistakes and failure coped with?
- How could they have been prevented?

To avoid suggestive questions, it was not specified or defined by the interviewers what the term 'mistake' (*Fehler*) and 'failure' (*Scheitern*) denotes, but left to the interviewees' perspectives and interpretations.<sup>5</sup>

During field research the interviewers were also able to visit three rituals (two festive and one healing ritual) that took place in middle-sized churches with more than 100 participants. They also attended another ritual of healing with only 25 participants that was held in a large room at a private house. Some of the interviews were conducted shortly after the rituals, which gave the interviewees the opportunity to directly refer to the prior events. The combination of interviews and participant observation can also be regarded as a way to improve the validity of the interviewee's reports in the sense of a multi-method triangulation (Flick 2004).

All interviews were transcribed word-by-word and interpreted with a qualitative content analysis system (Mayring 2002). This instrument allows the structuring of the interview texts according to topics of interest whilst simultaneously approaching the text through theoretical concepts. Matching text parts of the interviews were assigned to categories that mirror theoretical models regarding mistakes and failure. Hence, the category system is not only an ordering principle to structure extensive interview data in a comprehensive order, but can furthermore be seen as a set of hypotheses, considering which aspects of ritual failure and mistakes may be of interest for further research.

## 6. Results

The following categories were established:

1. preparatory neglect;
2. cognitive mistakes during a ritual;
3. mistakes in ritual performance (subcategorized into minor disturbances, interpersonal conflicts, and critical mistakes);
4. evaluation of mistakes and subjective theories about agency;
5. ritual failure (subcategorized into personal and collective failure);
6. coping with mistakes and prevention of deviation.

<sup>5</sup> Since the interviewees come from a German background all interviews were held in German with one exception, an Israeli participant, with whom the interview was conducted in English.

The descriptive categories '2. cognitive mistakes during a ritual', '3. mistakes in ritual performance' and '5. ritual failure' mainly contain information from reports referring to the inner frame of particular rituals.<sup>4</sup> The category '4. evaluation of mistakes and subjective theories about agency' refers to the interviewees' opinions and attitudes regarding the issues of mistakes and failure and is rather analytical. Results of the content analysis will be described and discussed according to the extracted categories. Original quotations from the interview texts will serve to illustrate examples. Quotations from interviews which were conducted in German are translated into English by the author.

#### 6.1. *Preparatory neglect*

An example of preparatory neglect is given by a woman who remembers a ritual that was held early on in her personal involvement with Santo Daime:

Once I took part in a work [= ritual; J.W.] with a shirt which wasn't ironed. One cannot imagine, it's ridiculous to even think about, but it really bothered me during the whole work. I had the feeling that it's not supportive . . . because I was concentrating the whole time its not having any pleats and I was distressed the whole time. . . . There are many small details that you notice, the more your attention is sensitized, the more you notice the little details that are not 100% right, when something could have been done before, which would have been much better. The room wasn't really tidy; people just put their belongings on one side and things like that.

What appears to be a small inattention in the preparations turns out to have a different quality when it is considered that Daime induces a highly suggestible state of consciousness. In accordance with the 'drug, set and setting' model it can be pointed out that any detail of a physical setting can assume subjective significance within the non-ordinary state of consciousness. This may apply to religious symbols or music, as features intended to evoke spiritual experiences but it may also be the case with flawed details that have been overlooked. In this example negative consequences arose only for the woman. However, future research may focus on how minor discontinuities in the preparation of rituals can add up to performance mistakes with collective consequences.

<sup>4</sup> Daime rituals are framed (Bateson 1972: 186) in an obvious way, so the separation between the actual ritual and the context is rather clear-cut and not as fuzzy as may be the case for other types of ritual.

