

AM



52 / dicembre 2021

RIVISTA DELLA SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI ANTROPOLOGIA MEDICA
FONDATA DA TULLIO SEPPILLI



In copertina

Ambainde TEMBINI (Donoban, Ondugu, Mali), accanto ai suoi feticci. Qui Ambainde è intento a preparare delle piccole strisce di cotone: dopo aver raccolto su di esse qualche goccia di sangue della paziente, le inchiederà su un albero-altare, “fissando” su quest’ultimo il male. (Foto: © Roberto Beneduce, 2008)



Il logo della Società italiana di antropologia medica, qui riprodotto, costituisce la elaborazione grafica di un ideogramma cinese molto antico che ha via via assunto il significato di “longevità”, risultato di una vita consapevolmente condotta lungo una ininterrotta via di armonia e di equilibrio.



Rivista della Società italiana di antropologia medica
Journal of the Italian Society for Medical Anthropology

Fondata da / Founded by
Tullio Seppilli

Biannual open access peer-reviewed online Journal

52

dicembre 2021
December 2021



Fondazione Alessandro e Tullio Seppilli (già Fondazione Angelo Celli per una cultura della salute) – Perugia

Direttore

Giovanni Pizza, Università di Perugia

Comitato di redazione

Roberto Beneduce, Università di Torino / Donatella Cozzi, vicepresidente della SIAM, Università di Udine / Fabio Dei, Università di Pisa / Lavinia D'Errico, Università di Napoli "Suor Orsola Benincasa" / Erica Eugeni, studiosa indipendente, Roma / Corinna Sabrina Guerzoni, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna / Fabrizio Loce-Mandes, Università di Perugia / Alessandro Lupo, Sapienza Università di Roma, presidente della SIAM / Massimiliano Minelli, Università di Perugia / Chiara Moretti, Università di Bologna / Giulia Nistri, Università di Perugia / Cristina Papa, presidente della Fondazione Alessandro e Tullio Seppilli (già Fondazione Angelo Celli per una cultura della salute), Perugia / Elisa Pasquarelli, studiosa indipendente, Perugia / Maya Pellicciari, studiosa indipendente, Perugia / Francesca Pistone, studiosa indipendente, Roma / Ivo Quaranta, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna / Andrea F. Ravenda, Università di Torino / Elisa Rondini, Università di Perugia / Pino Schirripa, vicepresidente della SIAM, Sapienza Università di Roma / Nicoletta Sciarrino, Università di Torino / Alberto Simonetti, studioso indipendente, Perugia / Simona Taliani, Università di Torino / Eugenio Zito, Università di Napoli "Federico II"

Comitato scientifico

Naomar Almeida Filho, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brasile / Jean Benoist, Université de Aix-Marseille, Francia / Gilles Bibeau, Université de Montréal, Canada / Andrea Carlino, Université de Genève, Svizzera / Giordana Charuty, Université de Paris X, Nanterre, Francia / Luis A. Chiozza, Centro de consulta médica Weizsäcker, Buenos Aires, Argentina / Josep M. Comelles Universitat "Rovira i Virgili", Tarragona, Spagna / Ellen Corin, McGill University, Montréal, Canada / Mary-Jo Del Vecchio Good, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Stati Uniti d'America / Sylvie Fainzang, Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale, Paris, Francia / Didier Fassin, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, Francia – Institute for advanced study, Princeton, Stati Uniti d'America / Byron Good, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Stati Uniti d'America / Mabel Grimberg, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina / Roberte Hamayon, Université de Paris X, Nanterre, Francia / Thomas Hauschild, Eberhard Karls Universität, Tübingen, Germania / Elisabeth Hsu, University of Oxford, Regno Unito / Laurence J. Kirmayer, McGill University, Montréal, Canada / Arthur Kleinman, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Stati Uniti d'America / Annette Leibing, Université de Montréal, Canada / Margaret Lock, McGill University, Montréal, Canada / Françoise Loux, Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), Paris, Francia / Ángel Martínez Hernández, Universitat "Rovira i Virgili", Tarragona, Spagna / Raymond Massé, Université Laval, Canada / Eduardo L. Menéndez, Centro de investigaciones y estudios superiores en antropología social, Ciudad de México, Messico / Edgar Morin, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, Francia / David Napier, London University College, London, Regno Unito / Tobie Nathan, Université de Paris VIII, Vincennes-Saint-Denis, Francia / Rosario Otegui Pascual, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spagna / Mariella Pandolfi, Université de Montréal, Canada / Ilario Rossi, Université de Lausanne, Svizzera / Ekkehard Schröder, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ethnomedizin, Potsdam, Germania / Ciro Tarantino, Università della Calabria, Italia / Allan Young, McGill University, Montréal, Canada

Comitato tecnico

Alessio Moriconi, Università di Perugia / Stefano Pasqua, Università di Perugia / Raffaele Marciano, Aguaplano Libri, Perugia / Attilio Scullari, Digital manager, Perugia

Editor in chief

Giovanni Pizza, Università di Perugia, Italy

Editorial Board

Roberto Beneduce, Università di Torino, Italy / Donatella Cozzi, vicepresidente of the SIAM, Università di Udine, Italy / Fabio Dei, Università di Pisa, Italy / Lavinia D'Errico, Università di Napoli "Suor Orsola Benincasa", Italy / Erica Eugeni, independent scholar, Italy / Corinna Sabrina Guerzoni, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Italy / Fabrizio Loce-Mandes, Università di Perugia, Italy / Alessandro Lupo, Sapienza Università di Roma, president of the SIAM, Italy / Massimiliano Minelli, Università di Perugia, Italy / Chiara Moretti, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Italy / Giulia Nistri, Università di Perugia, Italy / Cristina Papa, president of the Fondazione Alessandro e Tullio Seppilli (già Fondazione Angelo Celli per una cultura della salute), Perugia, Italy / Elisa Pasquarelli, independent scholar, Perugia, Italy / Maya Pellicciari, independent scholar, Perugia, Italy / Francesca Pistone, independent scholar, Roma, Italy / Ivo Quaranta, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Italy / Andrea F. Ravenda, Università di Torino, Italy / Elisa Rondini, Università di Perugia, Italy / Pino Schirripa, vicepresidente of the SIAM, Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy / Nicoletta Sciarmino, Università di Torino, Italy / Alberto Simonetti, independent scholar, Perugia, Italy / Simona Taliani, Università di Torino, Italy / Eugenio Zito, Università di Napoli "Federico II", Italy

Advisory Board

Naomar Almeida Filho, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brasil / Jean Benoist, Université de Aix-Marseille, France / Gilles Bibeau, Université de Montréal, Canada / Andrea Carlino, Université de Genève, Switzerland / Giordana Charuty, Université de Paris X, Nanterre, France / Luis A. Chiozza, Centro de consulta médica Weizsäcker, Buenos Aires, Argentine / Josep M. Comelles Universitat "Rovira i Virgili", Tarragona, Spain / Ellen Corin, McGill University, Montréal, Canada / Mary-Jo Del Vecchio Good, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA / Sylvie Fainzang, Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale, Paris, France / Didier Fassin, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, France – Institute for advanced study, Princeton, USA / Byron Good, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA / Mabel Grimberg, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentine / Roberte Hamayon, Université de Paris X, Nanterre, France / Thomas Hauschild, Eberhard Karls Universität, Tübingen, Germany / Elisabeth Hsu, University of Oxford, UK / Laurence J. Kirmayer, McGill University, Montréal, Canada / Arthur Kleinman, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA / Annette Leibing, Université de Montréal, Canada / Margaret Lock, McGill University, Montréal, Canada / Françoise Loux, Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) Paris, France / Ángel Martínez Hernández, Universitat "Rovira i Virgili", Tarragona, Spain / Raymond Maseé, Université Laval, Canada / Eduardo L. Menéndez, Centro de investigaciones y estudios superiores en antropología social, Ciudad de México, México / Edgar Morin, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, France / David Napier, London University College, London, UK / Tobie Nathan, Université de Paris VIII, Vincennes-Saint-Denis, France / Rosario Otegui Pascual, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain / Mariella Pandolfi, Université de Montréal, Canada / Ilario Rossi, Université de Lausanne, Switzerland / Ekkehard Schröder, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ethnomedizin, Potsdam, Germany / Ciro Tarantino, Università della Calabria, Italy / Allan Young, McGill University, Montréal, Canada

Technical Board

Alessio Moriconi, Università di Perugia / Stefano Pasqua, Università di Perugia / Raffaele Marciano, Aguaplano Libri, Perugia / Attilio Scullari, Digital manager, Perugia

AM. Rivista della Società italiana di antropologia medica fondata da Tullio Seppilli è una testata semestrale della Fondazione Alessandro e Tullio Seppilli (già Fondazione Angelo Celli per una cultura della salute), Perugia.

