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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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Résumé de l'article

João de Deus (Jean de Dieu) est un médium-guérisseur brésilien qui a su attirer plusieurs adeptes à l'étranger. Durant la dernière décennie, il a organisé à l'international des événements de guérison entre autres en Allemagne, aux États-Unis et en Nouvelle-Zélande. Par conséquent, des documentaires de l'histoire de Jean de Dieu ont été diffusés dans les télévisions nord-américaines, britanniques, australiennes et néozélandaises. Plusieurs de ces documentaires ont été téléchargés sur YouTube par des adeptes. Grâce à cette exposition, un intense flux de personnes, d'idées et de commodités s'est déversé entre ces pays et la Casa Dom Inácio (centre de guérison de Jean de Dieu au Brésil). Dans cet article, l'auteure piste ces flux entre l'Australie et le Brésil. Elle soutient que les Australiens, qui demeurent une société coloniale où la population aborigène a souffert de pertes immenses, comprennent différemment l'empreinte particulière du spiritisme de Jean de Dieu. Pour plusieurs adeptes, l'arrivée des « entités » (esprits incorporés par Jean de Dieu) est perçue comme une manière de guérir les blessures de la terre. Une telle compréhension n'est pas partagée par les spiritualistes et les adeptes de Jean de Dieu au Brésil, en dépit du fait que les populations indigènes de ce pays ont connu également dans leur histoire la dépossession et les souffrances.

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Establishing the John of God Movement in Australia

Healing, Hybridity and Cultural Appropriation

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In January 2008, I participated in the opening of the 'Australian Casa' in the town of Mullumbimby, on the north eastern coast of NSW. The Australian Casa is a branch of the Brazilian Spiritist centre Casa de Dom Inácio headed by the medium healer John of God in Abadiânia, central Brazil. In the past decade, John of God has been attracting a large number of Western followers. They learn about him through books, DVDs, and websites, and by participating in the international healing events John of God has conducted in Germany, the US and New Zealand, among other countries. Such global exposure has been accompanied by intense flows of people, ideas, and commodities between Casa de Dom Inácio and these countries. So far, there are branches of the healing centre in Australia and New Zealand (both established in 2008), and in the US (established in 2011).[2]

The Australian Casa was created by Kurt and Karin,[3] an Anglo-Australian middle-class couple who lived in Abadiânia with their three children and participated in the activities of the Casa de Dom Inácio in the second half of 2007. In 2006 and 2007, John of God conducted international healing events in New Zealand that attracted many Australians. Kurt and Karin participated in the second event. There, the Entity — as followers call John of God when he is in trance because he is channelling an entity/spirit — told them that they should go to

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1. I am grateful to the Australian Research Council for funding this research and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

2. For more on the Australian Casa, see http://theaustraliancasa.com; for the New Zealand Casa, see www.casadejose.org.nz/; and the American Casa, see www.johnofgodcasa.com/.

3. All names, but for the Aboriginal Elder's, are pseudonyms.

Abadiânia. Soon after they arrived back in Australia from New Zealand, Karin sold her business and they started preparing for the trip. They said they decided to go to Abadiânia for its spiritual side; Kurt is a medium and they were already keen to go to Brazil before the international event. In addition, they also wanted to give the children a cultural experience in another country. In the last days of their six-month stay in Abadiânia, they asked the Entity whether they could establish a spiritual centre on their property in Australia. After the Entity saw pictures of the property, he told them that their centre would in fact be the "Australian Casa."

At the opening of the Australian Casa in January 2008, the festivities started with a 'welcome to country' speech by an Indigenous Australian, as is customary in Australia. In her speech, the Indigenous Elder observed that a week prior to the event, she had performed a clearing ceremony of the site. She explained that she did the ceremony so that the Brazilian entities (or spirits) could be welcomed by the ancestors of the traditional owners of the land. Her talk began as follows:

> Welcome, everybody. The reason I came up here was to do a clearing [ceremony], because some of the bad things that have happened to our people over the last couple of hundred years have left some scars in the landscape. So I came up here to do a smoking ceremony so that [the site] can be renewed for this new movement that we have here today. On behalf of my ancestors, the traditional owners of the country, the Bundjalung language group, I'd like to welcome you all. Thank you.

After the 'welcome to the country,' Karin came to the microphone to thank the Aboriginal Elder:

> As you know, we had a clearing ceremony here a week or so ago, which was beautiful. And one of the reasons behind us asking Kay to come and do that [is] … because of Kurt's and my belief system, which is that we are non-denominational. And secondly, it isn't our land. It is the ancestors' land, and in knowing that, we came to this property and saw it and purchased it a couple of years ago; we knew that it was something that had to be shared.

Kurt also referred to the ceremony in his speech:

> It's very important for us to know that what we're doing on this land, that everything was done right, and on the day when Kay performed the ceremony, I think all those present will know what a powerful

> ceremony it was, and at the end of it we were all very humbled by it. So, thank you very much, Kay.

Throughout my research, I had heard mentions of how John of God and his entities were healing the land; how aboriginal ancestors had welcomed the Brazilian entities; and how they were working together to heal Australia. In this article I analyse the ways in which Anglo Australians deploy Spiritism and the beliefs they acquire at Casa de Dom Inácio in relation to their own country's history. I do so by discussing the process of establishing the 'Australian Casa,' the branch of the Brazilian healing centre. I argue that the position of Australia as a colonial-settler society, where the aboriginal population has suffered immense loss, entails a different understanding of Spiritism and John of God's cosmology. For many followers, Spiritism is not only about self improvement and healing (as is the case in Brazil), but also the arrival of the 'entities' is perceived as a way to heal the wounds of the land.

