



# MATERIALITY AND INTERCONTINENTAL ETHICS OF THE DAWN VALLEY

# MATERIALIDADE E ÉTICA INTERCONTINENTAL DO VALE DO AMANHECER

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**ABSTRACT:** This article deals with the formation of the *Vale do Amanhecer* religious group and the principles that govern its operation. Based on this principle, the concept that allows us to operate our analysis is that of hybridity. This characterizes the VDA, as it absorbs concepts and rituals from various beliefs, forming a mosaic of concepts present in various religious aspects: Catholicism; the polytheistic religion of ancient Greece; European Kardecism; African-based religions; the polytheism of ancient Egypt; Buddhism of Tibetan monasteries, in addition to the reference to indigenous caboclos and jaguars in America. All of these beliefs are in some way ritualized in the VDA's temples and hospitals. Our research is based on documentary analysis (articles and books on the topic), supported by theoretical and field analyses, which allows us, within this multiculturalist and New Age mosaic, to visualize intercontinental elements configured through the symbols in question.

**KEYWORDS:** Dawn Valley. Hybridity. Materiality.Rituals.

**RESUMO**: Este artigo trata da formação do grupo religioso Vale do Amanhecer e os princípios que regem seu funcionamento. Partindo deste princípio o conceito que nos permite operar esta nossa análise é o de hibridismo. Este caracteriza o VDA, pois absorve conceitos e rituais de várias crenças, formando um mosaico de conceitos presentes em várias vertentes religiosas: o catolicismo; a religião politeísta da Grécia antiga; o kardecismo europeu; as religiões de matriz africana; o politeísmo do Egito antigo; o budismo dos mosteiros do Tibete, além da referência aos caboclos indígenas e jaguares na América. Todas estas crenças é baseada em análise documental (artigos e livros sobre o tema), embasadas por análises teóricas e de campo, o que nos permite, dentro deste mosaico multiculturalista e New Age, visualizar elementos intercontinentais configurados através dos símbolos em questão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Vale do Amanhecer. Hibridismo. Materialidade. Rituais.

**RESUMEN**: Este artículo trata sobre la formación del grupo religioso Vale do Amanhecer y los principios que rigen su funcionamiento. Partiendo de este principio, el concepto que nos permite operar nuestro análisis es el de hibridación. Esto caracteriza a la VDA, ya que absorbe conceptos y rituales de diversas creencias, formando un mosaico de conceptos presentes en diversos aspectos religiosos: catolicismo; la religión politeísta de la antigua Grecia; Kardecismo europeo; religiones de base africana; el politeísmo del antiguo Egipto; el budismo de los monasterios tibetanos, además de la referencia a los caboclos y jaguares indígenas de América. Todas estas creencias están de alguna manera ritualizadas en los templos y hospitales de la VDA. Nuestra investigación se basa en el análisis documental (artículos y libros sobre el tema), apoyado en análisis teóricos y de campo, que nos permite, dentro de este mosaico multiculturalista y New Age, visualizar elementos intercontinentales configurados a través de los símbolos en cuestión.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Valle del Amanecer. Hibridación. Materialidad. Rituales.

## Introduction

The history of Vale do Amanhecer up until 1985 intertwines with the life of Neiva Chaves Zelaya, known as Tia Neiva. According to Oliveira (2011), Tia Neiva's life fits perfectly into the narrative of the empowered woman of the 21st century—a woman ahead of her time. Born in 1925 in *Própria* (SE), Brazil, to a Catholic family, Tia Neiva followed several conventional steps for women of her era: a practicing Catholic, she married Raul Zelaya Alonso at the age of 18 and had four children: Gilberto, Carmem Lúcia, Raul, and Vera Lúcia. However, her life took a significant turn at the age of 22 when she became a widow and needed to work to support her children. She worked as a truck driver (becoming the first woman in Brazil to obtain a truck driver's license), an urban bus driver, among other jobs.

In 1957, she received an invitation to work in the future federal capital, Brasília-DF. She accepted the invitation and moved with her four children to join the "candangos"<sup>3</sup>, which marked a major change in her life. At the age of 33, now residing in the federal capital, she began to experience clairvoyance (seeing and hearing spirits). Seeking help from the Catholic Church and Psychiatry without success, she turned to Spiritism, where she met Mãe Neném and decided to co-found the União Espiritualista Seta Branca (UESB) in 1960.