AM

Rivista della Società italiana di antropologia medica
fondata da Tullio Seppilli

Journal of the Italian Society for Medical Anthropology
Founded by Tullio Seppilli



Indice Contents

n. 52, dicembre 2021

n. 52, December 2021

Editoriale *Editorial*

- 9 Giovanni Pizza
AM 52: Un numero "miscelaneo"
AM 52: A "Miscellaneous" Issue

Saggi

- 11 Laura Faranda
L'eredità intellettuale di Piero Coppo. Dai guaritori dell'altopiano Dogon all'etnopsichiatria radicale
The Intellectual Legacy of Piero Coppo. From Upland's Dogon Healers to Radical Ethnopsychiatry
- 31 Eduardo L. Menéndez
Las relaciones sociales sanan, pero también enferman, matan y controlan. Una reinterpretación de la medicina tradicional
Social Relationships Heal, but They Also Sicken, Kill and Control. A Reinterpretation of Traditional Medicine

Ricerche

- 77 Corinna Sabrina Guerzoni
Fertility Narratives: An Experimental Project of Applied Anthropology within a Fertility Clinic of Southern California
Fertility Narratives: un progetto sperimentale di antropologia applicata all'interno di una clinica di fertilità californiana
- 97 Niccolò Martini
Effigie della mortalità. Analisi dello spazio culturale dell'eutanasia attraverso la prospettiva dei medici dell'Emilia-Romagna
Effigy of Mortality: Analysis of the Cultural Space of Euthanasia through the Perspective of Emilia-Romagna Physicians
- 129 Marcela Perdomo
Me Possessed? Interpreting Spirit Possession through Ethnographic Reflexivity. An Afro-Honduran Case Study
Io posseduta? Un'interpretazione della possessione spiritica attraverso la riflessività etnografica.
Un caso di studio afro-honduregno

Ricerche

- 157 Silvia Stefani
È possibile migliorare i dormitori? Note dall'accoglienza "a bassa soglia" durante l'emergenza pandemica
Can the Shelters Be Improved? Notes from "Low-Threshold" Services During the Pandemic Emergency
- 189 Gioele Zisa
Medicina babilonese e antropologia medica. Sull'efficacia delle terapie per il ripristino del desiderio sessuale maschile in Mesopotamia
Babylonian Medicine and Medical Anthropology. On the Efficacy of the Therapies for the Recovery of Male Sexual Desire in Mesopotamia
- 223 Paolo Zuppi, Junia Klein, Carlo Resti, Elisabetta Rossi, Marta Casini
Il paziente accompagnatore: Dante incontra Virgilio
The Accompanying Patient: Dante Meets Virgil

Recensioni

Donatella Cozzi, *La cura della longevità. Elementi per una antropologia dell'invecchiamento / The Cure for Longevity: Elements for an Anthropology of Aging* [Marta Scaglioni e Francesco Diodati (eds.), *Antropologia dell'invecchiamento e della cura: prospettive globali*], p. 237 • Renato Foschi, *Verso il Sud. La collaborazione fra de Martino e Servadio / Towards the South. The Collaboration Between de Martino and Servadio* [Emilio Servadio, *In viaggio con de Martino nella Lucania rurale tra magia e medicina popolare*], p. 242 • Salvatore Giusto, *La "Grande Trasformazione"? Pandemia, governamentalità e stato sociale nell'Italia dei lockdown sanitari / The "Great Transformation"? Pandemic, Governmentality, and Social Democracy in Locked-Down Italy* [Giorgio Agamben, *A che punto siamo? L'epidemia come politica*; Chiara Moretti, *Il Senso della Colpa ai tempi del Covid-19*], p. 248 • Pompeo Martelli, *Interrogare il senso della crisi. La Consultazione Culturale / Examining the Crisis' Meaning: A Cultural Consultation* [Laurence J. Kirmayer, Jaswant Guzder, Cécile Rousseau (eds.), *La Consultazione Culturale. L'incontro con l'altro nella cura della salute mentale*], p. 257 • Marta Scaglioni, *Care in (Eastern) Germany: From Socialism to the Privatization of Social Welfare / La cura in Germania (Orientale). Dal socialismo alla privatizzazione dei servizi sociali* [Tatjana Thelen, *Care/Sorge. Konstruktion, Reproduktion und Auflösung bedeutsamer Bindungen*], p. 261.

Editoriale

AM 52: Un numero “miscellaneo”

Giovanni Pizza

Università di Perugia
[giovanni.pizza@unipg.it]

Questo numero 52 di AM non ha sezioni monografiche e costituisce pertanto, come e forse più di altri, un carotaggio di ciò che la rivista è stata e intende essere: un periodico scientifico che pubblica scritti differenti orientati allo studio delle diverse culture del mondo contemporaneo e che hanno a che fare con questa fortunata branca specialistica dell'antropologia generale, l'antropologia medica. “Miscellaneo” è l'attributo che abbiamo dato, tradizionalmente, a questo fascicolo che raccoglie una varietà di temi e di autorialità, riconducibili, per diverse vie, all'antropologia medica italiana e internazionale, quella fondata, nel nostro Paese, da Tullio Seppilli nei primi anni Cinquanta del secolo scorso.

Piero Coppo, che purtroppo recentemente è venuto a mancare, è stato vicinissimo al nostro fondatore e a noi. Pertanto desidero manifestare la mia gratitudine a Laura Faranda, per avergli dedicato il saggio che apre questo numero “miscellaneo”, non tanto come dovuto ricordo, quanto per affermare il grande contributo che Coppo ci ha dato. Desidero ringraziare anche Roberto Beneduce il quale, proprio in omaggio alla memoria di Piero, ci offre una foto del proprio terreno dogon che abbiamo posto in copertina, e sono grato molto a Eduardo Menéndez, maestro dal Messico dell'antropologia medica mondiale, del quale pubblichiamo la relazione tenuta alla prima presentazione di AM a Roma, in presenza, tra gli altri, del Presidente SIAM, Alessandro Lupo, e della Presidente della Fondazione Alessandro e Tullio Seppilli, Cristina Papa.

Ho definito l'antropologia medica una subdisciplina “fortunata” perché lo penso: siamo stati veramente fortunati a incontrare sulla nostra strada persone del calibro di Tullio Seppilli e non ci scorderemo mai di ricordare il fondatore italiano di questi studi, al quale va la nostra memoria collettiva.

Si prosegue poi con le ricerche di Corinna Guerzoni, sulle narrazioni della fertilità e le loro articolate eterocronie, di Niccolò Martini sull'eutanasia, un tema attuale e complesso, di Marcela Perdomo, sui rituali di possessione in Honduras, argomento che andrà ripreso prossimamente anche per l'Europa, di Silvia Stefani, sul cosa ne è ora dell'accoglienza "a bassa soglia", durante la pandemia a Torino, di Gioele Zisa che, fra antropologia medica e religiosa, ben approfondisce una questione hittita che nei primi anni Ottanta del secolo scorso, fu testata, comparativamente da Alfonso Maria di Nola, e infine del medico Paolo Zuppi, che ora mette insieme diversi operatori per affrontare la questione clinica del rapporto medico-paziente in una chiave pienamente interdisciplinare.

Presentiamo poi recensioni ampie e articolate: sono il nostro modo per affrontare, pluralisticamente, il dibattito in questa disciplina specialistica, che in questo caso volge l'attenzione sia al momento della pandemia contemporanea da Covid-19 sia all'antropologia psichiatrica.

Speriamo così, anche con questo numero "miscellaneo", di avere offerto un ampio ventaglio di temi e problemi.

A presto e... Buon Anno 2022!

Me Possessed? Interpreting Spirit Possession through Ethnographic Reflexivity

An Afro-Honduran Case Study

Marcela Perdomo

Post-doctoral Associate in Africana Religions, Department of Religious Studies,
University of Pittsburgh
[mmp92@pitt.edu]

Riassunto

Io posseduta? Un'interpretazione della possessione spiritica attraverso la riflessività etnografica. Un caso di studio afro-honduregno

Questo articolo esplora le condizioni della produzione di conoscenza etnografica durante il mio lavoro sul campo sulla possessione spiritica nel *Dugu*, la religione praticata dai Garifuna, una comunità afro-amerindiana dell'Honduras settentrionale. Attingendo al mio viaggio da novizia a potenziale sacerdotessa, ma anche da etnografa ad antropologa, sosterrò la validità di mettere il mio corpo e la mia soggettività a favore della piena partecipazione come potente strumento etnografico per approcciare questo fenomeno. Il tipo di indagine antropologica che difendo in questo articolo non è né una prospettiva religiosa strettamente autoctona, né una fredda analisi scientifica a distanza. Invece, presterò molta attenzione all'interazione tra la pratica della possessione spiritica dei Garifuna e la mia esperienza personale di possessione come è stata interpretata dai miei ospiti. La mia intenzione è quella di mostrare che il mio coinvolgimento personale in una religione basata sulla possessione ha funzionato come un mediatore di significato per fenomeni difficili da cogliere solo da una prospettiva intellettuale ed esterna.

Parole chiave: possessione spiritica, riflessività etnografica, iniziazione, Garifuna, Honduras

This Article explores the conditions of ethnographical knowledge production during my fieldwork on spirit possession in *Dugu*, the religion practiced by the Garifuna, an Afro-Amerindian community of northern

Honduras¹. Though there is an abundant literature on ethnographical methods available in anthropology today, there is always an important part of methodological reinvention and adaptation in the confrontation of the ethnographer and his fieldwork. Coming back from my Honduran research on *Dugu*, I realized the inherent fragility, but also the great pertinence of more exploratory and improvised ethnographical approaches. From the double perspective of an anthropologist and initiate, my aim here is to give legitimacy to my own personal experience of spirit possession as a valid methodological approach to grasp this religious phenomenon.

Unlike the majority of the Afro-Atlantic religions, the African deities do not make part of the cosmological structure of *Dugu*. Instead, the Gari-funa worship the spirits of the dead (*gubida*) and ancestor spirits (*hiuruha*) who are believed to act on the bodies of their living descendants by spirit possession (*auwehani*)². The ancestral entities appear in dreams, in hallucinatory visions and they are also the instigators of illness and misfortune. The *buyei*, also known as a medium, spiritual leader, and traditional healer is at the heart of this creed. Nevertheless, in order to achieve this position, elected candidates must undergo through an engaging initiatory procedure that will gradually transform their own personal identity into a ritual authority through the learning and practice of spirit possession.