I have been researching the John of God movement since 2004, when I first went to Abadiânia. Since then, I have been to Abadiânia almost every year and lived there in the first half of 2007. Since 2004 I have also been doing participant observation at John of God events and meditation sessions at the Australian Casa and in Sydney. In addition, I have been to the healing events John of God conducted in New Zealand in 2006 and 2007. In all these locations, I have conducted a total of 45 in-depth interviews. In Abadiânia I have interviewed local authorities, hotel managers, cooks, cleaners, taxi drivers, and foreign tour guides and visitors. In Australia and New Zealand, I have conducted interviews with followers, people who have been to Abadiânia but do not consider themselves followers, and Aborigine and Maori people involved in the movement. So far, there has been no research on the John of God Movement apart from my own (Rocha 2010a, 2010b, 2009a, 2009b, 2007, 2006), as it has only developed in the last decade. Although the literature on Spiritism in Brazil is vast, to my knowledge there is only one preliminary study on the globalisation of Brazilian Spiritism (Lewgoy, 2008).

Spiritism in Brazil

French Spiritism was first introduced by the Brazilian elite in the late nineteenth century. Aspiring to embrace modernity, Brazilian elites were quick to adopt the latest French fashion. This is not surprising

since in the nineteenth century France was the metropolitan centre of culture, art and fashion for Brazilian elites. They would frequently travel to France and send their sons to study there. Speaking French and reading French literature was de rigueur for the cultivated Brazilian elites.[4]

Spiritism or Kardecism—as it is known in Brazil due to its founder Hippolyte Rivail's pen name, Allan Kardec (1804-69)—was a synthesis of many religious practices, such as Catholicism, Protestantism, and occult philosophies that flourished in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, including Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry and Theosophy. At the core of the Spiritist doctrine is the possibility of communication with the dead through mediums. Influenced by the positivist ideas of Auguste Comte (1789-1857), Kardec thought of life and death in terms of a progressive spiritual evolution. According to Kardec, the spirit, created by God, would go through several reincarnations until it achieved perfection. Karma, the law of cause and effect, would determine reincarnation. If one's actions in a past life were negative, one would reincarnate into a life of suffering (through poverty, disease, unhappiness). By contrast, if one practised charity in a past life (a concept Kardec drew from Christianity), one would reincarnate into a life of happiness. In this context, free will played a key role, as human beings could choose what path to take in their lives. The evolution of the spirit would thus depend solely on its own choice and effort (Cavalcanti 1990: 147-155; 1983: 65-68; Hess 1991; 1994).

In the same vein, Spiritists regard Christ as a highly enlightened being who achieved this state after undergoing several incarnations. Angels are understood as spirits of light and demons as ignorant spirits. Moreover, according to Kardec, communication between the physical and spiritual worlds would be possible through mediums who would channel or 'incorporate' disincarnated spirits. Mediums could then perform good deeds such as healing and disobsession (exorcism). Spirits would be willing to help because this would assist in their own evolution. Given that communication with spirits was considered an empirical

4. For an analysis of the influence of French culture in Brazil in the 19th century, see Jeffrey D. Needell, *A Tropical Belle Epoque: Elite, Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio De Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

and observable phenomenon, Kardec regarded his doctrine as a combination of science, philosophy and Catholic morality.

From the outset, the connection between Spiritism and healing was emphasised, and the ability to prescribe medication in particular became an important factor in the expansion and popularity of the movement in Brazil (Santos 1997: 22). However, other Brazilian characteristics also facilitated the expansion of Spiritism in the country. The presence of Afro-Brazilian (particularly Candomblé) and indigenous religions, characterized by a connection with the spirits of the dead and mediumship, have paved the way for the acceptance of its cosmology and practices. To make sense of the ways in which Spiritism has been hybridised with local religions, Camargo argues that there is a mediumistic continuum comprised by Spiritism on the one pole and Umbanda (a highly syncretic religion created in Brazil which incorporates elements from Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous religions, Catholicism, and Spiritism) on the other (1961: 3-15). Camargo notes that both Spiritists and Umbandists see themselves as Spiritists, and that the former use the term 'Kardecist' (i.e. followers of Kardec) to differentiate themselves from the latter (1961: 14). John of God's practices and beliefs can be placed halfway on this continuum, given that they have traits borrowed from both Spiritism and Umbanda.

By deploying a scientific discourse affirming its tenets, Spiritism in Brazil has drawn followers from white, educated elites. Indeed, Brazilian sociologist Lísias Nogueira Negrão has noted that "Spiritism is a literate religion. More than a religion, Spiritism claims to be science, philosophy. Because of its high powers of persuasion in deploying logic, it is adopted by higher educated social classes" (in Varella 2000: 80). Currently, Spiritism is so widespread in the country that according to anthropologist José Jorge de Carvalho, 'In many aspects, the Spiritist world-view became part of the national ethos, as much as Catholicism, and more recently Protestantism' (1994: 74). The latest census data has shown that Spiritism is still expanding; while in 1991 it had 1.6 million followers, by 2000 the number increased to 2.3 million.[5]

Over the years Spiritism has died out in France, and Brazil has become a centre for its dissemination around the world, mainly by Brazilian migrants, Spiritist intellectuals and medical doctors. In