### 6.2. *Cognitive mistakes during a ritual*

Since the efficacy of Daimi rituals for the participants strongly depends on the experiential qualities of the intoxication, individual mistakes may occur that interfere with the 'right' experience. A woman describes her perceptual activities during one ritual:

There was a conflict for me yesterday, so I temporarily broke the rules as well, if you view them really strictly. In these processes you are obliged to follow and to hold the energy. But I was curious about how Paulo Roberto is working, you know? That was on the other side, and because I've never seen him I watched him now and again, even if this is not according to the rules.

Her conflict resulted in an altered focus of attention—between her own experience on one hand and the performance of the ritual leader on the other hand—which can be seen as an example of what may be called a cognitive mistake within the 'cognitive rules'. However, this term may not only address cognitive information processing according to a computer model, but any of the psychological dimensions that summarize and influence the ritual experience, e.g. perceptual processes, the focus of attention, mental attitudes, the degree of participation or reflection, and the level of control over non-ordinary states of consciousness. Since these rules can be to a very large extent implicit or even unconscious, depending on the ritual involved, they may be hard to detect when not resulting in concrete action. From a methodological point of view this type of mistake can be seen as important example for the necessity of investigating psychological variables of ritual participants. Cognitive characteristics, individual framing processes, and the relationship between ritual mistakes and the degree of the 'ritual commitment' (Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994: 88) could be examined in further research.

### 6.3. *Mistakes during ritual performance*

This category addresses the most evident and most frequently reported form of rule-breaking. Included here are mistakes which are either made by the interviewees themselves or perceived by them as disturbances. Both perspectives are not strictly separable. Since the quality of performative mistakes can vary concerning their impact on the ritual as a whole, reports were subcategorized according the degree of endangerment to the flow and the phenomenological identity of the ritual.

A variety of minor and mostly unintentional mistakes and disturbances were reported, ranging from forgetting single hymns or passages of a prayer, mistakes in the *baileado* dancing steps and bumping into each other, singing too loud or out of tune, to being noisy while quietness is demanded. It seems that mistakes of this type have had no significant influence on a collective level and were consequently ignored. However, it should be noted that the reported slip-ups might have seriously disturbed individuals in their Daime experience, similar to the details mentioned under the category of preparatory neglect.

Another type of mistake during Santo Daime performances relates to interpersonal conflicts, mirroring power relations within Santo Daime.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the above-mentioned category, these mistakes can be understood as deliberate transgressions, since the rules are essential and known by virtually every participant. Mistakes that were reported frequently refer to the spatial position during a ritual:

There are rules that you know and there are rules that you are not sure of, and there are always things or so that happen in the work, like somebody wants to take your place and they think this is their place. You think that actually you are shorter than them standing on the other side and then you have these people because it goes by height... But it also goes by prestige of the person... you can be (laughs) very tall and still be on the first line because you are a very important person. There are all these politics there, it's just an observation.

A woman remembers a particular scene where spatial rules were broken:

When I sat at the table playing [an instrument; J.W.] I had difficulties with another person. There was an American sitting there, I don't know if you noticed him. Normally the table is the place for musicians and for the people who sing and carry the work, who care for the right frame and for the other people, that they are supported. It is the central place, and when somebody sits there... who doesn't know that and just more or less hangs around... and he was somebody like that, it was really draining. You notice that you have to work for him as well to hold the energy. And I went to the *fiscal* afterwards and said: "He has to leave!" Because I noticed that other people had the same feelings, and when he was removed it was better.

<sup>7</sup> Mistakes of this category are reported as explicitly mirroring interpersonal conflicts. However, since the concept of power can be applied for any social reality it may also be the case for mistakes that are summarized under 'minor disturbances', as for instance when a small slip leads to an argument between participants.

Other reports describe broken rules and the subsequent negotiation of conflicts within the Santo Daime hierarchy, e.g. an argument between a *fiscal* and a novice who was not willing to step back into formation, or differences of opinion between the ritual leader and a musician about which songs to play.