**Image 1** – Entrance sign to the Union Espiritualista Seta Branca – UESB

Source: O amanhecer do Jaguar, 2023.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Candango, originally a word from Africa, was used by slaves in a pejorative way, referring to the Portuguese who trafficked people, and was later used to refer to sugar mill owners.

The partnership lasted five years, and in 1964, Tia Neiva distanced herself from *Mãe Neném*, leading to the dissolution of UESB. Consequently, Tia Neiva founded the OSOEC (Social Works of the Christian Spiritualist Order) in *Tabatinga*. In 1965, she married Mário Sassi, and four years later, she established the *Vale do Amanhecer in Tabatinga*, which was later moved to *Planaltina* as its permanent location.

The union between Tia Neiva and Mário Sassi is key to understanding the binary logic of *Vale do Amanhecer*. Tia Neiva managed the spiritual aspect (until her death in 1985), while Mário Sassi handled the organizational and bureaucratic aspects of the doctrine (as the followers refer to the principles of this religion). At *Vale do Amanhecer*, mediums are still organized today as *Aparás/Ajanâs* (mediums of incorporation) and *Doutrinadores* (mediums who mediate between the entity and the client). Generally, men are called Jaguars and women are called Nymphs. In more specific ritual terms, *Aparás/Ajanâs*, as mediums of incorporation, align with Umbanda, while the *Doutrinadores* (mediators) align with Kardecism; this represents the binary logic of *Vale do Amanhecer*.



Image 2 – Identification ribbons (Doutrinador on the left and Apará on the right)

Source: O amanhecer do Jaguar, 2023.

In this context, this article addresses the material and ethical aspects of *Vale do Amanhecer* from its historical constitution and intercontinental pantheon. Therefore, beyond the Introduction and the Conclusion, this work seeks to explain the nuances between binarism, hybridism, and syncretism, which is the focus of the first section of this article. The second section will discuss *Vale do Amanhecer* as a New Age religion, emphasizing its intercontinental aspect through its unique rituals and materialities.

## Binarism, Hybridism, and Syncretism

In a straightforward manner, religious hybridism can be defined as the use by a particular religious community of distinct belief systems in a connected manner, without altering the fundamental assumptions (Berger, 2017). Based on this premise, we can understand that this concept aligns with the ethics of *Vale do Amanhecer* more than the idea of syncretism. In this case, hybridism indicates a mixture, whereas syncretism represents the fusion of religions. Despite this, syncretism is noticeable in our religious context due to African-rooted religions. Given the peculiarities of our colonization, Africans, prohibited from worshipping their *orixás*, mirrored their entities with Catholic saints as a way to continue worshipping their deities while making it appear to outsiders that they were effectively "converted." Thus, "Catholic saints had to later assume the resemblance and many of the attributes of *orixás* to become popular in the local context" (Freyre, 2006, p. 204, our translation).

The process of colonization in Brazil, which resulted from the intermixing of three ethnic groups (Africans, Indigenous peoples, and Europeans), was also driven by Portugal's urgent need to occupy Brazilian territory to prevent invasion by other European nations. This forms the basis of Freyre's (2006) observation regarding the formation of the Brazilian people, within which he develops the concept of "Racial Democracy." According to Freyre (2006), the unifying element in the formation of national identity would be the Catholic religion, which permeates the three ethnicities: the Portuguese who brought Catholicism to the colony, the catechized Indigenous people, and the syncretized Africans.

Religious festivals occurred throughout the year and marked the calendar of colonial Brazil, setting the rhythm of social life. They were events that gathered all members of the big house—masters and slaves—as well as their allies from other families. These were moments of social interaction, celebration, revitalization of intra- and interfamily bonds, and occasions to visit the city for celebrations (Freyre, 2006, p. 38, our translation).

Thus, enslaved Africans developed strategies to preserve their identity, and in the religious field, syncretism was the strategy used to maintain their religion without being

reprimanded by the colonizers. This allowed the survival of African religions in the colony, within the framework of worshipping ancestral gods, also known as *orixás* (in *Candomblé*).