5. At the time of writing, results for the 2010 census have not been released.

particular, the Brazilian Spiritist medium Divaldo Franco, who travels the world giving talks,[6] has played a seminal role in the expansion of the doctrine overseas (Lewgoy 2008: 89-91).[7] While Spiritism was first hybridised with popular Catholicism, Umbanda, and Afro-Brazilian and indigenous religions, beliefs and practices in Brazil, it is now being further hybridised when it reaches new shores. More recently, John of God's fame – boosted by global healing events, foreign media, the Internet, books, and DVDs – has strengthened these outward flows. However, rather than travelling in French, the language of its creation in the 19th century, or Brazilian Portuguese, the language of its expansion in the twentieth-century, now it travels in English, the lingua franca of 21st century globalisation.[8] It is noteworthy that many of John of God's overseas followers, upon returning to their homelands, seek to keep the connection with the Casa de Dom Inácio and learn more about Spiritism. They do so by frequenting Spiritist centres established by Brazilian migrants.

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6. For the past four years, Franco has been to Australia every year. His lectures are attended mostly by Brazilian migrants, but more recently there have been also some Anglo-Australian Spiritists and John of God followers in the audience.

7. It is noteworthy that in the 1960s another Brazilian Spiritist intellectual was also concerned with the dissemination of Spiritism outside Brazil. Francisco Cândido Xavier (1910-2002), better known by his nickname Chico Xavier, believed that Brazil had a mission to disseminate Spiritism and thus assist in the evolution of the planet (Cavalcanti, 1961: 5). He travelled to the US and the UK to visit Spiritualist churches in 1965. In the US, he established the Christian Spiritist Centre in Elon College, North Carolina, and donated the rights for his book Ideal Espírita to be published by the Philosophical Library of New York (Carvalho 2008: 15-17; Xavier and Vieira 1966).

8. Importantly, the John of God movement is not the only Brazilian religious movement which has been undergoing a process of globalisation. In recent times, Brazil has emerged as an important new centre of religious innovation and production, exporting not only indigenised forms of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Catholicism, but also African-based religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda, as well as diverse expressions of New Age Spiritism and Ayahuasca-centred neo-shamanism, such as Vale do Amanhecer and Santo Daime. This phenomenon is due to an increase in the number of Brazilians migrating overseas and to "spiritual tourism," as foreign visitors come to an imagined Brazil in search of exotic mysticism, fun or, in the case of the John of God movement, enlightenment. For more on this, see Cristina Rocha and Manuel Vasquez eds. *The Diaspora Brazilian Religions*. Brill, forthcoming.

John of God

According to hagiographic books written by followers (Cummings and Leffler 2007: 5; Pellegrino 2002; Póvoa 2003: 46), João Teixeira de Faria – or João de Deus, as his Brazilian followers later called him – was born in a small town in the state of Goiás in central Brazil 1942. He grew up in poverty and had very little schooling. João started prophesying at an early age, and recalls having his first vision at sixteen. He tells of how while bathing in a river, Santa Rita de Cássia, an important saint in the Brazilian Catholic pantheon, told him to go to a religious centre in Campo Grande, now the capital of Mato Grosso do Sul state. There, for the first time, he maintains that he took on the entity of King Solomon and healed many people while remaining oblivious to what he was doing. This was the first of the more than thirty-three entities he now channels. In this religious centre, he was also introduced to the Spiritist doctrine. Eventually, João saved enough money to follow the instruction of his spiritual guides to buy a modest house near the highway in Abadiânia, a small town 100km southwest of Brasília.

João de Deus asserts that he is the medium of the spirits of deceased doctors, surgeons, healers, saints and people who were remarkable in their lifetimes. He takes on these entities in a trance and does not remember his acts when he becomes conscious again. John of God is part of a small but significant group of medium healers who use kitchen knives, scissors, and scalpels to operate on patients while in trance.[9]

Like other medium healers, John of God has been persecuted by the judicial system, medical authorities and the Catholic Church in Brazil. He has been in jail several times, but every time he was imprisoned he would be released after healing inmates or someone in the police force (Pellegrino-Estricht 2002). Importantly, Kardecist Spiritists also do not accept his healing methods. The Brazilian Spiritist Federation (FEB in Portuguese) has historically worked closely with the authorities to make sure that its activities were accepted and differentiated from those it denominates as embracing 'low Spiritism,' that is, the mediumship and religious practices of the uneducated poor (Umbanda[10] and Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé). By

9. For an analysis of other healers, see Greenfield 1992; 1991.

10. For more on Umbanda, see Diane Brown. 1994. Umbanda Religion and Politics in Urban Brazil, New York, Columbia University Press.

contrast, FEB's emphasis on charity has led its doctrine and practices to be considered by the police, judicial system and the media as 'high Spiritism.' In this light, the acceptance of religious doctrines in Brazil followed class stratification and a desire for modernity, where the white elites' religions, which were able to establish a dialogue with science, were placed at the top. In the process of seeking acceptance in the country, FEB shed its most controversial practices, the ones which uneducated healers practiced: mediumistic prescriptions and psychic/mediumistic surgeries, the very practices that John of God engages in.

