



Body in the Brazilian New Age ethos

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Abstract

This exploratory paper aims to discuss the body in the Brazilian New Age. In the first part, we deal with the New Age in Brazil and how its materiality contributes to this ethos. Ultimately, we present the body in the Brazilian New Age, briefly dealing with health and sexuality. The last part was elaborated in dialogs with more general definitions of the theme by international authors (Heelas, Hanegraaff), interspersed with the ideas of authors who have researched the theme specifically in Brazil.

Keywords Corporeality · Sexuality · Religion and health · Religion and politics

The New Age is not exactly a “religion” in the most popular sense, which considers institutionalization and social organization (i.e., churches, temples, traditions). There are no constituted dogmas, no delineated organizational structure, and its followers are far from having an instituted office or a more significant agreement regarding their beliefs and habits. However, if the scholar adopts the definition of Hanegraaff (1999, p. 372) that religion is any symbolic system that influences human actions, providing possibilities to maintain ritualistic contacts between the everyday world and a more general metempirical framework of meanings, it is possible to study the New Age and its surroundings as something religious.

The New Age has become much more of an etic category than an emic nomenclature (Gilhus 2013). To see it, the scholar must go beyond and perceive it as a cutout of much broader social characteristics. One needs to look at other forms and retrieve daily experiences that constitute the social, religious fabric (Sutcliffe 2014, p. 17). Today it makes much more sense to talk about a New Age *ethos* —that is, of values and feelings typical of the New Age Movement — than of cohesive social groups in the mold of what we understand as churches or religious congregations.

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There is an overvaluation of consciousness and feelings in this New Age environment. The New Agers emphasize well-being, a state of fullness of mind and spirit (Heelas 1996, 2008). However, they cannot achieve such a psychospiritual state without the body. Therefore, to perceive the dimension of materiality present in the New Age, one needs specialized attention.

According to Hanegraaff (1996, p. 222), New Agers have an internal dilemma on the relationship between body and spirit. Both Gnostic monism and Cartesian dualism did not solve the puzzle. New Agers seek an integrated world. The matter is part of the body-mind-spirit triad, a vital element of the New Age cosmology. In other words, the spirit participates as the mind/psyche interacts with the matter. It is a continuum in which all these dimensions merge, interacting without a hierarchy. Caring for the body is an inherent part of caring for the spirit. This holistic vision perceives the being as an integrated whole, which opposes the Christian body-spirit duality.

Besides the body, the scholar may also notice other elements that help to form this ethos and are, at the same time, fed back by it. They compose what the New Agers effectively do in their daily lives, giving materiality to their rituals. Things such as drums, clothes, necklaces, incense, and crystals concretize a peculiar way of life that feeds their beliefs, gives them structure, and makes their concreteness possible.

This paper intends to meet this need, aiming to discuss the body in Brazilian New Age. In the first part, we will deal with the New Age in Brazil and how its materiality contributes to this ethos. In the second section, we present the general New Age understanding on body. Ultimately, we will present the question of the body in the Brazilian New Age.

The New Age in Brazil

For some scholars, the New Age circuit is restricted to Anglo-American and Western European countries only (e.g., Hanegraaff 1996, p. 13). However, Paul Heelas extended this scope to other countries from specific manifestations of what he understood as a broader social movement. In this case, modestly and sporadically, Brazil appears nominally mentioned by Heelas (1996, p. 121).

In Brazil, the academic interest in New Age is still rare (Guerriero et al. 2016). It is often identified as a fad, as something distant from the Brazilian Christian cultural roots. On the other hand, there is also much resistance to self-identification as a “New Ager” among the adepts themselves. However, undeniably, something new in the Brazilian religious field has been present since at least the 1980s, as evidenced by a few studies (cf. Amaral 2000; D’Andrea 2000; Magnani 1999; Soares 1994). Although often overlooked, the study of religion should not ignore what those people are doing, and it implies recognizing that there is New Age in Brazilian society. To better understand what is going on, it is necessary to briefly retrace the historical past and consider the nuances of what has been called the New Age Movement.

The New Age had its origins in the countercultures of the 1960s, mainly in the USA, England, and other Western European countries (Heelas 1996, p. 42). It represented a challenge to the dominant behavioral, moral, and religious values. Perhaps,

the refusal of authority and the appreciation of the search for inner truths were its most apparent marks. Although distant, all this ended up having some echo in Latin America and Brazil (Magnani 2000, p. 15).

To understand this, one must remember what Hanegraaff (1996) differentiated as the New Era *stricto* sensu and the New Era *lato* sensu. In its early years, the New Age emphasis revolved around millenarian groups that rejected the current world and proposed a new alternative society by breaking values and cultivating new habits. Several groups were formed, some of them with very sectarian characteristics. This period, which lasted until the mid-1980s, was that of the New Age *stricto* sensu. In Brazil, some groups were formed as well, especially with the arrival of religions from India, among them the Hare Krishna movement (Guerriero, 2000) and the Rajneesh movement (Jungblut and Adami 2017; Guerriero 2003), transcendental meditation (Prandi 1991), and the creation of alternative rural communities of a spiritualist nature, such as the communities of Trigueirinho (Camurça and Campanha 2016) and those created in Alto Paraíso, Goiás (Santos 2016; Maia 2018). On the other hand, the so-called New Era *lato* sensu began to predominate in the last decades of the twentieth century. It does not mean the disappearance of these previous movements, which exist until the present day. However, this new configuration means something much more profound and broader, influencing the cultural characteristics of our times that go beyond the formation of specific groups.