*Vale do Amanhecer*, founded in 1969, thus emerged in the second half of the 20th century and encountered a predominantly Catholic Brazilian social context, which generated certain pressure from the collective conscience (Durkheim, 2012) against religions outside the Christian scope. However, as Brazil is now a republic, Catholicism is no longer considered the official state religion as it was under the Imperial Constitution of 1824. Nevertheless, unofficial resistance to alternative religious models continues as a dilemma, despite *Vale do Amanhecer* not deviating from the origins of the Brazilian people, i.e., the characteristic of a mixed and hybrid culture.

In studying the plurality of the ways of being among Northeastern sertanejos, Amazonian caboclos, coastal crioulos, Southeastern and central caipiras, Southern gauchos, Italo-Brazilians, and Teuto-Brazilians, Darcy confirmed that, in Brazil, the hybrid element prevails (Miglievich-Ribeiro, 2011, p. 10, our translation).

The concept of hybridism is broad and is not limited to cultural fields alone, extending to areas such as biology and literature. However, when discussed in a cultural context, hybridism acquires special relevance for the study of *Vale do Amanhecer*, a religion that emerged within the New Age movement. During the emergence of *Vale do Amanhecer*, the world experienced increased intensity in movements such as multiculturalism and globalization, which were the influences that impacted the formation of this religion. In this context, Burke (2003) discusses hybridism as the result of multiple encounters and the mixing of diverse cultures on a multicultural and global level. According to Burke, "We should view hybrid forms as the result of multiple encounters and not as the outcome of a single encounter, whether successive encounters that add new elements to the mix or reinforce existing elements" (Burke, 2003, p. 31, our translation).

#### New Age and Multiculturalism

The late 19th century is marked as the beginning of the New Age movement, as Oliveira (2014, our translation) explains: "Historically, New Age movements began to take shape in the late 19th century, emerging from Theosophy, Occultism, and Transcendentalism [...]". In the 20th century, the West's attraction to the East adds another layer to this development. Eastern religions began to attract Western interest, leading to an engagement with the cultural elements of Buddhism, Hare Krishna, Yoga, etc. Said (2006) developed the concept of latent Occidentalism, which essentially analyzes the idea of an idealized or romanticized Orient by the West. It is within these concepts that the New Age movement was formed and advanced in the latter half of the 20th century when it arrived in Brazil.

In Brazil, the New Age movement found fertile ground for expansion due to the characteristics established by our colonial origins (Amaral, 2000). African-origin religions, as well as the religions of Indigenous peoples with their magic and shamanic rites, Freemasonry, Theosophy, and other practices brought by Europeans, along with Eastern practices introduced by Japanese immigrants and later by Chinese immigrants, create an environment conducive to hybridism. Our ethnic formation, mixed with Eastern immigrants arriving in the 20th century, provides the necessary ingredients for the New Age to gain strength from the late 1960s onwards.

In the 1970s, as a result of the first oil shock, which was directly linked to the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the Brazilian Miracle lost momentum. The middle class was severely affected, and the military dictatorship began to lose popular support, initiating a lengthy process of transition to democracy. This period of change allowed for the emergence of new movements in Brazilian culture, such as the Armorial movement and Brazilian rock, with Raul Seixas as one of its pioneers. Raul Seixas explored mysticism in his music, collaborating with Paulo Coelho and drawing inspiration from the doctrines of Aleister Crowley.

It was during this gradual process of redemocratization that initiatory religions, such as Santo Daime and *Vale do Amanhecer*, began to spread across Brazilian territory. In Brazil, the New Age movement acquired its dimension, differentiating itself from its American and European counterparts. The distinctive element of this Brazilian New Age is its connection with popular religious movements, incorporating spiritual entities such as *caboclos, pretos velhos*, and *exus*, which are part of Umbanda.