More recently the Spiritist Medical Association (AMESP) declared itself against psychic/mediumistic surgeries. According to Hess, the Association feared that psychic operations could endanger both patients (because of the lack of asepsis) and Spiritism (because it is turned into a mystical religion) (Hess 1991: 126-127). Hess has observed that for AMESP leaders, "Mediumistic surgery represents a threat, for it interferes with their campaign to win acceptance of Spiritist therapies within the orthodox medical and psychology professions. AMESP Spiritists have their own agenda of alternative therapies; and mediumistic surgery is not only not part of his agenda, it is its very nemesis" (1991: 137). Spiritist intellectuals favour the use of passes (laying on of hands) because they regard it as a scientific method of healing. Their attitude can also be explained by the fact that mediumistic surgeries are practiced by less educated members of the Spiritist movement. By condemning such practices, Spiritist intellectuals endeavour to distinguish themselves from this group.

Perhaps aware of this negative attitude, John of God is careful not to affirm that Spiritism is practiced at the Casa. He calls himself a Catholic, although his own healing practices are a hybrid of popular Catholicism, Umbanda and Spiritism. The mantra "the Casa is a spiritual hospital which is open to all religions" is often repeated by staff on the stage in the main hall and by the healer himself. Nevertheless, whenever foreigners inquire into the Casa 'beliefs', staff and volunteers direct them to read Alan Kardec. In addition, the Casa de Dom Inácio Guide for English-Speaking Visitors has a chapter on Spiritism in which it is described as "the philosophy of the Casa."[11] It seems that in the same way that Spiritist intellectuals distinguish between high and low

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11. See http://www.friendsofthecasa.info/uploads/A_guide_to_the_Casa_de_Dom_Inacio_V2.3.pdf, chapter 4.

Spiritism, the Casa uses 'high Spiritism' (Kardecism) as kudos to its practices.

Notwithstanding Spiritist intellectuals' rejection of psychic mediums, in the past decade João de Deus has become John of God, as his name and fame have reached global proportions. John of God has been travelling overseas, conducting healing events in many countries, including the US (annually), Greece, Germany, Austria, New Zealand, and Peru. His story has been told on North American TV by 60 Minutes, the Discovery Channel and ABC, and on British TV by BBC Wales. More recently, in November 2010, Oprah Winfrey interviewed people who had been to his healing centre, and the editor-in-chief of her O, *The Oprah Magazine* wrote a piece on her own healing experiences there (Casey 2010). All these TV programs have been uploaded by followers on the You Tube site. On this site, there are also several home movies focusing on the healer and his surgeries. Documentaries on the healer have been made by directors from several countries. In Australia, John of God and his surgeries were featured on TV in June 1998 (60 Minutes), October 2003 (A Current Affair), and March 2005 (SBS).

Australians and the John of God Movement

Since 2002, when I first heard of John of God, I have come across a number of Australians and other foreigners organising tours/pilgrimages to the centre, building homes there, publishing books about it, and taking his healing methods to their homelands. Some are learning Portuguese; others can already pray in the new language. Many live between two countries, spending part of the year in Abadiânia. In their frequent trips, they take back sacred objects (rosaries, crystals, and blessed water), DVDs, books on Spiritism and John of God, T-shirts and photos of John of God and the entities, which they buy at the Casa shop. They also bring herbal medicine that John of God prescribes and crystal beds (these are the basis of a chromotherapy-type treatment using Brazilian quartz crystals).

Having a crystal bed, many people told me, is a way of always being connected to the Casa entities and hence continuing the healing process. The fact that most of the crystal beds are placed in healing centres where there are other healing modalities (reiki, massage, naturopathy, etc.) helps disseminate information about John of God and the Casa in Brazil. In the past decade, many people have also become

tour guides, travelling to the Casa several times a year. Tour guides advertise their trips in healing centres, New Age magazines and newsletters, and on the Internet. Travel packages usually include airfare, some days for tourism in Brazil (more often than not in Rio), a two-week sojourn at the Casa (including accommodation, meals, debriefing with a guide and talks by Casa volunteers and expats who have been living there for a long time), and on days when there are no activities in the Casa, tours of Abadiânia's surroundings and Brasilia's New Age/ spiritual circuit (e.g. The Temple of Goodwill).[12]

The Internet has certainly played a role in the intensification of the traffic of people, commodities and ideas between the healing centre in Brazil and Australia. Most people told me that the Internet was the first place they searched for information on John of God once they heard about him. On the Internet they also bought books and DVDs, and watched him operating on people before they went to the Casa. There they shopped for travel packages from the several official Casa tour guides based literally all over the world.

In the past years 'current' sessions (also called meditation) have been established in several towns in Australia. Current is a literal translation for the word Brazilian Portuguese word *corrente*, i.e. chain or current. According to the Casa de Dom Inácio, a current is "a chain" of energy created by meditators sitting in silence that helps entities heal people suffering from physical, emotional, mental or spiritual ailments. Besides the two current sessions in Sydney, there are a host of monthly sessions in capital cities and country towns in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia. The intensification of the traffic of ideas, people and commodities between Brazil and Australia culminated in the establishment of the branch of the Casa in Australia in 2008.

Most Australian followers are of middle-class background, and were first interested in the healing conducted by John of God because of illness or because they are mediums or healers themselves and are seeking spiritual growth. They usually hear about his miraculous cures from friends or on TV, and then they look him up on the Internet. The John of God movement overseas is closely connected to the headquarters in Abadiânia. The healer controls everything, including choosing those who can become tour guides, buy crystal beds, and lead meditation/

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12. For more on spiritual tourism in Abadiânia see Rocha (2006).

current sessions overseas. Within Australia, the Australian Casa is the only place that can bless water for healing and is officially regarded as a branch of the Brazilian healing centre.

