

# THE CULTURAL EFFECTS OF NEO-PAGANISM'S RITUAL CREATIVITY

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In the last fifty years, different spiritual movements—that do not correspond to the church model and that—have emerged, due to their fluid and dynamic character, have propitiated an advance of global networks and have contributed to making specialized frontiers increasingly porous and permeable fields. A range of practices and beliefs related to Neopaganism, New Age, and neo-Indianisms/neo-ethnicities have thus emerged. These three spiritual modalities are inscribed in differentiable ideologies that intertwine the spiritual, the therapeutic, the political and the identity (Gobin, 2015). They concur in a search for bodily knowledge and techniques that recover the spiritual meaning of life as a way out of the materialism of the consumer culture in force in these times (Heelas, 1996). However, they also have different emphases that distinguish them, although they are constantly intertwined and often share common elements and can even be practiced in the same ceremony.

Inspired by local and foreign religious traditions, as well as mystical and esoteric knowledge (Magliocco, 2014: 1), adherents of these three alternative spiritualities have invented and imagined a wide variety of emergent rituals (Grimes, 1992). Prominent among these are those performed at archaeological sites. Paradoxically, these recreations or inventions also affect rescue projects of ancient ceremonial centers and ancestral rituals, imprinting them with an ambivalence of hybrid cultural goods that contribute to rescue and essentialize ancient cultures.

On the other hand, practitioners of spirituality have turned archaeological centers into “the new sanctuaries of a global spirituality” (De la Torre, 2019), as well as sacred places where the cult of numerous “neo-tribes” (Maffesoli, 1990: 32) takes place. The members of these ephemeral communities forged around empathy and emotions participate today in the “dynamic process of symbolic appropriation of

the past” identified by Jacques Galinier and Antoinette Molinié (2006: 19). See, for example, the case of those of neo-druids (Blain and Wallis, 2004), new agers (Lucas, 2007; Card, 2019) and neo-Indians (Galinier & Molinié, 2006; Molinié, 2012) who perform rituals at archaeological sites during solstices and equinoxes. Their action is mediated and enhanced by commercially driven tourism and entertainment industries, without which we cannot explain the current emergence of mystical spiritual tourism (York, 1999).

These rituals are part of a cycle of ceremonies of a polyform network of spiritual seekers on a transnational scale. However, the dialogical relations between the local and the global characteristic of Neo-paganism, Neo-Indianism, and New Age, as well as their intertwined trajectories and circuits, have given rise to several problems. Indeed, the identitary uses of archaeological sites allow the possibility of updating the memory and cultural promotion of traditional practices and historical spaces. They also make the definition of “heritage” a field of intersection and an arena of tension where different agents (the original actors, state institutions, tourism service companies, and the new celebrants) fight for the legitimate definition in a field crossed by different definitions and by the opposing uses that other agents impose on it. Likewise, they encourage the opening to alternative uses to those proposed and controlled by the State, evidencing contradictions and paradoxes in managing tangible and intangible heritage.

This special issue is the result of an open call and invitation to bring together well-known researchers who, without being part of a seminar or a research network, were conducting studies in different and distant places and who agreed to guide their reflections with the following questions: Is neo-paganism a phenomenon equivalent to neo-Indianism, but in different contexts of global/local interaction? Can New Age be thought of as a global spiritual matrix decontextualized and decontextualizing ancestral traditions? What is the history of the encounter between New Age and these ancestral traditions of America and Europe? Does it produce the same effects of recreation of ethnonational religions? Are different ritualized configurations produced? What is the place of popular religiosities in these configurations? Do they share circuits of global circulation or are specialized circuits constituted? Where do the crossings occur and where are tensions and differentiations

generated and what revitalizing, hybridizing, or essentializing effects do they generate?

Ten articles compose this special issue. Each one explores the juxtapositions and intersections between the New Age phenomenon, Neopaganism, and its articulations with neo-Indianism (in Latin American countries) and ethnopaganism (in the old continent). This is a novel topic capturing the interest of different anthropologists in different and remote parts of the world. Therefore, it was important to concentrate different works in one journal in order to break down academic regionalisms and language barriers. For the first time in its history, the journal *Social Sciences and Religion* publishes this dossier in a bilingual version (Spanish and English) to recognize the flows between different fields and scales where neo-pagan ritual practice takes place.