The New Age in Brazil, through syncretism (hybridism), conducts this process within a Brazilian context, using the famous "jeitinho." References

are made to preto-velhos, caboclos, Iemanjá, etc., but when we ask our informants if these are the same as those found in Umbanda and Candomblé, they emphatically highlight that they are not merely similar in appearance but are different—beings of light, spiritually evolved, here to perform charity. In this sense, we find the incorporation of Kardecist Spiritism as a fundamental element in cementing syncretic (**hybrid**) practices, as it refers to a mediatory religion, close to the practices of Afro-Brazilian cults due to its possession rituals, yet symbolically distant as a religion of white and literate individuals (Oliveira, 2011, p. 81, our translation).

New Age interacts with African spiritual entities in religions such as Umbanda, *Barquinha*, and *Vale do Amanhecer*:

When we draw attention to the interaction between elements of Afro-Brazilian cults and the New Age, whose emblematic expressions can be found in movements like Vale do Amanhecer, Santo Daime, Barquinha, Mystic Umbanda, Umbandaime, etc., we might risk referring to merely a "stylized Umbanda" or even a "white Umbanda." Considering that, as Ortiz (1999) points out, Umbanda itself emerged from a process of "whitening" Afro-Brazilian cults, incorporating various elements into these cults, especially elements from Kardecist Spiritism (Oliveira, 2014, p. 175, our translation).

## The Intercontinental Rites of Vale do Amanhecer

Hybridism, multiculturalism, and the New Age, associated with Brazilian colonization, provide an explanation for the ritualistic configuration of *Vale do Amanhecer*, which reflects the formation of an identity. It is an ethnic melting pot forged from the diversity of Portuguese (Roman, Iberian, Muslim, and African), Indigenous, and African elements. By analyzing the rituals of *Vale do Amanhecer*, we observe fragments from various religions across European, American, African, and Asian continents. In this sense, we will examine the rituals of Healing, Throne, Induction, and Sudálio.

The founder of *Vale do Amanhecer*, Neiva Chavez Zelaya, known as Tia Neiva, created *Vale do Amanhecer* as a Christian spiritualist religion based on visions she received from a spiritual entity called *Pai Seta Branca*. The origin of *Vale do Amanhecer's* principal entity clearly reflects intercontinental hybridism. Pai Seta Branca was an Indigenous person from the Bolivian highlands who is said to have lived in the 17th century and to be the reincarnation of Saint Francis of Assisi (Álvares, 1991). This demonstrates the hybridism of an element from European Catholicism with another element from Indigenous American culture.

The intercontinental hybridism of *Vale do Amanhecer* is also evidenced by the integration of entities from other religions into its rituals. This phenomenon includes the incorporation of entities from Afro-Brazilian cults such as *Juremas, Caboclos, Pretos Velhos*,

and *Exus*. In the context of *Vale do Amanhecer*, the terms "right" and "left" are used to differentiate this religion from African-derived religions. According to this categorization, *Vale do Amanhecer* is associated with the "right," while African-derived religions are linked to the "left"<sup>4</sup>.

Exercising intense mythological and ritualistic creativity, Vale do Amanhecer performed a spiritualist reading of a variety of other religious traditions, within a basic framework that can also be considered Umbandist or Afro-Brazilian, given that the principal entity worshiped in Vale do Amanhecer is a Caboclo (a spirit connected to the forests and representing indigenous, mestizo, and by extension, any Brazilian spiritual power) named Seta Branca. This entity could easily belong to the pantheon of traditional Afro-Brazilian cults such as Jurema, Pajelança, and Macumba, in addition to Umbanda; alternatively, it can also be interpreted as a Christian figure, as Seta Branca is described as an avatar of Saint Francis of Assisi (Carvalho, 1999, p. 14, our translation).

Vale do Amanhecer features diverse and complex rituals. An individual arriving at Vale do Amanhecer as a patient and seeking spiritual healing begins with the Throne ritual. In this rite, the patient sits in a chair to the left, while the medium of incorporation (*Apará/Ajanâ*) sits on the right. Behind and standing is the doctrinal medium. During this ritual, the incorporation medium receives spiritual entities (including entities from African-derived religions: *Pretos Velhos, Caboclos* who provide advice and suggest other rituals). Throughout the session, less evolved spirits interact with the ritual and attach themselves to the incorporation mediums, who are supported by doctrinal mediums that assist the rite and attempt to elevate the obsessive spirits, indicating the patient's connection to these spirits.