John of God Followers and Spiritist Centres in Australia

Brazilian migrants in the US, Europe, Japan and Australia have established Spiritist centres in their host countries. They are, for the most part, frequented by Brazilians but reach out to local populations by establishing sessions in the local language. However, although these two communities – Brazilian and foreign Spiritists and non-Brazilian followers of John of God – have developed separately in the Global North, things are slowly changing. The head of Spiritist centres of London and Brighton told me in 2007 that some English followers started coming to the sessions after they had been to Casa de Dom Inácio. In the US, the author of two books and two films on John of God and Spiritism, a tour guide herself, told me that she was assisting in the translation of Spiritist books for the Brazilian Spiritist centre in New York.

In Australia, some followers are starting to frequent the two Spiritist centres in Sydney. These centres have English nights when they welcome Australians to study the doctrine. This has been facilitated by the translation of books by Allan Kardec and famous Brazilian Spiritist authors such as Chico Xavier and Divaldo Franco provided at the Spiritist centre established by Brazilian migrants in New York City. In an effort to understand John of God's cosmology, many Australians buy these translated books in Abadiânia or on the Internet. Although Spiritist Brazilian migrants are not connected to the Casa, as John of God is not well known within Brazil, their efforts to translate material in order to proselytise overseas have come at a time when non-Brazilians are looking for centres of practice when they return home from Abadiânia.

Indeed, it seems that both processes – the globalisation of Spiritism and of the John of God movement – have dovetailed in the first decade of the twenty-first century. When I interviewed Australian followers of John of God who frequent the Sydney Spiritist centres, they told me that they were glad to have found a place to study the doctrine so as to better understand John of God's healing methods. In this way, they hoped to keep the connection with the entities of the Casa de Dom Inácio. To be sure, this is not a one-way street. Australian followers also

bring John of God's ideas and healing methods to these centres. An Australian told me that the Brazilians who run the Spiritist centre did not know much about John of God's work, since only now that he has achieved fame overseas is he becoming better-known in Brazil. Once he explained the Casa to them, these Brazilians started going to the Casa when they visited their families in Brazil. If they could not travel to the Casa, they gave photos of themselves, family and friends to the Australian to be shown to John of God.

Thus the transnational flows between Australia and Brazil are making a full circle. Australians go to Brazil for healing and when they come back home they may contact the closest centre where the same religion is taught and practiced. They then recount their experiences to Brazilians and, in so doing, encourage Brazilians to go to the Casa. In the next section, I discuss the ways in which Australians deploy Spiritism to heal Australia's historical wounds.

Purifying the Land of These Roaming, Traumatised Spirits

At the end of their six-month stay in Abadiânia, Kurt and Karin got permission to establish the 'Australian Casa' on their property. They told me that when they reflected on how they would go about it, they immediately thought of having some kind of ceremony that involved the traditional owners of the land. As Karin said,

> If we were starting something here in a spiritual sense, [we should] go right back to the spiritual ancestors of the land. And the Aboriginal people and the tribe that were from this particular area… [to] ask permission that it was OK to have the Casa here (Mullumbimby, February 2009).

This is because they did not feel that they owned the land, for as Karin noted in her opening remarks cited at the beginning of this article, it was "the ancestors' land." As the couple had no connections with Aborigines, fellow members of the John of God movement told them to contact Kay Cook, a Bundjalung Elder, and ask her to perform the ceremony. The north coast of NSW, where the Australian Casa is located, is the tribal land of the Bundjalung nation.

When I spoke to Kay in her home in Ocean Shores, a town near the Australian Casa, she patiently explained Bundjalung's traditions and cosmology. She told me the ceremony was necessary because of the

genocide of her people that occurred in the land. The ceremony was performed "to purify the land of these roaming, sad, traumatised spirits … so they wouldn't come in and cause bad energy." Kay reminded me of Australia's dark history of colonisation in these words:

> We've had seven [massacres] in our nation, just in my country alone … So there's a lot of trauma in this country, and that's why they asked me to come and clear the spirits out... Traumatic death, where they were trampled to death, stabbed, macheted, shot or hung, or whatever…however the white man pleased themselves to kill our people. Genocide happened here in Australia and almost wiped our people out. … (February, 2009).

In a seemingly analogous fashion to Spiritists and New Agers, Kay says that her people believe in reincarnation and that when people die they go to a spiritual place of waiting where they meet their family: "They're all there, just like me and you sitting down talking. But they're just in another dimension, and waiting for rebirth." The similarities are more striking when Kay affirms that this ceremony was "a way of healing the land." According to her, the ceremony was conducted not only to protect the Australian Casa, but also to heal the spirits and send them on their journey to a better place. It was done "to let go of… the pain of the past." Moreover, she was also concerned about suffering in Brazil when she agreed to conduct the ceremony:

> I thought it was a great opportunity for the Bundjalung nation, a person from here to be involved with someone from over there, from Brazil, because I'd read about the trauma, the children on the streets – just as much as we've gone through, but continuous bad things happening to them, and hardship over there. Knowing the hardship here in Australia, and knowing the hardship in Brazil, that if we could have a partnership like this we could help each other. I could get my projects going with that cultural restoration, and the Brazilians can also get their projects together, which is housing the needy, and feeding them, and helping them find a better life, create employment, or whatever it was the Casa was doing. And so I support that. So it was the outcome that I was interested in.