The research articles in this issue add to the several recent ethnographic studies that have explored these axes of discussion. In recent years, Jutta Leskovar and Raimund Karl (2018) have emphasized the organizational principles and innovations of New Age and neo-pagan rituals taking place at various European archaeological sites. Renée de la Torre, Cristina Gutiérrez Zúñiga and Nahayeilli Juárez (2013, 2016) have argued for the existence of a Latin American New Age generated by the delocalization of Latin American folk and ethnic traditions and their reformulation as spiritual and therapeutic paths accessible in a global market, but also effective in raising global awareness against the destruction of sacred territories, the preservation of nature and the conservation of ethnic cultures. De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga (2017) have even exposed the decolonizing potential of neo-indianist movements, revaluing precisely the poles excluded from the project of modernity: the indigenous, nature, the feminine, magic, intuition, and emotion (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Shamanic ceremony for a group of Italian travelers in an archaeological zone. Chichen Itza, Mexico. Source: Renée de la Torre March 21, 2012.

## **A kaleidoscopic reading of the glocal effects of neo-pagan spirituality**

The fact of gathering ten articles on neo-paganism, considering its presence and practice in different countries, shows us that we are facing a glocal event. Neo-paganism is a disenchanting exit from modernity, Christianity, and capitalism that seeks a sacred horizon in nature and in the pre-Christian traditions of both the Old World and the New World.

York (2009) characterized neo-paganism as a segmented, polycentric, and integrated network. This definition recognizes that, although it functions as a transnational network, it is segmented by the activity of different autonomous and sometimes even conflicting cells. The neopagan movement is not acephalous but polycephalous, there are different leaderships, although it is recognized that the agents and communities that conform it are interrelated in the network that integrates and articulates them, although it does not cohere or homogenize them.

This means that it is not enough to define and study it from a global perspective (from above and from the Global North) that privileges a look whose starting point is the idea of the network and its articulation with the global market; and that orients the look of the study from the perspective of the cosmopolitan agents of the Global North, who seek to experience the alternative spirituality to neo-capitalist modernity in the horizons that were denied by the project of rationalized, industrialized, and colonialist modernity. As Thomas Csordas put it, the risk of looking only from this scale makes the assumption that:

the cultural influence of globalization is unidirectional, from a globalizing center to passive periphery, with religion a neocolonial form of cultural imperialism. The empirical problematic in this case would be to determine whether this centrifugal impulse is towards the imposition or reimposition of religious master narratives on a global scale, and whether such an impulse is bound to fragment like a shattered mirror as it becomes instantiated in local cultural settings (Csordas, 2009: 3).

On the other hand, it is not enough to understand it fragmentarily from the monographs of communities enclosed within themselves and the places where they are celebrated, because although the local concretions are taken into account, the fact that the actors, ceremonies, and places are part of a global spiritual network requires that their inscription in a simultaneous time and a scale of interconnections between different localities and cultures be taken into account

As Argyriadis and De la Torre (2008) had pointed out, we are facing a phenomenon that demands bifocal lenses to address glocalization. This concept contributed by Robertson (1997) is useful to understand global modernity but bearing in mind that: “just as the local is globalized, the global is also localized. Both poles form two sides of the same coin, which interact producing the most diverse and contrasting effects” (De la Torre, 2001: 101).

Indeed, neo-paganism—as developed by François Gauthier in this magazine—is energized by the spiritual quests of cosmopolitan agents whose exoticized gazes on the distant, the magical, the pure and the ancestral lead them to the search for rituals of reconnection with their inner self, with their energy, with enchanted nature, with magic, with shamanism. Moreover, although this is a movement that has as its hallmark the autonomic perspective of its spirituality, it is mediated by

large cultural industries (tourism, market, literature, natural, ecological, light, and New Age consumption). However, it articulates other scales in which we can no longer appreciate only the deterritorialization of an esoteric mystical nebula (as defined by Champion, 1990), but a set of ethnographic studies on polycentric communities that allows us to appreciate the different ways in which neo-paganism is re-territorialized with different effects of meaning.