Drawing on my journey from novice to potential *buyei* priestess, but also from an ethnographer to anthropologist, I will argue the validity of putting my own body and subjectivity in favor of full participation as a powerful ethnographical tool to approach possession-trance. The very notion of participation raises inevitably some questions as to the objectivity of the ethnographic inquiry, as well as the knowledge produced. There is always a form of suspicion that narratives of scholars possessed do not take account of how scholars' religious experiences may be very different from the religious experiences of native or expert participants. Certainly, all researchers are to some degree connected to the object of their research, and depending on the nature of these connections, problems arise as to whether the results of research are the product of the researcher's presence and influence on the research process. If we define reflexivity as a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference, it can be clearly of central importance for issues concerning the challenging world of possession-trance phenomena, especially when the involvement of the researcher in the society of those being studied is particularly close.

Hortense Powdermaker once argued that participant observation requires both involvement and detachment achieved by developing the ethnographer's «role of stepping in and out of society» (1966: 19). In my own research experience, I sought to incorporate such insights and to develop forms of research that fully acknowledge and utilize subjective experience as an intrinsic part of research. In other words, my intention here, is to show that my personal involvement in a possession-based religion worked as a meaning mediator to phenomena difficult to grasp solely from an intellectual and outsider's perspective. Put differently, the kind of anthropological investigation that I defend in this paper is neither a strictly native religious perspective, neither a cold distant scientific analysis. Instead, I will give close attention to the interplay of the Garifuna's practice of spirit possession and my own experience of possession as it was interpreted by my hosts.

As I was conducting research in Honduras, I was well aware that it became nearly predictable that scholars writing on Afro-Atlantic religions would be themselves “possessed” at some point of their study³. A situation, that according to Paul Christopher Johnson, «by around 1990 became a frequently encountered trope on narrative device» (JOHNSON 2016: 160)⁴. While anthropologists are expected to maintain objective neutrality, simply describing experiences and the views of the subjects, some specialists in traditional beliefs have already publicly contended that genuine spirits are in effect sometimes at stake. Most notably, Edith Turner claims to have personally witnessed visible “spirit” substance during a Zambian spirit ritual in 1985⁵. Although the ethnographer might be changed by this experience, the majority of anthropologists are constrained by academic and cultural conventions that prevent them from fully engaging with it. As for my own personal experience, despite my efforts to remain on the sidelines, I became more involved in my topic of study than I had originally planned. Like many other scholars who focus on the study of spirit possession, at some point, I felt pressed to take a position in relation to spirits and their incorporation.

As very well-known by now, many approaches and disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, medicine, psychology, and religious studies have made significant contributions on the study of spirit possession. And yet, in spite of the array of studies and variety of approaches, the field of possession studies is mainly formulated around a few theoretical and methodological axes that often reflect mainstream scientific ideologies prevalent at the time (HALLOY 2012). This article does not attempt to retrace any of the latter, but to explore a less-developed path centered on the learning

and the emic understanding of spirit possession and ethnographical knowledge production. While most of the scholarship on spirit possession addresses the most explicit forms of possession-trance like states, I explore an understudied aspect of this phenomenon centered on the pragmatic conditions that underpin the process of becoming possessed. Based on my ethnographical material, I argue that spiritual possession is not merely a transitory “altered state of mind” but rather a constant and to some extent, “fluctuant-permanent condition” expressed through a porous relationship between personhood, humans, and non-human entities. Furthermore, in the past, some anthropologists have differentiated between trance and possession, while others have used them interchangeably (e.g., BOURGUIGNON 1973). As I will later discuss in more detail, in my approach, I suggest a unified view of spirit possession organized around different stages of psychosomatic bodily experiences. From this angle, I will argue how the cultural and psychobiological aspects of spirit possession are intertwined in a variety of experiences subsumed under the concept of possession.

Me Possessed?

I met Memo in November 2009 while conducting fieldwork on spirit possession in the village of Triunfo de la Cruz, Honduras. At the time, Memo was a young 24-year-old man undergoing through his apprenticeship to become a *buyei* (priest). But similar to the immense majority of elected individuals, before entering the universe of *Dugu* he was vehemently opposed to it. In effect, like most of the Afro-Atlantic religions, *Dugu* practice suffers from a poor reputation and is often labeled as a “diabolic cult” among the local population, especially among adherents of neo-Christian religions. It is thus not surprising that spiritual calls from the ancestors are rarely accepted by the chosen candidates. However, not attending the call of the ancestors can ultimately lead to death. As for many, Memo learned of his destiny to become a *Dugu* priest through revelatory illness and recurrent misfortune. Divination revealed that his dead maternal grandfather required him to begin initiation urgently or else he would die. The initiatory journey to *Dugu* often begins when an individual starts suffering from chronic adversity whether it is of medical, emotional, professional, or legal nature. In that case, a local religious authority can conclude via divination that the source of the annoyance lies in a bad relationship with the spirits of the dead and that they are now calling for appeasement and devotion.

After several interviews, the young apprentice suggested that my inquiry on spirit possession was not a hazardous enterprise and, like him, I would probably have to undergo through initiation myself. At the beginning I received his suggestion with skeptical eyes. «Who do you think I am?» Those were the words that went through my head. And I don't doubt that they were visible in my face. To my knowledge, I was not experimenting any of the stereotypical symptoms that usually lead a person to become a *Dugu* devotee. Except for maybe one thing, I was going through a very difficult moment of my ethnographical journey. As mentioned above, because of social stigma, *Dugu* is particularly hard to approach, even if minimally when one is not a member of the liturgic congregation, and even more so when one is not Garifuna⁶. In my case, although we came from the same country, the Garifuna still considered me to be an outsider. The least I can say, is that this difficulty led me to important states of stress and anxiety that were also combined with more personal issues. At that point, I was truly afraid that my research on spirit possession would simply fail. But in the eyes of my young interlocutor, this rough patch could only be caused by tormented spirits. He thus suggested to consult a local specialist to corroborate my candidacy for initiation.

Some factors such as neurological stress are quite common to many of the accounts on spirit possession, but the postulation of other factors often depends on the sociological, psychological, and other models of explanation employed. As for me, my hosts deducted that I was a candidate for conversion based on my mere interest to conduct fieldwork on this subject. To their eyes I could not feel attracted to their traditional creed solely by intellectual curiosity. From an emic perspective, it is believed that non-converts to *Dugu* do not approach this religion unless they don't receive a spiritual call from dead ancestors. Therefore, my interest on this matter was considered a clear call for initiation and not just a scholarly inquiry⁷.

Several days later, I was sitting in Lena's little consulting room. Lena was a well-known local medium and healer. «Oh my, little sister... your spirits are strong! (*Hereti banigu!*) You will become a *buyei* (*buyeibadibu*). The day will come when you will escalate the pole (last initiation rite in *Dugu*)». I heard these words with a disbelief that most likely had shown on my face. «Yes, this is what your spirits are saying», the *buyei* asserted in Garifuna language. In that moment hearing that I had tutelary spirits asking for devotion, I felt lost and confused. From that point on, both, Lena and Memo invited me to get initiated. Needless to say, that holding the position of a novice in the *Dugu* religious system presented me an excellent opportunity

not to be missed. What better position could have I hoped for than the one thus assigned?

By accepting to take my first steps into *Dugu*, I knew I was going to have to compromise my own subjectivity in order to investigate on the religious learning of spirit possession. At first, I was considerably surprised to learn all the deliberate associations that my initiators were making between my own subjectivity and the influence of supernatural agents. For instance, during one of my many visits to Lena's consulting room she told me that I had already been possessed by ancestor spirits without me even being aware of it. «Me, possessed?» I said to myself, «there must be something wrong». However, to prove her argument, the specialist made me recall one particular scene where I was apparently “under the influence” of the spirits. In a very hot and humid afternoon, I was sitting on Lena's backyard waiting for long hours just to see her. In that particular day I was feeling rather impatient, annoyed, uncomfortable, and melancholic. I must have had an expression of despair on my face when both Lena and Memo approached me nonchalantly. After taking an inquisitive look at me, Lena pointed out to her apprentice: «look, she is with her people (spirits)»⁸. In the eyes of my hosts, I had just experimented a “form” of spirit possession due to the ritual procedures they had been working on during the precedent days. Although I was rather skeptic about my hosts' diagnosis, one of the early lessons I learned during the process of initiation to *Dugu* was that this was not a “believe” religion, an orthodoxy *stricto sensu*, but a “do” religion (i.e., an orthopraxis) as well as a religion of “experience” or a “phenomeno-praxis” based on an experiential practice and expertise. In other words, my constant auto-reflexivity, and my desperate attempts in analyzing my personal experience of what seemed to be a spiritual possession according to my interlocutors, would usually lead me to dead ends. Local mediums mainly acquire spiritual and moral knowledge through bodily experiences and enactment rather than by attending religious lessons or other forms of explicit learning.

It was the instruction to take a ritual ablution that started my journey. Ritual cleansing is an obligated step before entering the sacred world of the ancestors. It involves getting rid of specific invisible substances that pollute the human “soul” (*afurugu*). According to the doxa, prior to ritual cleansing, novices are literally considered to look “dark” (*burigati*) or obscure in the eyes of the spirits. The special ablution, known by the vernacular term of *arani* (medicine in English) is meant to “clear up” (*aclarar*) the neophytes in order for the spirits to literally “see” them, and thus “approach” them

(*acercar a los espíritus*). Although the induction of trance-like states is not the ultimate goal of this ablution, many of my respondents report entering already into altered states of consciousness right after going through this particular procedure. Some of these states went from mild hallucinations to important mental alterations.