When asked if she ever thought of going to the Casa in Brazil, she replied,

> Yes, I'd love to go there and meet the fellow that I've done this partnership with, with his holy water and my blessed ashes. That would be quite interesting. Even if it is a spiritual partnership, and not on

> contract or anything like that... It's a spiritual partnership, I think. We're doing the same work of healing together here.

During the healing ceremony, she first painted participants' faces "with tea tree oil and ochre, and sang a blessing song."[13] According to her, all this helped "to purify them, give them a healing, to chase anything [spirits] that may be following them away from them." She noted that all the bad energy following participants was eliminated that day. Indeed, Kurt was almost at a loss for words to describe how he felt about the healing ceremony:

> It was really, really powerful.... I felt just a closeness to the land which I've never felt before, and it's almost like being in Brazil in front of the entities. You feel a sort of thick fog around you, almost, like you're in a bit of a dream, and that's sort of what it felt like. You close your eyes, and we were all holding hands and had our faces painted, and she's chanting and saying (pretends to chant) and it's like that, and you're really rocking forward and back, and you're in a bit of a dream, and I'm connecting through to Spirit and saying, "Please, we ask for permission" and all that… you're really in a bit of a zone with it, you know? At the time it felt really fantastic. It just felt really special, and in fact, after Kay left, I asked the others who were here, I said, "How was that?" And they said "It was absolutely amazing." They felt a real connection. A lot of them have very strong connection to Spirit, and they felt spirits around them, and I felt spirits around us (Mullumbimby, February 2009).

Kurt's comparison of the ritual to the Casa shows that magic, being close to the sacred and connected to Spirit, is a large part of the experience of the Casa in Brazil and Australia. Moreover, by saying that he felt close to the land during the ritual, Kurt follows on many Anglo Australians' complex relationship with land and belonging, which I will discuss later in the article. Here it is sufficient to note that more recently "discourses about White Australia belonging are no longer so much about belonging in the country (where 'country' signifies nation and citizenship), as they are belonging to country, where country signifies a land-based spirituality" (Grossman and Cuthbert 1998: 774). For now, however, we will go back to Kay and the healing of the land. After Kay blessed all the participants, she continued the ceremony by going

13. The participants in this ceremony are Anglo Australians who have been part of the movement for some years and who live on the north coast of New South Wales, where the Casa is located.

around the boundaries of the property. She recounted her experience as follows:

> I made a couple of wands with the mix of the tea tree and the eucalyptus and burnt those to smoke out the area, and walked around to sing my blessing song. So I blessed the whole area where the Casa is, to keep out the bad energy, so the only energy that would be there now is whatever John of God puts there, because it's been cleared (my italics, February 2009).

When asked whether she felt comfortable with John of God's entities coming to Australia, or if she felt there was further colonisation and dispossession of her own spirituality, she said, "I feel quite comfortable. … They didn't just come in. They asked, and they asked for a special ceremony, so they gave that respect, acknowledgement."

New Age Appropriation?

When discussing cultural appropriation, scholars usually have in mind the ways in which New Agers appropriate Indigenous cultures.[14] New Age followers long for a connection with the sacred, nature, and land in everyday life (Hanegraaff 1988; York 2004). They yearn for a pre-industrial and even pre-colonial age, one in which elements such as "environmental friendliness, a tribal/community ethic and a lack of technologisation" are commonplace (Welch 2002: 21). Since New Age followers see their own culture as lacking in these elements, they appropriate Indigenous cultures and spirituality, which they perceive as having them in abundance. They do so by idealising and romanticising Indigenous cultures, most of the time not acknowledging the power inequities, Indigenous cultural diversity, political struggles, social issues (e.g., high rates of violence, disease, poverty, lower life expectancy, etc.), and the fact that urbanised Aborigines do not necessarily fit into this idealised image of hyper-spiritualised, hyper-mythologised, timeless, outback Aborigines (Grossman and Cuthbert 1998; Marcus 1988;

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14. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to define the New Age movement, since it is a loose grouping of diverse beliefs, techniques, and practices, with no single central authority or doctrine that can indicate whether an individual belongs to it. Having said this, there is a core of common beliefs that we can call New Age, such as "the evolution of the soul through successive incarnations, monism, karma, the basic goodness of human nature, the power of the mind to transform reality, and so on" (Lewis 2004: 12).

Neuenfeldt 1998). Since the 1980s, anthropologists, political activists and Aborigines themselves have condemned this cultural appropriation as cultural theft and a continuation of colonialism and dispossession.

A well-known example of these elements is found in the book Mutant Message Down Under (1991), in which North American writer Marlo Morgan fabricates her experiences with Aborigines in Central Australia. By using elements derived from popular culture and a New Age imagining of Indigenous peoples as 'primitive', hyper-spiritualised, and devoid of history, the author penned a book that became a best seller, and also generated heated debate within and condemnation by Aboriginal organisations, the academic community, and the media.[15]

More recently, however, scholars have argued that although cultural theft and outright misrepresentation, such as that seen in Mutant Message Down Under, must be denounced, many times what takes place is more complex than a simple dichotomy between '"bad" New Age appropriators and "good" Aboriginal victims (Rowse in Grossman and Cuthbert 1998: 772). This oversimplification with respect to villains and victims overshadows Indigenous agency and the extent which both parties interact (Grossman and Cuthbert 1998; Muir 2007; Mulcock 2001a; 2001b; 2005; 2007; Waldron and Newton 2008; Welch 2002).