This issue includes a theoretical review that dialogue the proposals emanating from studies carried out at different scales and thus, seeks to circumvent this limitation, as can be seen in Gauthier's theoretical text. However, as a whole, the sum of the articles allows us to approach the dynamics of the multi-situated activities of the network of neo-pagan spirituality in order to appreciate them like a kaleidoscope with which to dynamically recompose the flows in different directions and the interactions between different scales, different places, different actors and in continuous intersection with other logics that overflow the spiritual.

On this scale, Denise Lombardi offers an ethnography on the mystical experience of a group of French tourists guided along the shamanic route in the Otomí ethnic region. In her ethnography one can see how there is a translation of the indigenous into the language and sensibility of Western spirituality, or rather of the spiritualization of the experience translated into the somatization of energy. The spiritual tourists lived their spiritual climax. Most likely, these travelers returned home thinking that the rituals were genuine. It is likely that some even selected this experience as something special and that it now forms part of their own menu of personalized spirituality (Champion, 1990). On the other hand, we may suspect that what they experienced and somatized as authentic were Otomí rituals that previously practiced a syncretic tradition but had been recently reinvented as Aztecs and have been spiritualized in the present, as Susanna Rostas develops in her article.

Surely the French travelers never wondered how their journey influenced the lives of the indigenous people and the guardians of the tradition. Nor did they learn how they saw them, or how the supposed shaman adjusted and redesigned his performance to the expectations of their exoticizing gaze and began to speak in terms of energies and even chakra alignment. What is undeniable is that they participated, lived and

felt in their innermost being a shamanic ritual. As Yael Dansac develops in her ethnography on Carnac in France, it is necessary to attend to how personal transformation is experienced at archaeological sites. It is certainly useful to understand the narratives that redefine these sites as sacred places and energetic sites in the circuits of neopagan practitioners.

However, what is desirable for their study is to conduct multilocal ethnographies, but this is not always possible. This dossier—like other collective publications—means efforts to place in parallel the descriptions of the movements and their ceremonies in distant places—apparently disconnected—that are considered sacred or energetic centers and that in parallel are both places of tourist attraction and of energy-charging practices. This allows us to recognize these places as multi-practiced spaces crossed by varied and contrary logics of experimentation. At the same time, it allows us to capture simultaneity. For example, the cases of Carnac, France (Dansac), and of the main ceremonial archaeological centers in Mexico (De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga) coincide with a global event called Planetary Harmonic Convergence organized by José Arquéelles (a spiritual leader who is Chicano and therefore overcomes the North-South divisions). It was the first ceremony where New Age leaders converged with spiritual leaders of ethnic groups, and was held simultaneously in different key places of the neo-pagan network. The most relevant aspect of this event—as its agents recognize—is that it constitutes the ceremony from which the neo-pagan ritualization of equinoxes and solstices made sense since it served as the connector of the local and national circuits of a global network (not only imagined but practiced) articulated by ceremonial time (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Summer solstice celebration at Stonehenge. Wiltshire, UK.  
Source: Yael Dansac, June 20, 2017.

These ethnographic passages can also be richly complemented by the article offered by Quetzil Castañeda in which he addresses and critically questions the effects of these ritual exchanges on the invention of Mayanized shamans in the Yucatan Peninsula and exposes cases in which “the people of these communities of otherness respond, engage and propitiate the spiritual quest, as well as reject it as another form of neocolonial and capitalist imperialism.” Both perspectives are valid. Reading them in parallel allows us to appreciate that both are intertwined, and that their interaction produces multidirectional hybridization effects and generates cultural disputes. The French lived an experience that will perhaps be part of their own menu of personalized spirituality (as developed by Champion, 1990). While the celebrants of their shamanic ritual also transformed themselves with the appearance of more authenticity and incorporated into their language the terms of spiritual



alignment, or have contributed to an apparent essentialization of their ancestral tradition.