I tried to explain my emotional states to Memo while I was going periodically through the ritual cleansing. Strong sentiments of anxiety, depression, and mental confusion would typically invade me during the whole process. But I also wanted to emphasize to my host that what I was feeling were not unknown emotional states to me. Indeed, I did not spontaneously relate any of these states to any plausible influence of the initiation process. To the contrary, I would instead feel frustrated believing that my old personal issues were impeding me to feel the “true” effects of the ritual activity. Without really knowing what to expect, I did however imagine that I would have to go through some kind of unedited “esoteric experience”. Instead, as aforementioned, I thought I could feel absolutely nothing because of my intruding, negative and subjective mental states.

Nonetheless, for my interlocutor there was no doubt, those sentiments simply did not belong to me. In his eyes, they were the clear manifestation of an ancestor spirit. According to him, I was only experiencing one of my dead grandmother’s feelings. That degree of permeability between the manifestation of spirits and the emotional experience of a person is very representative of the relationship existing between the invisible agents and human hosts within *Dugu’s* cosmology. While most of the literature on spirit possession addresses the most explicit forms of possession-trance like states, the Garifuna ethnography shows a taxonomy of more nuanced interactions between spirit agents and humans. If from an emic point of view, affliction or integral possession-trance reveal unequivocally the manifestation of exogenous entities because of their ostensible nature, from an etic point of view, the minimal expression of these forms of interaction are much more difficult to grasp. In this case, the subtle line that divides the subjectivity of an individual and the intervention of the spirits of the dead is particularly tenuous. In this sense, I was considerably surprised that banal sentiments of anxiety and discomfort on my behalf would be interpreted as being someone else’s emotional state and not merely mine. At first, being influenced by academic literature on possession-trance, made me think that any prodrome or symptom related to this altered state of consciousness would be rather unexplored, and foremost completely unknown to me. As Katherine Dunham put it in *Island Possessed*, «Instead of feeling

the god in possession of me, the calculating scientist would take over». Another element that intrigued me was to see that possession is not simply the outcome of intense inner conflict but also tautologically the cause for it.

Transcultural elements observed in anthropological accounts of possession often include a biological element that cannot be reduced to cultural models. In fact, studies show “an altered neurophysiology” during most possession states. While many anthropologists note that neurophysiological studies may not resolve whether supernatural factors might supplement natural ones, it is however clear that neurophysiological changes, including hyperarousal, do occur (KEENER 2010). As for me, not only was I experimenting mental uneasiness, but I was also going through several biological alterations, such as loss of appetite, insomnia, dizziness, mild hallucinations, and acute nervousness. *Grosso modo*, at that time, my psychophysical condition easily resembled to a sort of an involuntary ascetic state. It is worth noting that following observations and self-reports of people suffering from ill-health attributed to harmful spirits, anthropologists have shifted their attention from social conflict and holistic approaches to analyze the lived experiences of symptoms illness and the people most affected (IGREJA 2018). For instance, following the ethnographic studies that examine the link between spirit possession and health problems, Leslie Sharp’s (1993) work in a migrant town in northwest Madagascar acknowledged the existence of “possession sickness” in the sense that people attribute the cause of various illnesses to spirit possession. Many of the symptoms of these diverse debilitating illnesses included chronic headaches, dizziness, loss of appetite, persistent stomach pains, or sore neck, back or limbs.

In what follows I will elaborate the indigenous conception of what may be perceived as possession *idioms* within the Garifuna spirituality.

Possession Idioms in Dugu

Auwehani is the vernacular term utilized by my local interlocutors to describe the introduction of a spirit ancestor into the body of an individual. It is a pronominal verb derived from the word *auweni*, which means “death”. For our purposes in this paper, it is important to stress that the Garifuna differentiate well the state of *auwehani* (i.e., the integral replacement of an identity over another) from more nuanced states of dissociation. Several linguistic expressions such as: “the spirits are near (an individual)”, “the spirits are behind (an individual)” or “being with the spirits”

are commonly employed to indicate that an individual is *under the influence* of the spirits without being necessarily entirely possessed by them. Hence, this influence may be understood as what could be called a “partial possession”, state in which a given individual incarnates only partially the identity of the spirits in addition to its own. In this form of dissociation, the individual may alternate different languages, various sonorous voices, different linguistic intonations, different emotional and behavioral states, and he or she may even express the spirits’ different identities through specific sartorial choices, all within the same moment and while keeping some sort of self-awareness. Those leaving the “integral” possession state often have no recollection of how they behaved while being possessed. Indeed, Raymond Firth notes that field experience has confronted anthropologists with:

dramatic changes of personality in men or women they were studying – startling yet evidently accustomed alterations of behavior, with trembling, sweating, groaning, speaking with strange voices, assumption of a different identity, purporting to be a spirit not a human being, giving commands or foretelling the future in a new authoritative way. Sometimes it has been hard for the anthropologist to persuade himself that it is really the same person as before whom he is watching or confronting, so marked is the personality change⁹.

Moreover, one of the most salient paradigms of Garifuna spirit possession is its interconnectedness with the notion of selfhood. The revelation of me, the ethnographer being under the influence of possessor spirits raised many questions about cross-cultural conceptions of individuality. Differently put, framing myself this way depicted me as racially and ethnically ambiguous. Despite the common neurological character of possession trance, possession behavior and beliefs vary widely among cultures. Therefore, we should allow for greater variations in expression. This diversity does not need to surprise us. Cultural conceptions shape the experience of many illnesses or mental distress, sometimes including behavior that other societies associate with possession¹⁰. Considering this diversity of experience, Erika Bourguignon remarks that despite transcultural constants stemming from «its psychobiological substrate», possession behavior «is subject to learning and by this means, it is amenable to cultural patterning». As such, it takes on a striking variety of forms. Furthermore, Keener (2010) adds that because of this culture-specific element, travelers may carry specific expressions of mediumship and possession behavior to societies without prior experience of them. Likewise, the nature of possession cults itself is subject to evolution. For instance, some societies have gradually transformed therapeutic

possession cults into group entertainment and have voluntarily allowed to accept and convert outsiders.

Although some cultures do not associate spirit possession with infirmity, one could list vast numbers of cultures that do, including the Garifuna culture. However, in my case, it was clear to me that my alleged possession was not linked to any form of illness, but rather to a “spiritual vocation” that was being manifested through a personal crisis. Positively valued spirit mediumship (*abuyehani*) is a different situation from spirit possession seen in negative terms, though in many cultures it classically arises as the resolution of a period of psychological stress or breakdown. In such cases the resolution of a period of emotional crisis is not the achievement of a “normal identity” through the exorcism of the malevolent spirits. Of course, the role of spirit medium is by no means systematically preceded by a “spiritual illness”. Selection of spirit mediums can take place on a variety of other bases, including a hereditary component. Although by that time I was well aware that people in all cultures can experience dissociation and altered states of consciousness, my sensitivity to local interpretations cautioned me against pronouncing on the meaning of these experiences. Worldviews affect how various societies describe these phenomena and under what conditions people most often experience them. Moreover, the degree of acculturation is often a common factor, and the lack of suggestibility can sometimes even render possession-trance states difficult to achieve¹¹.

Possessor Spirits, Sense of Self and Belief

Every time you feel like wearing a gown and covering your head with a headscarf, it is them (the spirits) who are asking you to do so. If you want to cook something special, it is them wanting to eat it. And if you want to make a trip somewhere, they will always leave ahead of you.

Buyei Francisca

Possession practices linked to divination among the Garifuna prove to be a significant index of senses of identity. The self in this light can be seen more as a process, not a fixed pattern. In this section I will refer to “self-hood” as a locus of experience, rather than a category of thought. As I will demonstrate it shortly, the fusional relation between spirits and individuals sustained by *Dugu* experts undeniably questions the subjectivity of the latter and the sense of self. Indeed, The dead seem to incessantly infiltrate their human hosts’ thoughts and to act on their affective and cognitive levels in a quasi-permanent way. Like Marilyn Strathern (1988) describes Melanesian

personhood not in terms of individuals – distinct actors possessing discrete emotions, awareness, and agency – but in terms of “dividuals” beings constituted by properties, goods, and substances that are exchanged with others in an ongoing manner; it is safe to assume that Garifuna personhood contains different ingredients such as a “spiritual double” (*afurugu*), the spirit of dead kin (*gubida*) and spirit ancestors (*hiuruha*). From a pragmatic standpoint, it is mainly through ritual action that this axiom becomes effective.

The mediumistic consultation (*la consulta*) constitutes a fundamental preliminary step previous to formal initiation to *Dugu*. While the main scope of consultations effectuated for ordinary individuals is to diagnose eventual illness and misfortune, consultations for medium candidates does not only reveal the etiology of the latter but are also intended to start *pre*-initiating neophytes by putting them in *direct* contact with spirit agents. In this sense, albeit the mediumistic language formally introduces the spirits at stake by revealing the main features of their identity as well as their *desiderata*, it is the concrete manifestation of psychophysical effects deliberately induced by the practitioner in patients that will ultimately legitimize the spiritual inquiry. In other terms, by acting on the consultants’ psyches and bodies senior religious authorities trigger religious belief among profane individuals. In this way, from a Lévi-Straussian theoretical angle, the “symbolical efficacy” of the mediumistic discourse will gain validity through complementary elements, namely bodily experiences, and the medium’s perlocutionary act. Hence, it would be utterly misleading to consider the mediumistic discourse as an autonomous matter (BOURDIEU 1991)¹².