Whereas the above mistakes during the performance can be evaluated as not interfering with the ritual's identity the following subcategory can be denoted as 'critical mistakes' concerning the integrity and stipulated form of the ritual. An example is reported by a woman who remembers a ritual she took part in, where one participant broke several rules which threatened to destroy the ritual:

This guy on the men's side got possessed by . . . I don't know, himself. It started with some kind of . . . doing very gross sexual movements. Like, I don't know, touching himself and lifting his leg, all kinds of things. In his place, sitting down. Because when we were sitting down everyone had a little space to move. Then he started getting up and he was really, really strong and really aggressive, really pushing the boundaries and other people were trying to hold him and couldn't really hold him and he was trying all the time to get to the women's side. . . . And you know, everybody is high, so somebody is trying to hold him and then you put him down and then he gets up again. And he was always trying to get to the women's side. I was terrified . . . for ourselves, because it felt like nobody was really holding him together, and he could really get out of his place and move, and come to the women's side and somebody would pull him back, and this happened a few times back and forth. . . . We were on the fourth floor of the building and there was a balcony . . . and it was in the last moment that Ronaldo went out to the balcony and got him back in the room, because the guy could have jumped down. And they got him back to the room and the whole ritual continued, he locked the door, Ronaldo. So he couldn't go the way back, and the whole ritual continued with this guy trying to get to the women's side or doing kind of things on the other side and I was really scared, I think all the women felt like this . . . I think it was very wrong. He afterwards said that he had an amazing time [laughs]. He was so happy, he was mumbling all these kinds of words and screaming and we were trying to sing, and he was really screaming. And he said he was really, really happy. Never ever felt so happy in his life. . . . Afterwards people kind of forgave him, you know, there was this kind of compassionate attitude towards him, even if he screwed up everybody's ritual.

Nevertheless, the ritual was not interrupted but continued even under the adverse circumstances described.

#### 6.4. *Participants' evaluation of mistakes and subjective theories on agency*

A comparison of the last two examples shows that the American participant, who sat at the table during the ritual, is replaced due to his 'unenergetic' behaviour, while the continuous breaking of basic rules in the second case, like moving to the women's side, is evaluated with an attitude of compassion. The examples show that 'mistakes' don't equal 'mistakes' in every case. In the second example the transgression was perceived as helpful for the participant. The interviewee reflects on the event: "Maybe it's good that this situation happened. This guy had a release, he was doing really well with himself." It can be assumed that the evaluation of mistakes by the interviewees did not reflect the degree of threat to the course of the ritual, but mirrored rather the theories about why and for what purpose mistakes are made.

One suitable explanatory model for these different evaluations may be the attribution of agency in the subjective theories of ritual participants. In social psychology the attribution processes are assumed to be a cognitive need to find causal relations of perceived phenomena and therefore give meaning to subjective realities (Hewstone 1990). According to this theory the reasons and the control for certain behaviour or perceived phenomena can be attributed to either internal causes (the phenomenon is self-caused) or external causes (e.g. caused by other persons, circumstances, fate, chance or higher forces such as deities). The empirical analysis of attributions may be a useful way to reconstruct how agency is represented in the participants' view. Who or what is responsible for mistakes according to the participants' theories?

If mistakes are attributed to an internal cause and to the control of ritual participants, then human intentions are seen as reasons for the false action. These actions are evaluated as intentionally disturbing the flow of a ritual. The question how a ritual can go wrong is answered by an interviewee:

Ego... if there's too much ego, too much... too little sense for the community, that will show up immediately. We have to stay within the energy together, and as soon as you go too far, that's a disturbance, in that moment everything goes wrong.

On the other hand, if actions are attributed to the external control of non-human agents, they are still reported as mistakes but the evaluation is quite different:

Yes, and there are people who go so deeply into the process that they dissolve the ritual to a certain degree. . . . I once took part in a ritual, there was a woman yelling "Alfredo" . . . for three quarters of an hour or an hour. Again and again. And she was furious. It needed ten or twelve women to hold her, because she was so powerful. . . . But the ritual did not stop.