The association between attachment to the land and belonging is a thorny issue for Euro- Australians in constructing their national identity. While researching Anglo Australians' and New Agers' attraction to Uluru/Ayers Rock, Marcus found that the rock "has been transformed from an Aboriginal sacred site to an 'Australian' one which belongs to all by birth-right" (Marcus 1988: 264). By replicating Aboriginal identification with the land, White Australians may claim they are autochthonous to Australia as much as Aborigines are.

None of the people I interviewed referred directly to the issue of belonging to the land. They were, however, enthusiastic about the possibility of helping heal the land of its historical suffering. For instance, Kurt felt that the establishment of Australian Casa and the arrival of the Brazilian entities are assisting in healing relations between White and Aboriginal people. He described his view as follows:

15. For more on this, see Neuenfeldt 1998: 89-93; Huggins et al. 1996.

> In my belief, I think [the Australian Casa] would be helping to heal the land and helping to heal the people… that are here. Aboriginals and white people [are] still in reconciliation, and we've still got a long way to go. But this particular area attracts a lot of like-minded people, as you've probably seen, of spiritual people,[16] and I think a lot of good work can be done here between black and white and different cultures (Mullumbimby, February 2009).

Moreover, Kurt sees the Australian Casa as helping to heal on "other levels." He deploys Spiritist beliefs to assert that the current sessions at the Australian Casa aim to heal people who are sick (physically, emotionally, and spiritually), people who are possessed by spirits, and those who are lost spirits so that they can move on. Spiritism and New Age overlap, as Kurt says,

> Look, if there was one word that I'd use to describe what we're doing here, it would just be "healing"…. [Current sessions are a way of] healing the land and healing Mother Earth. When we ask for protection, we ask to bring the energy down and ground it into Mother Earth. It's an important thing. You can feel when you walk around this land here how powerful it is.

However, Kurt cannot be placed easily in a box labelled 'New Age' and certainly does not see himself as a New Ager. In his words,

> We're really down-to-earth people. I'm a builder…We're so far from being religious! … I used to think that this [the association between land and energy] was a load of crap, but when you actually have some connection, or you get a stronger connection to Spirit, you just walk and you feel it. It's almost buzzing. It feels so great (Mullumbimby, February 2009).

Thus a connection to the land was a consequence of the rituals Kay performed rather than something he was actually seeking. In her research of New Age spirituality in Australia, Jane Mulcock argued that the spiritual supermarket, including its associations with superficial materialism and consumerism, relates to the way New Age merchandise is produced and marketed, but does not reflect on the people who consume it, who are "sincere and serious [and] who are genuinely seeking

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16. The north coast of NSW has historically been an area where the counterculture movement has flourished in Australia. Utopian communities were established in Mullumbimby and Nimbin in the 1970s. For a good analysis of the emergence of the counterculture movement in this area and its relationship with local Aborigines, see Newton 1988.

a greater sense of meaning and purpose" (Mulcock 2001a: 170). Like its New Age counterpart, the John of God movement is loose and highly heterogeneous, and many people I talked to were deliberately careful in asking for guidance of Indigenous people concerning matters of the land. In addition, they acknowledged the Aboriginal dispossession and were anxious to translate this in their attitudes.

For instance, we may recall that Kay Cook was very clear that the reason why she conducted the healing ceremony was to address the Euro-Australian genocide of her people. She said so in her 'Welcome to Country' speech at the Australian Casa opening, while the audience listened approvingly— a far cry from the attitude Grossman and Cuthbert (1998: 779) found at the Woodford Folk Festival when Anglo Australians were upset with an Aboriginal woman who spoke of the pain of being part of the stolen generation. In tandem with Kay's speech, Karin, in her own remarks, affirmed that the land they bought in Mullumbimby after selling their house in Sydney was not theirs, but it was the "the ancestors' land." Her husband Kurt repeatedly told me that he wanted to do things "the right way." Asking permission of the local Aborigines to establish the Casa, and thus acknowledging difference among Aboriginal nations, was part of it.

Perhaps this is evidence that things have changed since Newton (1988) found that white participants of the Mind, Soul and Healing Festival in 1979 were not interested in the politics of Aboriginality, but only in their spirituality, and Grossman and Cuthbert (1998) reported on the conflicts at the Woodford Folk Festival. In 2008, Waldron and Newton noted this shift, stating that "cultural appropriation goes two ways; … and that the deep connections and genuine commitment of some New Age/Neopagans suggest potential for a more positive and grounded future relationship between the two groups" (Waldron and Newtown 2008: 3). Indeed, many White people are now aware of how the engagement between White and Indigenous people is politically loaded and fraught with pitfalls. On the one hand, accusations of cultural theft and colonisation have been disseminated in the public domain. On the other, the publication of the Bringing Them Home report[17] in

17. Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families investigated the forceful removal of these children by the Australian State and church missions between approximately 1869 and the 1970s.

1997, the high turnout of Anglo-Australian families at the March for Reconciliation in Sydney in 2000,[18] and the high approval among the same cohort for the Rudd government's apology in 2008 attest to fact that many Anglo Australians acknowledge the pain and suffering of the Aborigines and are interested in righting past wrongs.

Gillian Cowlishaw identified this trend when she noted that, although "previously undervalued,... [i]ndigenous peoples have become the nation's favourite wounded subject,... a fact evident in the innumerable funded projects dedicated to reconciliation and normalisation" (2009: 6). Following Berlant (1999), she argues that this is due to "sentimental politics," which incites "white citizens... to do something in response to the discovery of violence and injustice perpetrated by our own forebears and the institutions we have inherited" (2009: 6). I believe that in their endeavour to "heal the land" the people in the John of God Movement share this desire.