Although the psychophysical effects provoked by the ritual invocation of the supernatural agents may vary among individuals, there are nevertheless several stereotypical symptoms that I collected while conducting research. During the mediumistic intervention, the majority of the interviewees reported feeling “moved”, (a sentiment usually manifested through weeping), mental alienation expressed by a current local saying: «Like feeling out of this world» (*Como si no estuviera en este mundo*) – which implies a lack of cognitive concentration and an “non ordinary” way of being in the world – sudden somnolence (*un gran sueño*), a strong shoulder pain¹³, and grand fatigue in general. In addition to these recurrent states, some candidates may also arrive to the mediumistic consultation suffering from mysterious physical illnesses, such as unbearable chest pain, belly pain, the impossibility to walk, high fever, and strange dermatological disorders,

among others. In these cases, the classical scenario is the miraculous suppression of the pathological misfortune under the condition of formally compromising to initiate oneself to *Dugu*. It is important to note that the immediate suppression of illness is another important way to engender religious belief among the skeptics. Spirit mediumship is thus an embodied relational healing practice that is grounded in the body rather than in cognitive-discursive processes (SELIGMAN 2014).

As time went by, I would be constantly surprised of Lena and Memo's comments concerning my possession, my possessor spirits, and sense of self. While conducting fieldwork in Triunfo de la Cruz, I was living in a small house near the beach, but to hear them tell it, the choice of living in that house was not mine, but my spirits' choice. Not only had my spirits chosen my home's location, but according to my initiators, they would also choose practically every activity I engaged in. My daily walks on the beach, the way I dressed, the way I danced, and even my corporeal postures were all the result of my spirits' agency. Let us now substantiate these observations by taking a closer look at what takes place in a *Dugu*'s mediumistic consultation for medium candidates.

Since the beginning of my initiation, I realized that Lena was struggling to exercise as a medium because of her addiction to alcohol. Many people in the village were starting to lose faith on the effectiveness of her healing sessions. Very soon, her financial situation started decaying, and even her physical appearance was suffering from neglect, especially from a hygienical point of view. Nevertheless, in the opinion of her peers, this unfortunate situation was not solely Lena's responsibility. In their narratives, Lena had attracted "drunken and dirty spirits" that were taken possession over her. Eventually, like many of her clients, due to this inconvenience I was no longer able to rely on her services and had to find another option in order to pursue my ethnographical journey. That is how I met Basilia, a well-recognized *buyei* and the person who would later become my official *Dugu* godmother (*ebene*). I choose to go straight to the point and begin with a description of my spirit consultation experiences with my new interlocutor. Here is my account directly drawn from my ethnographic journal and audio recordings.

In order to corroborate my vocation to become a *buyei* myself, Basilia and her assistant Francisca proposed me to consult the spirits on a hot Friday afternoon. As I entered the dark little room, I sat down in front of my two hostesses. Only the light of several candles could illuminate well

Basilia's impressive altar. The ambiance was calm and quiet. As usual, before a mediumistic consultation I was feeling somewhat anxious and nervous.

Me: (talking to Basilia) Look, I brought you a small bottle of rum and a candle.

Basilia: Oh, thank you. Baba (her principal spirit helper) is not here though. He went out to take care of some stuff. They (the spirits) go out sometimes you know. They have different missions to do. Sometimes they come back early, sometimes they come back late.

Me: So, you are alone right now (without spiritual aid)?

Basilia: Oh no! It is true that Baba is the boss. But when he is not here, I call my (dead) grandmothers and other spirits, and they all reunite when I have to give consultations. But of course, if I need to address a very difficult situation, then Baba has to be here to help.

[...].

Basilia started the invocation rite *arairaguni*: "descending the spirits". She spat rum on her altar, closed her eyes, and while smoking a big cigar she suddenly entered in a different state of consciousness.

She starts speaking in Garifuna with a metallic voice.

Basilia: Listen to me, you do have spirits from Garifuna descent on behalf of your mother, they speak well the language (Garifuna). You also have Mestizo spirits coming from your father's side. These are the ones that showed up first, then the others came afterwards. They are here to take care of you. There is a little old woman here that says to be more than 150 years old. She is more or less your height. Or... maybe she is a little taller than you. She had the same body shape as you before you lost some weight.

Basilia alternates different voices pitch. Sometimes she speaks with her eyes closed.

Basilia: Your Mestizo spirits work with medicinal herbs to purify the body. They will teach you how to do this as you will join them (get initiated). But... you also have two other spirits next to you. One of them is a lean tall woman, she is pretty. She comes from India it seems... She does body massages with a lot of oil. The other woman who accompanies her looks like an Egyptian [...]. She uses folkloric clothes, very colorful. She has big earrings that hang down to her neck. She uses a bandana on her curly hair. She wears her hair in a certain way... She has golden anklets and bracelets. She wears a lot of things... This one hasn't told me yet what she does exactly. I don't know what language she speaks, but anyway, she hasn't said anything so far. The Indian girl, on the other hand, speaks Spanish. Anyway, I'm locating them...

[Silence]

Basilia: She is a gypsy! I don't know if you ever dressed like a gypsy. With your hair loose, with a lot of colors, earrings... Her bracelets make a lot of noise, they bangle. They (her spirits) say that these bracelets are amulets of protection according to the noise they make. The anklets protect the feet

from spiritual things that you can catch [...]. She is a kind of buyei. I don't know if you've seen her before. She has a lot of intuition. You'll notice that sometimes you don't need to be told this or that, because you already know it. That's what she has (intuition).

Conventionally, *hiuruha* (ancestral spirits) appear in groups of family spirits, similar to the biological family. These groups are habitually joined by other spirits that are not necessarily biologically related to the chosen individuals but who join the group according to the affinities with their mounts. For instance, unlike many Garifuna mediums, Basilia lived many years in New York, where she had the opportunity to get involved with other Afro-Atlantic religions like *Santería* and *Palo Monte*. Since then, her spiritual constellation became gradually inhabited by new spirits coming from these religions. In my case, back in the year 2010, the medium mentioned that besides my family spirits I was also accompanied by a female spirit named "Gypsy" (The spirit she mentioned again in the consultation above). What was relevant about this spirit woman was her dress code which apparently had commonalities with mine. During the consultation exposed in this paper, she saw a new female spirit from India. I must point out that before going back to Triunfo de la Cruz in 2012, I had spent a year initiating myself to Yoga and Ayurveda. Thus, in her mediumistic discourse, Basilia established a parallel between the presence of this female spirit and my affinity for these spiritual practices.

In addition to this, even though spirits possess many humanlike characteristics, they also exhibit supernatural traits like one of my spirit grandmothers who was apparently 150 years of age for example. It is important to stress at this point that the identification process of the spiritual agents during the consultation is directed by a constant *Leitmotiv* i.e., the revelation of the latter's physical traits. Indeed, the immense majority of the mediumistic consultations that I witnessed were in large part dedicated to meticulous descriptions of the physical characteristics of the consultants' spirits. Hence, the detailed description becomes a sort of hypotyposis as the medium establishes various connections between the identity and the physical aspects of the spirits and those of the consultants such as morphological details, physiological and phenotypical traits, race, sartorial style, taste, and particular abilities. Identification with the ancestors is thus through both imagery and enactment.

That being said, the whole process of identification would probably not have the same efficiency – certainly without the ritual context in which it takes place – but above all without the specialized knowledge of the post-

humorous existence of the dead mastered by the medium. This hermeneutic, but also any rhetoric about the cult is omnipresent throughout these exchanges, which tends to leave any layman hardly indifferent. As an example, we can already mention the beginning of the conversation that took place with my interlocutor during the preliminary phase of the consultation. We are dealing here with information that brings to light clues relating to the virtual life of the dead. A life, which obviously resembles under several plans, that of the humans. The existence of a parallel between the world of the dead and that of the living facilitates, in a way, the ostensive learning of this universe.

Notwithstanding, it must be said here that this tableau-vivant becomes gradually complex as the expert assembles the different physical portraits belonging to each spiritual entity and chooses several specific elements belonging to one and the other with the aim of drawing a “general portrait” of the consultant. At this point the person’s selfhood is clearly presented as a composite or a condensation of plural identities (SEVERI 2007). At the end of my consultation with Basilia, my personal image (physical and psychological) was ultimately a condensation of my spirit agents.

Let us note at this point that it is rather the sum of all the aspects that the *buyei*’s discourse puts in place, which makes it possible to build the strength of the persuasive effects of the mediumistic speech. In other words, it is plausible that the revelation of the causality of the misfortune would not have the same credibility without the presence of the hypotyposis contained in the detailed description of the invisible agents. This visual and sensory suggestion is all the more reinforced by the performative efficiency deployed by the mediumistic messages. Indeed, all the messages contained in this exchange aim to change the status of an ordinary individual to that of an individual formally elected to become *buyei*. Exhortations, recommendations, and proclamations are integrated into the ritual speech of the officiant. Moreover, the attention to detail and the specificity of the instructions all contribute to arouse belief or at least curiosity in the most seasoned skeptic.

Furthermore, as said before, the somatization in the *consulta* has also the objective of proving the veracity of the existence of the spirits and the type of influence that they are able to exert on a psychophysical level. But for Basilia, nothing is more natural than to experience these psychophysical states when the spirits decide to contact their mounts. As a medium, she is also able to feel the spirits of others through her body. After long

hours of consultation, Basilia revealed to me that my spirits “came down” (*bajaron*) with grand (physical) force. Apparently, they literally “clung” to her in order to manifest their need to be heard and recognized. It then felt appropriate to confess that I myself went through particular physical and emotional states during the whole ritual procedure. Just like many of my interviewees, I experienced somnolence to some degree, as well as mental uneasiness. «They touched you!» Basilia exclaimed. Not in figurative sense, but in a literal one.