Asked, if participants in a dissociated state have more rights to act out she answers:

When you are out of yourself, you are out of yourself, there's no question of being right or wrong . . . You can't be different!

The subjective theory mirrors the view that human agency can be seen as bound to the individual's free will, presence of the self, or intentional control (Ahearn 2001: 114). If action is not controlled by the participant but by the non-human agency of the spirit, the participant cannot be blamed for the transgression. As shown earlier, Ayahuasca has the psychoactive power to dissolve the characteristics that would be demanded to purport individual human agency (Shanon 2002: 198). According to the doctrine of the church, the sacred substance Daime is the embodiment of the divine and the source of divine revelations. If these revelations manifest themselves in action, but are also mistakes, theories about agency could be stretched further by stating that anything happening during a Daime ritual is controlled by the divine, hence right. However, the interviewees' reports show a clear differentiation in the evaluations of mistakes. When questioned whether participants who break the rules cannot be held responsible for their transgressions due to a loss of personal agency, one interviewee replied: "Exactly, just in justified cases, but the difference is clear to see." Nevertheless, even this clarity can be flexible and inconsistent, therefore subjective theories may oscillate between human agency and the agency of the Daime. Thus, if subjective theories about the causes of deviation are changed, the rules of rituals may change as well, and the rituals therefore remain dynamic.

In general, the interviewed participants understand Daime rituals as processes of personal, social and spiritual development. This includes individual non-ordinary states of consciousness and inner realities, interpersonal behaviour and group processes, and ritual performances—as well as mistakes and deviations. An interviewee explains:

It is my attitude to try to stay calm and stay with me, even when I notice something that worries me and which is not good for the ritual . . . Let's say someone is playing really loud and you can't hear anything, then I



would try again and again not to take it as too important and simply think: okay, that's a detail, but what we want is something else, we want the connection with God, we want to call the powers and we want to care about healing. And then the detail is not so important anymore. . . . Mostly it is not perfect because it is conducted by humans, and therefore, the more I can forgive others making a mistake, the more I can forgive myself and admit that I sometimes make mistakes as well. . . . Sometimes the ego of the people appears, and you have to deal with it, with your ego and the egos of other people, and that can sometimes be confronting! And, yes, it is exactly what we can learn, because that happens to me in real life as well, and then I have to cope with it as well. And then I think to myself: I learn it in the church, then it will be easier in my life.

### 6.5. *Ritual failure*

Despite a high flexibility of Santo Daime rituals due to the assumption of a non-human agency, few cases of complete failure were reported by interviewees. The term failure is understood by participants as the precocious ending of a ritual against the rules, according to which a clear cut-off point is made to close the ritual, usually with three Lord's Prayers and three Ave Marias.

Before analyzing the interview data it should be noted that interviewees were hesitant to give information about ritual failure:

Well, I believe after all these years of experience that the ritual cares for itself, that it can't go wrong. I still trust in it, even when difficult situations arise. . . . It never failed, never.

The view that Daime rituals can't fail was expressed several times as a starting point in the interviewees' narratives. It couldn't be validated completely whether this is wishful thinking rather than actual experience. Even if most interviewees also hold a critical perspective towards Santo Daime, an overtly unfavourable opinion about their own religious practice (as it is the case in a recorded interview) may result in discomfort. However, this subjective theory can also be seen as mirroring the general assumption that ritual performances are invariably conducted according to fixed rules and that failure of rituals are hardly an issue within emic discourses.

The failure of a ritual is reported in two subcategories, the individual and the collective. While on a collective level a precocious ending is regarded as the collapse of the ritual, from an individual point of view a ritual fails when a participant breaks the rules by leaving before the last prayer is said. A woman describes:

I left a ritual in the middle . . . went in the car and drove off . . . I was really not well. I did not want to stay there. I fell down there, I injured my head. So, I left. And that's like the number one 'don't do'.