The doctrinal medium should not remain stationary behind an Apará, merely visualizing. As soon as they arrive, they perform the "puxada" (spiritual pulling). Afterwards, they naturally proceed with the doctrine and elevation. If the spirit does not detach, they should not insist. Instead, they should allow another to take their place, as often, the afflicted spirit requires fluids of a different nature for complete recovery, which will not occur if the same doctrinal medium continues to assist (ASPIRANTEVALELASARO, 2017, our translation).

The Healing is a ritual inspired by Kardecist Spiritism where patients sit on cement benches and receive energies from incorporated mediums. In front of them are doctrinal mediums and female *falanges*, and the ritual is led by a male doctrinal medium, as only men conduct the rituals at *Vale do Amanhecer*, despite the religion being founded by a woman. Generally, patients are always directed to healing after the Throne consultation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Right and left here are references to the moral qualifications of the religious works done.

The ritual requires ten Aparás and six doctrinal mediums, who position themselves behind the Thrones and may wear any uniform. With attire, two master adjurations are required: one will hold the lance in front of the salt and perfume, while the other will coordinate the patients, timing the incorporations. In Aledá, four Masters of the Sun, one Ajanã, three Moon Nymphs, and one Sun Nymph enter with their respective attire (ASPIRANTEVALELASARO, 2017, our translation).

The Induction Ritual is one of the *Vale do Amanhecer* rituals characterized as entirely initiatory, representing a pure aspect of the New Age movement. This ritual displays hybridism by integrating elements from traditional religions, as well as influences from African-derived, Indigenous, Tibetan, and pre-Christian European religions, along with aspects related to ufology. The purpose of the Induction Ritual is to promote the elevation of obsessive spirits through an energy exchange between patients and masters.

Induction is a purely initiatory work that benefits both the patients and the participating masters. It forms a current that captures various negative forces through an original mechanism created by the initiates. Its commanders must be appointed solely by Master Tumuchy or the First Master Jaguar (ASPIRANTEVALELASARO, 2017, our translation).

The *Sudálio* is a ritual where the hybridization of Kardecism with Umbanda and Indigenous entities becomes apparent. This can be observed through the incorporation of passes (a Kardecist Spiritism rite), *Pretos Velhos* (Umbanda entities), and *Caboclos* (Indigenous entities), who incorporate into mediums and administer passes to patients.

In summary, as Durkheim (2013) asserted, *Vale do Amanhecer* is a composition of rites and myths that shape a moral community, forged around sacred elements that are both intercontinental and hybrid. This illustrates the potential of Brazilian religious diversity, which:

- 1. Strengthens the use of attire;
- 2. Creates symbolic instruments of religion;
- 3. Systematizes and defines performative spaces;
- 4. Assumes spiritual assistance as a form of service;
- **5.** Removes economic logic from services while not excluding the possibilities of exchange.

Thus, *Vale do Amanhecer* stands as: a New Age movement, a point of cultural hybridism, a reference for assistance, a reference for multiculturalism, and above all, a point where material and immaterial symbols become convergent.

## **Final considerations**

*Vale do Amanhecer* is categorized as a New Age Popular religion (movement), although this nomenclature is difficult to define objectively. In our study, intercontinental hybridism is evident, as *Vale do Amanhecer* is formed from fragments of various religious and ufological matrices, as well as rituals created from the union of multiple fragments. These fragments are a constant in *Vale do Amanhecer*, observable both in the rituals and the history itself (Zelaya, 1977).

The range of elements from European, Asian, African, and American religious matrices present in *Vale do Amanhecer's* rituals can be found in Tibetan monasteries, the polytheistic religions of ancient Greece and Egypt, *Candomblé* and Umbanda entities, and Amerindian religions. Since it involves a mix, we use the term hybridism rather than syncretism, as the intercontinental fragments used in *Vale do Amanhecer's* rituals come together to form a new ritual, rather than merely mirroring entities. This is demonstrated in the case of Pretos Velhos and Caboclos, where the entities do not lose their characteristics or undergo modifications but are incorporated into the rituals while maintaining their essences.

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