Anthropologists have spent lengthy periods of time conducting ethnographic studies of spirit possession in various societies and have suggested that the diversity of the phenomenon makes it difficult to capture in a unique approach and definition. However, there are several points of departure that one must consider when engaging with this complex topic. Evidently, spirit possession is an embodied phenomenon which nevertheless transcends the individual and becomes part of group dynamics (STOLLER 1995). It is present in societies that cultivate the belief that a person's body and agency may be influenced and controlled by exogenous invisible entities. Moreover, spirit possession can manifest in ritual practice and in everyday life. In these particular contexts, spiritual entities are regarded as humans (LAMBECK 1981). Thinking along these lines, individuality, sense of personhood and spirit possession should not be considered in isolation from each other. Unlike in Boddy's example of possession (1988), in which the *zairan* spirits represent forces alien to those whom they possess, in *Dugu* a permanent link is viewed between adepts and their tutelary spirits, as their personalities tend to coincide (McCARTHY BROWN 1991). On another note, with the concept of “embodied imagery”, Thomas Csordas (1997, 2001) does an effort to reconnect mental processes with subjective experience by means of perception, imagination, and corporeality, defending that imagination is the privileged process for experiencing the sacred. This approach offers new means for conceiving the experience of one's embodied engagement with particular cultural worlds. In this sense, perception, embodiment, and imagination are always embedded in a cultural tapestry.

Learning to 'Feel' Possessed and Ethnographic Reflexivity

Bitterness. Resentment against ethnography which makes you take so inhuman a position, that of an observer, in situations where it would be best to let go.

Michel Leiris, August 25, 1932

In his appendix on fieldwork methods added to the 1976 edition of *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Evans-Pritchard confessed that, in studying witchcraft, he came to at least “half-believe” in it himself, and that, from the Nuer, he himself was transformed by first learning about «the nature of God»¹⁴. However, he did not mention how such a radical shift in stance might influence the «general view of the nature of phenomena being studied»¹⁵. In this last section I would like to consider the challenges and opportunities associated with doing ethnographic reflexivity in the context of religious initiation. Pressing questions await answers—such as, who do we become as narrators of culture through ethnographic practice? How may our potential social positions narrow, or to the contrary, deepen our view of the subject of study? Social position does not work in the abstract; it is irreducibly mediated by ongoing interpretation and communication in the field. As I have suggested earlier, ethnographic reflexivity can take the research’s problems of communication as interesting and valuable facts in themselves. Performing ethnographic reflexivity during my initiation to spiritual possession meant drawing a nuanced map of cultural variation and puzzles to reflect on how communication succeeded or failed. At the same time, since reflexivity comes with the weight of responsibility, my main concern consisted in resisting self-absorption to allow the effort of autoethnography to work outside of my experience to serve others. This reflexive standpoint required a particular kind of vulnerability and exposure that made me acknowledge and analyze how and why my position was a relevant marker in my own research.

Although every spiritual call is unique for every Garifuna candidate to possession, my own way of experiencing it was special, however also confusing since I was not totally convinced but neither was I totally skeptic about the diagnosis of my own spiritual vocation. The numerous mediumistic consultations and previous failed attempts of initiation had already given me the opportunity to experience some psychosomatic symptoms that my hosts would relate without hesitation to spirit possession, yet my emotional states and psychological stress did not improve. Basilia and her assistant Francisca were both well aware that I was not totally convinced about the fact that my

personal distress was due to spiritual influence. In fact, Francisca would always repeat to me: «The problem with you is that you believe, but yet you don't believe» (*Crees y no crees*). The two specialists were also convinced that my symptoms resulted from incomplete possession and even some kind of spiritual punishment because my spirits could not fully enter and make use of my body. After months of hesitation on my behalf, my two future *Dugu* godmothers finally claimed: «It is time to arrange you (initiate you)».

“Fixing the *Ebu*” is the vernacular expression that refers to initiation to spirit possession *per se*. Literally, it means that the time has come to prepare the human “mount” (*Ebu*) for the spirits. To do so, the elected individual will go through several preliminary rites of purification before he or she can incarnate the dead. Overall speaking, the neophyte's first steps of initiation concern a generalized bodily treatment which scope is to promote the identification of induced psychophysical states that the initiate will be later able to relate to spirit possession. Being ritually possessed requires fluency through sensorial stimulation, the (re)shaping of the physical body, and practice.

Contrary to many accounts by possessed people that I collected, during the whole process of initiation I never fully succumbed to total spirit possession, or to total eclipsing of the self, except for maybe one brief moment. I shall come back to this. However, I did go through many psychophysical states that transformed my consciousness as well as the outer world around me. Nevertheless, the ethnographer in me could not allow me to fully grasp this experience as I needed my rational brain to record everything that was happening to me, yet I found this counterintuitive to ethnographical common sense. Because of my double posture (initiate/ethnographer) I was afraid that I would fail the test and would simply end up not being possessed at all. I finally had to admit that the anthropological value of data provided by the ethnographer's introspective account usually remains ambiguous. I realized that the best thing I could do was to translate my own subjective experience and let the *Dugu*'s religious experts validate it. As Jeanne-Favret Saada showed in her study of witchcraft in the Bocage, the ethnographer should first allow him or herself to be “caught” (“prise”) (1997). And that is what I did.

After a period of seclusion in the ritual temple (*dabuyaba*), traditionally, a ceremonial presentation (*arufudahani*) of the new initiate in front of the local religious community takes place. For this occasion, the new *ebu* (mount) is expected to be ritually possessed in front of the entire assembly.

Neophytes are invited to play the rattles (*maracas*¹⁶) along with the drummers who play the traditional *Dugu* beat especially designed to induce possession-trance. According to religious experts, it is not really the ability to interpret the sacred rhythm that counts, rather it is the effect produced by the sound execution *per se* that is highly valued. In their narratives, there is no need to be a *buyei* to be able to play the *maracas* in this unique way given the rhythm's great simplicity. Indeed, contrary to other much more sophisticated Garifuna musical genres, *Dugu*'s ritual music happens to be the most elementary rhythm of all. The drumming for instance, produces a constant homorhythmic pulsation while the *buyeis* on the other hand, play the *maracas* following a repetitive and monotonous melodic formula. Thus, from a technical point of view this instrument's execution requires little or no learning at all. From an exegetic perspective, the rattles are sacred artifacts that are intended to "call" the spirits. Once a neophyte starts playing the *maracas* he or she can be possessed at any time. A young initiate once told me, «you must really observe the *buyeis* when they begin playing their instruments. You will see a sudden change in their face, they close their eyes... That means that it is no longer them playing the *maracas*, but the spirits themselves». In other words, the main scope of playing the sacred instruments is to induce ritual spirit possession among the neophytes and to legitimate their ability to be possessed. I can place myself as an anecdotal example of this. For me, everything went very fast as I describe it on my ethnographic journal:

When the first drumming started, my godmother came to the sanctuary chamber to look for me. I was extremely nervous. I was afraid of not being able to play the maracas and looking ridiculous. But it was too late. I walked out of the sanctuary next to her. Suddenly, we started playing the maracas with grand effervescence. I felt a spontaneous intensity. I was suddenly caught by an enormous force that the limits of my body could barely handle. That is how enormous it was. As the first chant ended, I felt incredibly proud of myself, I felt so fulfilled... finally, for the first time I felt myself invaded with bliss. After all those long uncomfortable moments of seclusion, I was gladly surprised and impressed about my first performance in front of the audience. I totally abandoned myself to the experience. Francisca pointed out to me: «you had a great beginning. You sure can play those maracas!»

During the second chant, I continued playing the maracas with the same effervescence. This time it was almost too long, to the point that my wrists started hurting. But the music was so incredibly absorbing that I couldn't make myself stop. Suddenly, my initiators starting spitting rum in the back of my neck (a local technique to induce possession). They wanted me to absolutely fall (in possession trance). But I was still aware. The people behind me though, were getting possessed one by one. It was very intense! Little

after that, I lost it too! The music caught me. I couldn't stop shaking the maracas towards the ground, like the other people entranced often do. I did this gesture repeatedly without really knowing why. At the end of this music sequence, I felt extenuated and with a strange sensation of vacuity. Just like the other possessed say: «I felt as if I was out of this world». My memories of this moment remain vague.

Trance self-induction through the Garifuna sacred instruments was by far one of the most rewarding experiences I lived during the entire initiatory process. After playing the rattles I felt incredibly empowered. It was like a renaissance, as if I had achieved something very grandiose. And above all, my experience seemed to perfectly fit to what *Dugu* experts expect from the new initiated. Throughout the ceremony I experienced different states of consciousness and odd bodily sensations. From feeling completely absorbed during the intense rattling, I went to a sort of depersonalization state afterwards. I had perceptual alterations of my own physical body and the world surrounding me seemed like a vivid dream. I also felt brutal shifts of moods and emotions. For instance, I went from feeling euphoric, to feeling somewhat hypnotized and sometimes very depressed and extremely extenuated. My initiators had no doubt about my personal experience, to them, I was possessed. In parallel with Rudolf Otto's interpretation of numinous experiences (1917), undoubtedly, possession and trance seem to manifest themselves across a vast phenomenological spectrum, from experiences of calm and bliss to frenzied attacks.

The question now, is how to validate my introspective data as genuine ethnographic data? How much can my claims really represent, beyond my personal or social biases? Skepticism about knowledge claims has led many ethnographers to build into their accounts an important amount of reflexivity. Reflexivity should ideally open a dialogue with readers about the worth of the ethnographer's interpretations and explanations (LICHTERMAN 2017). For Pierre Bourdieu, the task of reflexivity is centrally about scouting out common-sense assumptions, the doxa induced by power relations which distort the sociologist's ability to demystify domination (BOURDIEU, WACQUANT 1992).