When questioned if other participants or *fiscals* argued or tried to stop her, she said:

Nobody noticed me. I was so smooth. I stood up, I caught my boyfriend and we just left. We even managed to take our jackets from upstairs.

She accounts for her decision after questioned if she was aware of the rule not to leave the ritual:

Oh, I knew that but there was no way that I was staying. I didn't care. I wanted to get out. I was really not well. I thought I was going to die. I kind of lost sensation in my hands and my feet and I was really not well so I did not trust anyone in this room anymore and I didn't want to be there. I just wanted to go and sort myself out.

The following day she went to the ritual leader, apologized and explained the situation. However, the ritual leader wasn't so much annoyed about the participant, but rather about the situation occurring at all and about the *fiscals* in charge.

The perspective of another participant who sometimes works as *fiscal* during Daime rituals is of interest here with respect to how these situations are coped with:

There is the problem that people want to leave the work and go home. And then you start talking with them: "It'd be better if you'd stay." "But I don't want to, this is too much for me." You somehow try to influence, not only by talking, I often pray as well: "Give him the ease and power to go through, because this is just a period". And then they ask: "How long will it be? How long is the (Daime's) effect? I can't do it anymore. When does it stop? It's so strong in my head." . . . Well, then you try to talk with them, to encourage them, try to bring them back. But there were cases, when people left and went home. . . . You've said to them that staying until the end is the rule, but participants have their own will . . . they are not our property, finally they act according to what they want.

The question is addressed regarding the specific circumstances in which the major rule 'Nobody leaves the ritual before it is officially finished' is enforced, or the participants' wish to quit is accepted. According to interview data, no methods of pressure are applied to keep participants in the ritual and the criterion of respecting participant's individual needs is followed when it comes to the serious question of leaving a

ritual. It should be noted that participation in Santo Daime rituals is fully voluntary, the rules of the ritual are well-established and known, and the atmosphere is serious but friendly and supportive rather than forceful or strict. Further research may address the issue as to what extent rules (as collective ritual norms) are enforced and negotiated in relation or even contrary to individual needs and motives.

While in the case of a single 'personal failure' the ritual is not threatened, the summary of many individual mistakes may result in the collapse of the ritual, losing its phenomenological identity and integrating characteristics. A Santo Daime ritual may break down as soon as there is not a majority of participants who are able to continue performing. This was possibly the case in a reported ritual with seven, at that point rather inexperienced partakers. A woman who by now is a qualified and experienced member of the church remembers:

Yes, I once experienced that a work had to be ceased. . . . The energy level in the room was so high that the leader couldn't hold it anymore at that moment. And because of this energy . . . well, he decided to interrupt the work, to stop it. That's something he wouldn't do nowadays, for sure, but back then in this work he did. He felt he couldn't hold it anymore.

Since it wasn't specified during the interview what exactly caused the premature end of the ritual it can be assumed that all participants were overwhelmed by the psychoactive effect of the brew and unable to perform any further in accordance with the existing rules. One has also to take into consideration that seven participants is a rather small number for Santo Daime rituals, which are usually larger. Nevertheless, one could ask whether the size of a certain group performing a ritual (and the ratio between experienced and inexperienced participants) predicts disturbances or even the failure of a ritual. Since it is stated by interviewees that Santo Daime rituals are the most suitable form for the intake of the psychoactive substance, it is not the question whether the participants want to continue the prescribed performance of singing and dancing but rather whether they are able to do so. This hypothesis also concurs with an interviewee's explanation:

It also depends on the group. In large works . . . there are other possibilities than in a small one where you sit around a table with six people. Then everybody has to do more . . . because the energy is completely different and it is more demanding. If there's few people, everybody has to take a lot more care. If it's a large group and someone drops out, fine. But in a small work it is highly important if someone is absent.