Approaches from the local scale allow us to reinstate a blind spot of global perspectives: places of celebration are not empty spaces or lands to be discovered. In reality, they are territories that function as arenas where memories and identities are disputed between ethno-national movements, indigenous communities, government agencies, and tourism companies as developed by De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga. Therefore, they are not only scenarios practiced by cosmopolitans (archaeological areas, ritual specialists, narratives, healing technologies) but anthropological places loaded with history, identity and recognition (Augé, 1998). In this sense, they are also valued and safeguarded by ethnopaganist subjects who value the revitalization of their ancient rituals and shrines as practices inscribed in struggles to recognize of the rights of native peoples. In the case of Lithuania, the Romuva movement, detailed by Zornitsa Petrova, recovers and reinvents the Jore spring festival by reviving Baltic rituals to the god of thunder, fire, and light in order to recover the Romuva tradition, while at the same time inscribing itself in a project that seeks to counteract the authority of the Catholic Church. In Teotihuacan, Mexico, the Mexicanidad movement seeks to recover the indigenous memory and thereby dignify the original peoples who are socially and racially discriminated against.

It also turns out that the practices of neo-pagan celebrants function as a catapult to put native practices into transnational circulation. Such as the ritual ingestion of peyote, yagé or ayahuasca, whose transnational circulation also catapults shamans, medicine men, and grandmothers of the tradition (who previously served as healers and ritual specialists and guardians of ethnic traditions) who now travel and constantly participate in ceremonies of the neo-pagan network and contribute to imprint a seal of authentication to their ceremonies. We could even speak of a kind of spiritual gentrification effect (Possamaï, 2002, 2015) of national and community assets as detailed by Alhena Fernandez in analyzing the cultural and political effects of the globalization of ayahuasca in the countries of the Amazon basin. Going even further, during the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020, the neo-pagan virtual celebration was set up to reactivate and spiritually connect all the megalith temples present in Malta in a network of sacred energy through a ceremony located in a

cyberspace meeting place. A sort of second harmonic Convergence but digitized. As Kathryn Rountree explains: “This project exemplifies the intersubjective intertwining of physical sacred sites and online sacred space, the collective journey in shamanic consciousness and individual physical journeys.” She calls this movement the new Westernized paganism.

In sum, this special issue allows us to de-center the idea of globalization perceived from the polarity of cosmopolitan centers by presenting different articles based on ethnographies. These were carried out in different countries and focused on different movements, showing how ceremonial practices are inscribed in three socio-spatial scales that are also scales inscribed in different fields of power, influence and relevance, but which at the same time are interconnected (Çaglar & Glick Schiller, 2011). On the transnational scale is the spiritual network made up of workshops, schools, movements, and even cultural industries that produce the meaning of a global neo-pagan spirituality; the national scale involves governmental and commercial agencies in the production of the definition of heritage; and the local scale is where the struggle for the rescue of ancient vernacular and pre-Christian traditions takes place.

The protagonists of the neopagan movement are both the seekers of exotic spiritualities and the defenders and guardians of indigenous or ethno-paganist vernacular traditions, and the functioning of the global network cannot be understood by looking at only one of the poles of globalization. This is why we are pleased to combine these articles in the same issue, as it allows us to approach the dynamics of the multi-situated activities of the neo-pagan spirituality network, to appreciate them as a kaleidoscope capable of visualizing the dynamic re-compositions generated by the interactions between different scales, different places, different actors and in continuous intersection with other logics that overflow the spiritual.

### **Intersections neopaganism / neoindianism / ethnopaganism / indianism: disputes over heritage**

Different authors in this dossier describe how a diversity of actors ritually uses archaeological sites, and how this ritual appropriation is

part of processes of identity construction and affirmation that find a way of legitimization in the historical and memorial density that these sites evoke and seem to safeguard. It's interesting to follow this plot as a reading key that in fact, crosses some cases of both neo-pagan and neo-Indian movements. The search for these keys corresponds to the objectives of this dossier.