According to Schmidt and Huskinson (2010):

Unless one is able to 'go native' and interpret spirit possession and trance from an insider's perspective, one is forced to rely on observable data-such as body movements and perceived changes in personality-and on subjective accounts of those who were possessed or in trance. Both sources of information are unreliable and highly speculative.

Since I did indeed was given the opportunity to understand spirit possession and trance from the insider's point of view, I decided to first interpret my own experience through the eyes of my hosts. In fact, my entire training in spirit possession, depended mostly on the comments and reactions of my initiators to my experience. This is how I found out what possession truly meant to local religious experts, bodily and psychologically speaking. Although the ethnographer's experience is most likely to be very different because of cultural ontologies, it has to show nonetheless a sufficient set of stereotypical elements that will make religious authorities acknowledge and legitimate the experience of possession shared by a category of individuals, namely the initiates. Classic anthropological methods such as full participation, observation, and interviews with people certainly complement the ethnographic reflexivity. In fact, full participation naturally engenders an ethnographic reflexivity of experiences. It also relies on a series of "technologies of the self" as Foucault once stated (1994). All observation is perforce self-observation (CLEGG 2013).

In the same vein, Marcus and Fischer (1958: 45-76) have taken the area of the self and the expression of emotions as one of the areas in which experimental ethnographies have been most effective in developing ways of writing that transcend conventional reporting techniques. The authors suggest that «focusing on the person, the self, and the emotions – all topics difficult to probe in traditional frameworks – is a way of getting to the level at which cultural differences are most deeply rooted: in feelings and in complex indigenous reflections about the nature of persons and social relationships» (*ibid.*: 46). However, researching selves is for the self to be not just a central character in the society being researched but the principal character, so that the ethnographer is his or her own key informant (AULL DAVIS 2002). In this process of interaction between ethnographer as self and ethnographer as other, social knowledge of general interest and significance may be successfully produced.

Moreover, full acceptance of the social position that is assigned to the ethnographer by his or her hosts is essential in order to comprehend exegetic elements. In my own personal experience, I was mostly seen as a "foreign" candidate for possession by the religious community. Evidently, coming from the same country and revealing African ancestral roots in my family background through mediumistic consultations – though challenging – was absolutely determinant for the legitimacy of my candidacy. However, I was still seen mainly as an outsider, simply because I am not Garifuna, but rather *Mestiza*. Nevertheless, my case remained still somewhat ambiguous

since I became fully engaged in a spiritual practice that the Garifuna habitually protect and rarely share outside of their ethnic group. This illustrates eloquently the relational game in which the ethnographer is susceptible to be caught into. Through auto-reflexivity I could consider the different social positions with ongoing communication between ethnographer and the people researched.

As I narrated it throughout this essay, my incredulity and my role as an ethnographer impeded me on many occasions to fully give myself into the experience. My westernized conceptions of the self, of the etiology of inner conflicts, and the notion of healing were difficult to juxtapose to local cultural ontologies. While initiation in this context is expected to cause a communal healing (e.g., the neophyte, family, and ancestors), I lived the whole experience from the individualistic point of view. Concepts of sociocentric and cosmocentric selves are found in many non-Western traditional healing systems such as shamanism and spirit mediumship (KIRMAYER 2007), which do not aim to actualize one's unique inner attributes or personality, as in the case of Western psychotherapy. Rather, the aim of these traditional forms of healing focus on guiding individuals to live in harmony with other people, nonhuman entities, and the environment in general.

Functioning Garifuna spirit mediums generally are described – and present themselves – as free from all the distress and illness after initiation. In my journey, I was not able to account for such an immediate relief. This does not mean that previous troubles cannot recur or that new forms of misfortune cannot develop after becoming a local medium. Indeed, as Peters (1982) suggests «for the fully initiated shaman, “therapy” never ends. His initiations and healing rituals are his continuous therapy, functionally similar to the therapeutic benefit a therapist derives from the psychotherapy he performs» (p. 38). Similarly, Garifuna mediums' healing transformation does not happen all at once but is an evolutionary process that occurs over time and may continue long after initiation (see CSORDAS, 1994). Thus, the medium's spiritual transformation may be a lifelong process without predetermined or specific outcomes.

Ethnographers are in a good position to produce interpretive explanation of their hosts' everyday action. Ethnographic observation potentially offers an accurate view of the meanings of action *in situ*. The ethnographer's relations with the researched constitute the royal route to interpretively valid meanings. To seize those meanings, ethnographers are willing to take risks with the researched, and their reflexivity can help make that risk-taking

more transparent to readers (LICHTERMAN 2017). In this way, ethnographic research can be viewed as an attempt to solve a problem of communication (DEWEY 1922, 1927). In other words, the ethnographer must learn how to communicate with the researched to maintain an acceptable and pertinent presence in the field before any scholarly data can be produced. I believe ethnographers should communicate to their readers their experience to learn from their inevitable cluelessness. Interpretive reflexivity takes the researcher's difficulties of communication as pertinent facts in themselves since this method seems to work better with a poetics of misunderstanding. I realize now that my whole experience of learning to feel possessed was embedded not only on the privileged ethnographic positionality I was given by my hosts, but also on the acceptance of my constant skepticism and never-ending perplexity.

Notes

⁽¹⁾ The Garifuna originated in the Caribbean island of Saint-Vincent during the 17th century. In 1797, they were forced to leave their homeland by the British Crown to the Atlantic Coast of Central America, where they now live in scattered villages in countries like Honduras, Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and more recently the United States.

⁽²⁾ Within the Dugu pantheon, next to *Bungiu* (the supreme god) stand the *gubida* and the *hiuruha*: the disembodied souls of the ancestors. In practice, the *gubida* constitute the spirits of the more recently deceased ancestors who have material needs and demands, and who may also afflict humans when not commemorated. The *hiuruha* are "higher" spirits who are the aids and spiritual guides to *buyeis* (the local mediums and Dugu priests).

⁽³⁾ See Halloy, Karestetzi, Karen McCarthy and others that have done research on Afro Atlantic Religions.

⁽⁴⁾ This is particularly true for the most known Afro-Atlantic religions. Since the very beginning of the nineteenth century, many if not most anthropologists of these religions are very likely to get involved one way or another in liturgical matters. For instance, let's mention some of the founders of Afro-Brazilian studies ritually committed: Edison Carneiro, Ruth Landes, Pierre 'Fatumbi' Verger, Roger Bastide, and Juana Elbein dos Santos. However, being less known to anthropologists and being less open to the public eye, it is still rare even today, to get initiated in the Garifuna Dugu as a foreigner. I shall come back to this point.

⁽⁵⁾ See especially Edith TURNER, *The Reality of Spirits*, "Shamanism", Vol. 10(1), <https://www.shamanism.org/articles/article02.html>; cfr. Edith TURNER, *The Reality of Spirits*, "Re-Vision", Vol. 15(1) 1992: 28-32; also critiquing ethnocentric Western readings in TURNER E. *et al.*, *Experiencing Ritual. A New Interpretation of African Healing*, University

of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1992; advocating entering indigenous experience in *The Anthropology of Experience. The Way to Teach Religion and Healing*, pp. 193-205 in BARNES L.L., Talamantez I. (eds.), *Teaching Religion and Healing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006; more view them as simply *psychologically* real to the patient: Michael SINGLETON, *Spirits and 'Spiritual Direction': The Pastoral Counselling of the Possessed*, pp. 471-478, spec. 477, in FASHOLÉ-LUKE E., GRAY R., HASTINGS A., TASIE G. (eds.), *Christianity in Independent Africa*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1978.

⁽⁶⁾ In comparison with mainstream Afro-Atlantic religions namely, Candomblé and Santería, Dugu's religious devotees are not habituated to welcome new members outside of their ethnic group.

⁽⁷⁾ However, it must be said here that it does not suffice to be interested in *Dugu* to draw that conclusion. My personal and ethnographical efforts seemed to play a preponderant role on my hosts' deduction. My eagerness and previous knowledge about their traditional religion was also fundamental in order for them to believe that my intentions were far from superficial.

⁽⁸⁾ Dugu adepts often refer to spirits with the vernacular terms of people (*gente*), viejos (the *old ones*), your family (*los tuyos/banigu*), which indicates the humanlike ontological condition of the latter.

⁽⁹⁾ Firth, foreword to *Spirit Mediumship* (mentioning his own astonishment).

⁽¹⁰⁾ E.g., Bert KAPLAN, Dale JOHNSON, *The Social Meaning of Navajo Psychopathology and Psychotherapy*, pp. 203-229, spec. 203, in KIEV A. (ed.), *Magic, Faith and Healing: Studies in Primitive Psychiatry Today*, Free Press, New York 1964.

⁽¹¹⁾ *Degree of acculturation*: Larry PETERS, *Ecstasy and Healing in Nepal An Ethnopsychiatric Study of Tamang Shamanism*, State Mutual Book & Periodical Service, New York 1999, pp. 11-16, 46-47, 50; Lisa L. FREY, Gargi ROYSIRCAR, *Effects of Acculturation and Worldview for White American, South American, South Asian, and Southeast Asian Students*, "International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling", Vol. 26(3) 2004: pp. 229-248, citing a large number of other studies for lack of suggestibility; see cases in Murray LAST, *Spirit Possession as Therapy Bon among Non-Muslims in Nigeria*, pp. 49-63, spec. pp. 52-53, in LEWIS M., AL-SAFI A., HURREIZ S. (eds.), *Women's Medicine: The Zar-Bori Cult in Africa and Beyond*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1991.