It can be concluded that the size of a ritual group (and the accumulated experience of its participants) is one important factor for the correct conduction of a Daime ritual, even if a mere numerical perspective would oversimplify the social reality of the Santo Daime church.

#### 6.6. *Coping with mistakes and prevention of deviation*

The issue of deviation is closely linked to attempts to regain or ensure/prevent the 'right' ritual order. Interviewees' reports in this category deal with either correctional attempts during rituals or preventive and evaluating activities outside ritual performances.

Mistakes detected during rituals were reported to be performatively corrected by other participants, *fiscals*, and in some cases the ritual leader. There exists a well established hierarchy of corrective instances. When asked who would be responsible for the avoidance of mistakes a woman said:

The *fiscal* is responsible for the order, order or safety. He must know the rules particularly well and he has to decide what to do. Of course there are borderline cases, and there the commander (ritual leader) has to decide. But the *fiscal* asks him: "Okay, there's this and that..."—in exceptional cases!... Of course you can't disturb him permanently because the ritual leader has other things to do than to take care of the participants' positioning.

This quote also shows that the hierarchy of correction relates to the degree of seriousness of the mistake. While small slip-ups may be negotiated among the participants, more deviant actions demand intervention from the *fiscals* and leaders. A particular way to clarify an ambivalent situation is to interrupt the flow of the ritual and pause for a moment, mainly with the aim of quietening the audience and regaining the right 'energy', but also to give space to separate ritual groups and conflicting participants. Conversely, a correctional attempt is reported for the periods of concentration:

Occasionally songs are reintroduced when somebody is too noisy during silence, then the singing is the carrying element and no longer his yelling.

Outside the ritual frame several activities ensuring the correct conduct of the religious practise are reported:

There are regular *fiscal* meetings where such things can be talked about, problems that occurred, situations which were handled in the wrong

way, any inattention... or how to deal with special people who act in a certain way again and again, how to cope with their behaviour, how to integrate them in such a way that the ritual remains harmonious for everybody... also how to improve the rituals.

The discourse about rituals (including any deviant occurrences) in more informal settings outside the ritual frame was reported by participants as well as observed by members of the research team. After a ritual is done, participants usually stay inside the church for a certain time to eat together, exchange experiences, socialize and review the ritual. Since the number of participants in the European Santo Daime Church is comparatively small, and some participants have a shared history not only as ritual participants but also as friends or partners, it can be assumed that this discourse permeates into private and informal spheres.

### 7. Conclusion

Contrary to the assumption that rituals are hardly ever conducted wrongly or cannot fail (see Merz and Polit in this volume), participants' accounts of European Santo Daime rituals deal with a broad range of errors. These vary from small slip-ups to the serious and complete failure of a single ritual performance and occur on an individual level as well as collectively. The ubiquity of potential mistakes and failure is reflected in the participants' discourses on the rituals. The interview data indicate that the study of mistakes and failure as well as the study of evaluative and correctional processes cannot be limited to the actual ritual performance, but that different contextual factors should be taken into consideration as well, such as how the fluid concepts of mistakes and failure are evaluated and negotiated outside the actual ritual.

Why are some performances evaluated as 'wrong', whereas others, which imply a serious breach of the rules, are not? The assessment of ritual actions by participants, *fiscals* or the *comandante* as mistakes is highly dependent on information exceeding the actual ritual performance. Whereas some ritual actions are considered to be consciously motivated, and controlled by a human agency, others are regarded as controlled externally by the animated spirit of the psychoactive brew Daime, the superior ritual agent so to speak. This discourse clearly mirrors two different criteria for the evaluation process: human vs. nonhuman or divine agency. Since these criteria are closely related to the participants' states of consciousness it can be concluded that the analytical term 'altered