In both types of cases, we can see how identity groups assert themselves as depositaries of an ethno-national root or essence alternative to the one proposed and sacralized by the state or by the majority church. For example, the Joré ritual described by Petrova manages to appropriate a ceremonial complex consisting of an archaeological site, a museum and an ancient astronomical observatory, during which participants “remember” their traditional ethnic heritage, aligned with natural rhythms. The Romuva movement can be counterposed to Catholic hegemony from this place of memory: “The celebration represents a symbolic inversion of the dominant narrative of identity, where Catholicism is erased while ethno-paganism is represented as deeply interwoven with Lithuanian identity.”

Something similar happens with the Mexicanity movement described by Rostas, whose predilection for archaeological sites as a place to celebrate their ritual dances challenges the Catholic temples, as they are valued as traditional sites for the syncretic Catholic conchera dance and this entails a challenge to the hegemony that Catholicism has imposed on the national identity. In such celebrations, Rostas states, the archaeological sites destroyed by the church in the first stages of the conquest-evangelization of New Spain, are reactivated as living ceremonial centers in which in a very significant way “sowings of name” (Mexica baptisms) are carried out, as initiation rites that signal the adoption of a Mexica identity.

Nevertheless, these rites at archaeological sites are not only symbolic counter-hegemonic acts to the power of the Catholic Church. They also challenge the national state's narrative on heritage, for—as De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga point out—the government institutions responsible for national heritage (backed by multinational organizations such as UNESCO) seek to preserve archaeological sites as historical vestiges, museum sites “witnesses of a past and grandiose time of the Nation”. At the same time, the various ritual practitioners seek to

experience the ancestral memory that, for them, is alive and deposited in those sites. “This experience—De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga tell us—has an eminently collective character—there is even talk of genetic memory and collective unconscious—and serves to anchor a promising vision of the future as a return to the times before the conquest, in the present time that accumulates more than five hundred years of colonial domination and autochthonous resistance.”

It is key to recognize both in cases of neo/pagan movements in Europe, as well as in cases of neo/Indian movements in Latin American countries (such as Mexico), that the multiplication of actors and creative ritual uses of archaeological sites puts on the table the current management capacity of the State itself over these places of memory. An element that Gauthier in his initial reflection relates to the contemporary decline of nation-states. Even in the monolithic conservationist and nationalist logic of the states themselves regarding the management of these sites, we can see the existence of tensions and contradictions derived from the advance of the rights of the so-called original peoples, the multiethnic discourses of the nation, the growing importance and economic value of cultural/spiritual tourism, both national and foreign, which leads to the implementation of local development policies based on tourist services and the so-called heritage industry, responsible for the promotion and exploitation of these sites, rather than their conservation.

Access to archaeological sites usually controlled by the State has thus become a matter of both ideological and legal dispute. Both Rostas and De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga point out how, in the case of indigenous people and Mexicanists, Mexican state authorities severely limit the use of archaeological sites, claiming the imperative of their conservation. They claim that such access constitutes a cultural and religious right as original peoples, considered heirs/descendants of the builders of the sites. The different European neo-pagan ethnic movements face similar situations. The Rainbow Family group, described by Katri Ratia, poses a different situation: it does not explicitly identify itself as pagan, but in its European strand, it holds its ritual gatherings at archaeological sites; it isn't particularly sensitive to minority rights, and doesn't always relate to archaeological sites in terms of direct ancestry; its forms of festive ritual celebration and use of sites (such as sleeping in stone caves where Etruscan tombs are found) blatantly violate basic

conservationist regulations for archaeological sites. They denounce such regulations as oppressive and based on a passive sacredness modeled on dominant religions, specifically on Protestantism, and therefore violating their particular ritual forms. Ratia takes advantage of this contrasting case to raise the problematic relationship between intangible heritage, religious rights, and legitimacy: Who can claim their legitimate, authentic and traditional religious expressions and on what grounds?