⁽¹²⁾ See Pierre BOURDIEU in *Language and Symbolic Power*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1991.

⁽¹³⁾ From the emic perspective, it is believed that spirits seize humans by their shoulders.

⁽¹⁴⁾ E.E. EVANS-PRITCHARD, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 1976, pp. 244-245.

⁽¹⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The *maracas* are iconic instruments in Dugu, played exclusively by *buyeis*. Like drums, they are used as sacred possession-trance induction tools.

Bibliography

- AULL DAVIES C. (2002), *Reflexive Ethnography. A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, Routledge, London/New York.
- BODDY J. (1988), *Spirits and Selves in Norther Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance*, "American Ethnologist", Vol. 15(1): 4-27.
- BOURGUIGNON E. (1973), *Introduction: A Framework for the Comparative Study of Altered States of Consciousness*, pp. 165-196 in BOURGUIGNON E. (ed.), *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus.
- BROWN K. (1991[2018]), *A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- CLEGG J.W. (2013), *Developing an Adequate Theory of Self-Observation*, pp. 3-24 in CLEGG J.W., *The Social Sciences*, Transaction, New Brunswick/London.
- CSCORDAS T. (1993), *Somatic Modes of Attention*, "Cultural Anthropology", Vol. 8(2): 135-156.
- DUNHAM K. (1969), *Island Possessed*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- EVANS-PRITCHARD E.E. (1976), *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- FAVRET-SAADA J. (1980), *Deadly Words, Witchcraft in the Bocage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- FAVRET-SAADA J. (2012), *Being Affected*, "HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory", Vol. 2(1): 435-445.
- FIRTH R. (1967), *Introduction*, pp. 15-16 in MALINOWSKI B., *A Diary in the Strict Sense of Term*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- FOUCAULT M. (1994), *Tome IV: 1980-1988*, in *Dits et Ecrits (1954-1988)*, édition publiée sous la direction de Daniel Defert et François Ewald avec la collaboration de Jacques Lagrange, Collection Bibliothèque des Sciences humaines, Gallimard, Paris.
- HALLOY A. (2012), *Gods in the Flesh: Learning Emotions in the Xangô Possession Cult (Brazil)*, "Ethnos. Journal of Anthropology", Vol. 77(2): 177-202.
- HALLOY A. (2013), *Percibir la Presencia de los Dioses. La Danza de Posesión en un Culto Afro-Brasileño*, "Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Sobre Cuerpos, Emociones y Sociedad", Vol. 4(10): 30-47.
- HALLOY A. (2012), *Full Participation and Ethnographic Reflexivity: An Afro-Brazilian Case Study*, "Journal for the Study of Religious Experience", Vol. 2(1): 7-24.
- IGREJA V. (2018), *Spirit Possession*, pp. 1-10 in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, John Wiley & Sons, London.
- JOHNSON P.C. (2016), *Scholars Possessed! On Writing Africana Religions with the Left Hand*, "Journal of Africana Religions", Vol. 4(2): 154-185.
- KIRMAYER L. (1994), *Pacing the Void: Social and Cultural Dimensions of Dissociation*, Chapter 5 [pp. 91-122] in SPIEGEL D. (ed.), *Dissociation: Culture, Mind and Body*, American Psychiatric Press, Washington.
- KIRMAYER L. (2007), *Psychotherapy and the Cultural Concept of the Person*, "Transcultural Psychiatry", Vol. 44(2): 232-57.
- KIRMAYER L., BOON-OOI L. (2020), *Dang-ki Healing: An Embodied Relational Healing Practice in Singapore*, "Transcultural Psychiatry", Vol. 57(6): 786-800.

- LAMBECK M. (1981), *Human Spirits: A Cultural Account of Trance in Mayotte*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- LEIRIS M. (1980), *Préface*, in Rouget G., *La musique et la Trance*, Gallimard, Paris.
- LICHTERMAN P. (2017), *Interpretive Reflexivity in Ethnography*, "Ethnography", Vol. 18(1): 35-45.
- SCHMIDT E., HUSKINSON L. (2010), *Spirit Possession and Trance. New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Continuum, London.
- SELIGMAN R. (2014), *Possessing Spirits and Healing Selves. Embodiment and Transformation in an Afro-Brazilian Religion*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- SEVERI C. (2015), *The Chimera Principle. An Anthropology of Memory and Imagination*, Hau Books, Chicago.
- STOLLER P. (1995), *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa*, Routledge New York.
- STRATHERN M. (1988), *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- WACQUANT L. (2002), *Corpo e Alma. Notas etnográficas de um aprendiz de boxe*, Relume Dumara, Rio de Janeiro.

Scheda sull'Autrice

Marcela Perdomo è nata a Valle de Angeles (Honduras) nel 1980. È borsista di post-dottorato e docente presso il Dipartimento di Studi Religiosi dell'Università di Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Nel 2019, ha ricevuto il suo dottorato in etnologia e antropologia sociale presso l'EHESS di Parigi, Francia (Tutor: Carlo Severi). È stata docente e ricercatrice presso l'Universidad Autónoma de Honduras e l'Universidad Tecnológica Centroamericana di Tegucigalpa. I suoi interessi di ricerca includono l'antropologia delle società della diaspora africana nei Caraibi e in America Latina, l'antropologia delle religioni afro-atlantiche, la possessione spirituale, la coscienza storica, l'etnia e la razza e la riflessività etnografica. All'Università di Pittsburgh ha tenuto i corsi "Religione e razza", "Dal Vodou alla Santeria, le religioni della diaspora dell'Africa occidentale" e "Guarigione, sciamanesimo e possessione degli spiriti". Il suo libro *Healing the Dead. Memory and Spirit Possession in the Garifuna Dugu of Honduras* sarà pubblicato dalla serie "Afro-Latin America", Cambridge University Press, Harvard University. Attualmente è membro della Association for the Study of the Global African Diaspora (ASWAD).

Resumen

¿Yo, poseída? Interpretar la posesión espiritual a través de la reflexividad etnográfica. Un estudio de caso Afro-hondureño

Este artículo explora las condiciones de producción de conocimiento etnográfico durante mi trabajo de campo sobre la posesión de espíritus en el *Dugu*, la religión practicada por los Garífunas, una comunidad afro-amerindia del norte de Honduras. Basándome en mi viaje de novata a potencial sacerdotisa, pero también de etnógrafa a

antropóloga, argumentaré la validez de poner mi propio cuerpo y subjetividad a favor de la observación participante como una poderosa herramienta etnográfica para abordar este fenómeno. El tipo de investigación antropológica que defiendo en este trabajo no es ni una perspectiva religiosa estrictamente nativa, ni un frío análisis científico distante. Por el contrario, prestaré mucha atención a la interacción entre la práctica de la posesión de espíritus de los Garífunas y mi propia experiencia de posesión tal y como la interpretaron mis anfitriones. Mi intención aquí es mostrar que mi participación personal en una religión basada en la posesión funcionó como un mediador del significado de fenómenos difíciles de captar únicamente desde una perspectiva intelectual y externa.

Palabras claves: posesión de espíritus, reflexividad etnográfica, iniciación, Garífunas, Honduras

Résumé

Moi possédée? Comprendre la possession spirituelle à travers la réflexivité ethnographique. Une étude d'un cas Afro-hondurien

Cet article explore les conditions de la production du savoir ethnographique au cours de mon travail de terrain sur la possession spirituelle dans le *Dugu*, la religion pratiquée par les Garifunas, une communauté afro-amérindienne du nord du Honduras. En m'appuyant sur mon parcours de novice à prêtresse potentielle, mais aussi d'ethnographe à anthropologue, je soutiendrai la validité de la mise en exposition de mon propre corps et de ma subjectivité en faveur de l'observation participante comme outil ethnographique puissant pour aborder ce phénomène. Le type d'investigation anthropologique que je défends dans cet article n'est ni une perspective religieuse strictement indigène, ni une analyse scientifique froide et distante. Au contraire, j'accorderai une attention particulière à l'interaction entre la pratique de la possession par les esprits chez les Garifunas et ma propre expérience de la possession telle qu'elle a été interprétée par mes hôtes. Mon intention ici est de montrer que mon implication personnelle dans une religion basée sur la possession a fonctionné comme un médiateur de sens pour des phénomènes difficiles à saisir uniquement d'un point de vue intellectuel et extérieur.

Mots-clés: possession d'esprit, réflexivité ethnographique, initiation, Garifunas, Honduras

Abstract

Me Possessed? Interpreting Spirit Possession Through Ethnographic Reflexivity. An Afro-Honduran Case Study

This Article explores the conditions of ethnographical knowledge production during my fieldwork on spirit possession in *Dugu*, the religion practiced by the Garifuna, an

Afro-Amerindian community of northern Honduras. Drawing on my journey from novice to potential priestess, but also from an ethnographer to anthropologist, I will argue the validity of putting my own body and subjectivity in favor of full participation as a powerful ethnographical tool to approach this phenomenon. The kind of anthropological investigation that I defend in this paper is neither a strictly native religious perspective, neither a cold distant scientific analysis. Instead, I will give close attention to the interplay of the Garifuna's practice of spirit possession and my own experience of possession as it was interpreted by my hosts. My intention here, is to show that my personal involvement in a possession-based religion worked as a meaning mediator to phenomena difficult to grasp solely from an intellectual and outsider's perspective.

Keywords: spirit possession, ethnographic reflexivity, initiation, Garifuna, Honduras