states of consciousness' resembles 'altered mode of action control' and hence includes a more differentiated perspective on ritual mistake than just performative rule-breaking. If the question is raised whether the right to deviate from ritual norms represents different degrees of power, the analysis of the interviews shows that this is clearly the case. The negotiation of mistakes mirrors power-relations, e.g. between more and less experienced participants, the *fiscals* in charge or the *commander*. The motivation behind some mistakes may even be subversive, that is, to challenge these power relations. However, it is clear that at the top of the hierarchy of participants, *fiscals* and the ritual leader is the postulated being and power of the Ayahuasca: "Finally, the ultimate rule is the Daime itself, the Juramidam – the spirit, the soul of the ritual. That's the ultimate authority, is God, if you want."

Closely connected with the notion of different ritual agents are the criteria for judging the ritual's efficacy. One main criterion for assessing a ritual as successful is the 'right atmosphere', something that is empirically difficult to ascertain. This atmosphere or flow of energy between participants as well as between the congregation and the spiritual realm is effected by conducting the ritual according to the prescribed rules, e.g. the formalized dance. According to Moore & Myerhoff (1977: 12) this doctrinal efficacy is postulated by the cosmological understanding of the ritual.<sup>8</sup> However, performative mistakes, which seriously endanger this postulated efficacy by threatening the ritual order, are tolerated when interpreted as action that is controlled by the superhuman and divine agency of the animated being Daime. In these cases the emergent qualities of a ritual performance come into focus. Schieffelin (1996: 81) describes the emergent as "what performance as performance brings about". Here emergent efficacy is defined as its results in social reality. Schieffelin adds: "This is true even when what emerges in a given performance is not necessary predictable or is even the opposite of the performer's intentions." Implicit theories about the ritual's efficacy are related to the participants' differentiated evaluation of mistakes. While carrying out actions according to the rules is connected to human agency, the emerging results of the ritual are connected to the power of the Ayahuasca, the non-human agency. Thus, rituals are protected against failure to a certain degree, since in the case of grave mistakes the

<sup>8</sup> "The religion postulates by what causal means a ritual, if properly performed, should bring about the desired results. A religious ritual refers to the unseen cosmic order, works through it and operates on it directly through the performance. The gods, the ancestors, the spirits are moved."

focus of ritual participants may shift from human to nonhuman agency and from doctrinal to emergent efficacy. However, if the emergent results of a ritual performance—in this case study highly modulated by the effects of the psychoactive substance—reach a certain limit, then the ritual may fail in the sense that it is broken off before the official closing. As shown above, in this case the emergent qualities of the ritual became too predominant. In the described example the ritual leader “couldn’t hold it anymore”, and the ritual was abandoned.

It therefore seems that the issues of mistakes and failure highly depend on the participants’ explanations of why and how some action is perceived as mistaken whereas other, and sometimes more serious rule-breaking, is not. As important as the analysis of ritual performances may be, for an understanding of why a particular action is considered to be wrong, additional information is useful. Intra- and extra-ritual critique are both closely related to questions of motivation, intentionality, the attributed agency of ritual actors and the substance-induced state of consciousness of the participants.

Lastly it is necessary to deal with methodological shortcomings. The use of in-depth interviews appears to be particularly useful when investigating apparently unimportant phenomena or idiosyncratic events, or cognitive or experiential processes and structures. However, as important as these individual perspectives may be, when focussing on the issue of deviation the tendency to give socially acceptable answers has to be taken into account, in particular when the interviewees are emotionally committed to a religious group, as is the case with Santo Daime. A related question is the heterogeneity of the participants, an issue that lies outside the scope of the present paper. What role does the socio-cultural background of the ritual participants play? Is there a different acceptance of mistakes when rituals are conducted in Europe instead of Brazil? To what degree are definitions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ exchanged and understood between the European and Brazilian participants of the churches of Santo Daime? These questions raise issues about intercultural differences and need to be addressed in further cross-cultural research.

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