Clearly, the argumentation of the practitioners themselves, as presented in the cases of this dossier, is diverse. One of their main differences crosses both neo-Indian and neo-pagan movements: while some currents are articulated around the defense of ethno-nationalist ideals as part of processes of resistance to domination/colonization (for example, the Romuva ethnopagan movement or the Mexicanists who, according to Rostas, assert their exclusive right to the ritual use of the pyramids vs. Tibetan lamas) others, such as the Rainbow family participants articulate around cosmopolitan, universalist and eclectic ideals to deliberately blend different traditions in search of experiences of contact with nature, and the neo-pagan visitors to the megaliths of Carnac described by Dansac have turned archaeological sites into enchanted places, practiced as “sites for contact with nature, sites of access to energies and part of personal trajectories of spiritual growth and transformation.”

Both the neo-pagan universe located primarily in Europe, the United States and Canada, and the universe of reinventions of the indigenous past sought by Indianists and neo-Indianists in the Latin American context, are internally differentiated as they are made up of heterogeneous movements, with different scales and translocal and transnational connections. Within them, we find “radically different orientations towards issues such as ethnicity, nationality and the relationship with space”, as described by Ratia. However, the ethnographies reported in this dossier show that the events or gatherings constitute meeting places for this diversity, where one and the other constantly exchange their identities either as seekers of experiences or as guardians of tradition in a game of interchangeable identity mirrors depending on the context. The interaction of neo/pagan and neo/Indian celebrants with traditions generates identity reinventions that take place at archaeological sites. Although one may accuse the other of xenophobia

or cultural extractivism; both orientations seem to be part of a process that Ratia describes as “rearrangement of cultural boundaries” that mobilizes the imaginaries of places and of the past time they evoke, in a contradictory dynamic of reaffirmation of identities in resistance and emergence of globalized sensibilities and planetary ethics. On the other hand, the intractability of the terms neo-paganism and neo-Indianism in other latitudes emphasizes the identity and even political problems that exist in the cultural contexts in which these concepts are applied. In Europe, neo-paganism promotes a return to “native” traditions that are not characterized as indigenous, and in some neo-pagan groups, the reconstruction of ethnic spiritualities through a process of reconnection with extinct societies has been associated with extreme right-wing movements that advocate anti-immigration policies (François, 2018). In Latin America, neo-Indianism is linked to nationalist and ethnic discourses that feed on re-formulations of the past of native peoples that are not understood as pagan. Since the use of this term is restricted to the European space and its Christianization process (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Energy charging ritual at an archaeological site. El Ixtépete, Jalisco, Mexico.

Source: Renée de la Torre, March 21, 2009.

## **The production of material and immaterial “sacred” spaces**

The articles presented in this dossier show the impact of a global phenomenon on the local production of sacralized, material and immaterial spaces, in which romanticized, mystical and exotic visions of extinct cultures, archaeological sites and native peoples converge. A vision of nature permeates these ideologies as a source of knowledge and a catalyst for work on oneself, which is inscribed in the matrix of meaning promoted by global New Age spirituality (Ivakhiv, 2003: 110). At the same time, this vision that crosses diverse latitudes and recycles different ontologies is also nourished by local elements that anchor it—not without tensions—to particular cultural and historical contexts.

In the texts published here, the transversal reading of the identity, ritual, and spiritual uses accorded to ancient vestiges brings the following lines of convergence: the conceptualization of extinct societies and indigenous peoples as bridges of access to a lost, and at the same time ritually accessible, knowledge about nature, the cosmos and the human being; the dressing of archaeological sites as spaces where it is possible to access other realities; the search for a transcendental experience that arises from the physical and/or emotional investment of the participant in a specific place; and the ritual production of an experience lived as authentic and even traditional for those who share the ethos of contemporary alternative spiritualities.