It is noteworthy that it is not only Australia that has to be healed. When Australians who were trying to organise a John of God International healing event in their country realised that the event was not going ahead, they explained the situation by comparing their circumstances with New Zealand, which held John of God events in 2006 and 2007. They believed that the event was able to take place there because the Maori and the British had signed a treaty, so relations had not been so fraught with suffering and pain.[19] In contrast, because the Australian situation had been so dire for Aborigines, it would take more time for John of God and his entities to be able to visit. First, an increasing number of crystal beds arriving in the country (perceived as portals for roaming spirits to move on to the light) and current sessions together with the Australian Casa were required in order to heal the land enough for them to come. More recently, when it was announced

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18. The 'Walk for Reconciliation' took place across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on May 28, 2000, as a response to the Bringing them Home Report. While the Sydney Morning Herald claimed that 200,000 people participated in it, other media such as Kooriweb, claimed that a much higher number was involved (one million). (http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/great/grt8.html accessed on May 5, 2009.)

19. Signed on 6 February 1840, the Treaty of Waitangi established a British governor of New Zealand, recognised Maori ownership of their lands and other properties, and gave them the rights of British subjects.

that John of God was going to perform a healing event in Germany in November 2011, an Australian follower told me after a current session: "Of course they need it, with that history! An event like that is not only about healing people and lost spirits, you know, but healing the land." As noted before, the idea of healing in general, and healing Planet Earth in particular, is a powerful trope in the New Wage movement (Hanegraaff 1998).

Furthermore, Mulcock found in her research that,

> For many, claiming an autochthonous spiritual identity seems to make sense, perhaps as an alternative to the emptiness and lack of belonging that such people often identify with 'Western' culture, perhaps to address other needs and anxieties, perhaps for the thrill of transformation. Whatever the reason, these people have described significant emotional investments. (Mulcock 2001: 177)

This is also the case for all the people that I talked to. Whether they were ill and in desperate need of a cure, or were in search of spiritual growth and meaning, all of them made a significant investment of time and money in their relationship with the Brazilian and Australian Casas. Many borrowed money to go to Brazil, others raised funds for the Brazilian Casa, the soup kitchen and the orphanage nearby. The couple running the Australian Casa left their jobs behind and were dedicating most of their time and finances to building and running the healing centre. Kurt told me, 'What we're doing is from the heart… so I feel that the ongoing thing with the spiritual ancestors of this land [is] an important thing.'

Conclusion

The establishment of the Australian Casa, the branch of John of God's healing centre, by Anglo Australians shows a romantic yearning for an enchanted world, in which humans are connected to the land and spirits that supposedly existed before industrialisation and European colonisation. This yearning does not preclude a respectful engagement with the traditional owners of the land. The first preoccupation of the Anglo-Australian founders of the Australian Casa was 'to do things properly' and invite Aboriginal Australians to participate in the arrival of Brazilian Spiritism in the country. Since they did not feel they possessed the land, they delegated their welcoming of the Brazilian entities to the ancestral owners of the land.

Importantly, this article shows that when religious practices travel they hybridise with local beliefs and issues. Anglo Australians travel to Brazil and bring back a particular kind of French-Brazilian Spiritism, which has undergone successive processes of hybridisation in Brazil, first in its engagement with the Brazilian religious field and more recently with John of God's beliefs and practices. This new hybrid form is carried through books, crystal beds, rosaries, blessed water and other sacred objects and souvenirs bought at the Casa shop and online. Spiritist concepts they learn at the Casa (obsession, attachment, Entities, reincarnation, etc.) are then deployed to address particular Australian issues, such as the historical Aboriginal dispossession and suffering at the hands of Anglo colonisers. Because Spiritism is localised, it becomes meaningful and can flourish in Australia. It may also be meaningful to some Aborigines, such as the Elder Kay, who actively engaged with the John of God movement and cleared the land for the entities to arrive. She returned to the Casa only once because she felt her healing work had been done there.

This article has focused on the ways in which Anglo Australians have given new meaning to what they learnt in Abadiânia (and not on Indigenous Australians, who will be the subject of a future article). While Spiritism and John of God's cosmology are not at all connected with healing the land in Brazil (even if there is a history of dispossession and killing of indigenous peoples), in Australia, as I have demonstrated, they are very much associated with healing Australia's past history. Granted, it is still too early to see new practices being created. Moreover, John of God's strict control of who can establish branches of his Casa de Dom Inácio, where they will be built, and how they will function also restricts innovation in rituals.

Finally, Brazilian Spiritists, who have never heard of John of God and Casa de Dom Inácio, may learn about them when followers start going to Spiritist centres in Australia. As Brazilians start engaging with John of God's healing practices and beliefs for the first time, Australians will be able to study the Spiritist doctrine in more depth with them. Brazilians may then visit Casa de Dom Inácio the next time they go to Brazil to see their families. Therefore, if Spiritist speakers travelling overseas and Brazilian migrants were the forerunners in the globalisation of Brazilian Spiritism, John of God is greatly contributing to this process because of the social and cultural capital his foreign followers possess. Their easy access to and knowledge of the Internet, the English language

and the media, along with their high mobility, make them good disseminators of the Casa de Dom Inácio's beliefs, rituals, and practices. Future research on the localisation of this movement in other parts of the world should yield important data for comparative research.

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