From north to south, the authors delve into the imaginaries conferred to ancient and contemporary societies. In his theoretical reflection on the components of “Maya” spirituality, Castañeda reconstructs the origins of the hegemonic globalized discourses that have long invested this ethnic group, its ancestors and its vestiges with a halo of mysticism, turning them into the foundation, method and objective of a successful spiritual market. Taking as case studies the massive ritual and spiritual practices carried out in Teotihuacán and Chichén-Itzá, De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga also point out the existence of a doctrine shared by a sector of the Mexican movement, which considers the original peoples as depositaries of an initiatory and secret knowledge. However, this romantic notion is not limited to extinct cultures, since, as analyzed by Fernández, the ritual consumption of Ayahuasca recreates forms of unequal relationships based on exoticism and distance that find their referents of legitimacy in the imaginaries of the Amazon basin and the

indigenous peoples who live there. These “others” are valued in the West as guardians of a millenary knowledge of the use of yagé and embody the idealized figure of the indigenous people as primitive connoisseurs of nature.

In Europe, similar imaginaries are evoked in various practices inspired by both New Age and neo-paganism. Petrova discusses this for the case of different pagan circles in Lithuania, where the worldview of the ancestors is considered to be focused on nature as a source of life and wisdom. This constitutes a corpus of “living” knowledge preserved in oral tradition that has been passed from generation to generation as an unbroken spiritual tradition. In the contemporary rituals analyzed by Dansac in northwestern France, this same idea is reproduced by those who consider the ancient megalith builders as a people who lived in communion with nature and had knowledge of its healing and revitalizing powers. Folkloric practices and local oral traditions are understood as proof of the continuous transmission of this way of life, which can be ritually “reactivated.”

The ethnographies presented demonstrate that the imaginaries and representations of the original cultures are also conferred to their material vestiges. Pyramids, megaliths and temples form the material supports of ancient and contemporary worldviews. In her study of Rainbow Gatherings, Ratia argues that various Etruscan archaeological remains are considered sacred sites that emphasize connections between past and present, provide contexts for experiencing holistic healing, and catalyze visions and introspections. In the dances of the Mexican concheros, Rostas explores similar conceptions of pre-Columbian pyramids as portals to other dimensions, places animated by occult forces and recipients of energies that were experienced by ancient societies. Indeed, discourses on sacredness and energy as intrinsic qualities of archaeological sites cut across all the geographical and cultural contexts addressed by the dossier authors. As Gauthier highlights, these spaces have become living theaters and symbolic actors of ritual constructions, spiritual crossbreeding and reappropriations of the past (Figure 4).





Figure 4: Spiritual tourists during the descent of Kukulcan (the Feathered Serpent). Chichén Itzá. Source: Renée de la Torre, March 21, 2012).

The various ceremonies carried out at archaeological sites produce in those involved a feeling of connection to other realities, and also somatic and emotional experiences that are interpreted as spiritual or transcendent (Dansac, 2020). The material and ancestral dimension of these spaces legitimizes and authenticates a myriad of purposes that converge in the search for self and physical, mental and spiritual well-being. The importance given to these sites as objects and spaces that materialize a metaphysical experience is addressed by Lombardi in his study of French spiritual tourists who come to Mexico for stays presided over by a shaman of Otomi origin. Nodal spaces considered sacred (De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga), such as Teotihuacán or Malinalco, serve to give legitimacy to a form of neo-shamanism conceived and structured by Western actors as “traditional.” They also serve to imbue the notions mobilized in the rituals with authenticity and validate the participants’ experiences.

Although most authors present data indicating that physical contact between the practitioner and the archaeological site is catalytic and formative of a spiritual experience, the current pandemic context has witnessed the adaptability of actors to produce these effects without the need to be physically “there.” Today, various digital media can reproduce images and sounds of archaeological sites that, coupled with

real-time virtual communication between participants, can produce dematerialized sacred spaces. Rountree provides us with an analysis of this phenomenon, so far scarcely explored. By conducting a virtual ethnography on the online transmission of the summer solstice at Stonehenge and the pagan rituals performed in Zoom by Maltese circles, the author questions the hegemony of sacred spaces as places that must have material support. Her data show that it is possible to participate and co-create a spiritual experience at a distance, in which materiality and immateriality are combined.

In sum, the authors of the ten articles that make up this dossier present us with different critical readings of a glocal phenomenon in full expansion and in constant transformation, which makes the production of sacralized spaces a characteristic component of the new spiritualities.

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