One can see such formation everywhere the New Age is noticed, including Brazil. There is no concern among the followers to belong to a New Age religion or identify themselves as New Agers. On the contrary, it has become ubiquitous to perceive believers of the most varied religions incorporating New Age elements. Simultaneously, sectors of the traditional religions are “New Aging” themselves, and society began to incorporate this new ethos, turning it familiar, not so discrete from other social values (Camurça and Campanha 2016; Guerriero et al. 2016; Stern and Guerriero 2020). In some cases, such ethos is so widespread that some scholars even consider it difficult to distinguish from popular culture (cf. De La Torre 2016). Regardless of whether they follow a particular religion or not, different subjects can use various New Age objects such as crystals, gnome images, dream catchers, or clothing pieces. There is a set of materialities in this New Age ethos. One can even think of a New Age aesthetic, a way of being in the world that incorporates a particular way of dressing, cult objects, and a preference for a particular way of eating.

Among the New Age ethos’ distinctive aspects, one can highlight the consumption of products that have become well-known through esoteric chain stores in large Brazilian cities. The best-known chain has been *Alemdalenda*, initially created by an esoteric priestess in 1988 and existing until today (Bezerra 2012, p. 38). In these, it was common to find esoteric books, New Age music albums, characteristic clothing, crystals, pyramids, gnome figures, and many other usual New Age utensils.

The esoteric stores contributed to the diffusion of the components of the New Age ethos in the country. In his research on esoteric spaces in Brazil, Magnani (1999) identified that such places are not only points of sales but posts for the exchange of New Age messages, for living experiences and courses that propagate the New Age values. The courses and workshops are negotiated merchandise, an aspect that covers the belief. In these, courses occur the material experience itself, in which the adepts interact with

others through their bodies. They are never merely theoretical. In general, they involve dances, therapies, and other bodily experiences. It is important to emphasize that there are no “teachers” in these workshops, but “facilitators” or “gurus,” people who have already run the path and now try to help others to do as well. The important thing is that individuals perform their own experience. In this sense, the body is an intermediary element. Without materiality, there would be no way to carry out the experience and the desired path of spiritual evolution that each New Age individual must follow.

In Brazilian medium and large cities, it is pervasive to come across yoga centers, spaces for meditation and personal growth, bookstores for self-help, and study centers focused on the millenary pearls of wisdom of traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Esotericism, and also traditional indigenous peoples. Holistic alternative healing centers bring together different healing practices not always accepted by modern biomedicine, sell their treatments using old, adapted instruments, or new creations resulting from the most different combinations. Add to this, there are many places for natural products and healthy eating, such as stores or restaurants. We are facing an enormous offer of practices and goods that value spiritual elevation and well-being. According to Magnani (1999), these holistic spaces bring together diverse elements such as objects, images, symbols, and a whole range of materials used in holistic practices. These elements stimulate the body’s senses. They also form a network where the New Agers transit and practice their experimentations (Amaral 2000; Campbell 1972). This network gives the New Age its material and social basis, where virtually its ethos manifests itself.

After the 1990s, these stores lost much space in Brazil. A similar thing was reported by Hanegraaff (1996) when describing European esoteric bookstores. The Dutch author says that such products, previously only sold in specialized places in Europe, started to be sold more commonly in general department stores. Thinking about the Brazilian scene, one finds colorful candles and incense in big supermarket chains today. In the 1980s, New Agers would need to go to a specific spiritualist store to buy such products.

It means that the New Age is more diffused today in Brazil. Its beliefs are also hybridized with other religious forms. The critical element that distinguishes it is personal spiritual evolution, a core myth among the New Age. The New Agers understands that there is no external god but that individuals carry within themselves a spark of the whole universe’s energy. Gods from different pantheons — i.e., angels, pre-Christian gods, elementals, spirit animals, Jesus, and Buddha — are worshiped as examples of enlightened beings and great masters or as psychic projections of this inner divine spark (Hanegraaff 1996). What matters, according to this vision, is the truth within each one.

New Age Materiality and Spirituality

Brazilian individuals committed to alternative doctrines and a strong creative spirit can indicate that such ideas have something in common. Fueled by the media, common traits emerge uniting such agents’ interests, leading to innovative syntheses. Thus, tarot readers, astrologers, urban shamans, and aura therapists

may conclude that each of them has found their way to a common goal of spiritual evolution, and they see all those paths as more or less equally valid. Furthermore, a subject who is not directly concerned with these practices can elaborate on these new values to their traditional lifestyle, without significant disruptions.

Whether in health, professional environment, or relationships, this spiritual search occurs materially in several domains of the Brazilian New Ager's life, although the central elements of this worldview are metempirical. New Age spirituality is not a matter of accepting doctrines formulated by others, but a highly individual search, which one must base on personal experience. Humankind's task is to transform the world into a better place by adopting a spiritual vision. Although they involve various spheres of social life, there is a central axis in these beliefs. Moreover, this axis is of a religious and spiritual nature. These values involved in the different spheres are becoming current, diffuse, and rooted in the broader Brazilian society (Guerriero 2018).

Following the steps pointed out by Peter van der Veer (2013), of a modern spirituality constituted simultaneously between the spiritual and the secular, we understand that this holds a wide range of material aspects. This intertwining between material and spiritual gives the contours of this modern ethos. There is an implication here, notably the question of corporeality.

For New Agers, the body mediates the path to the source of primordial energy. Such a path will lead individuals toward their evolutionary climb, the ultimate goal, to some extent resembling a vision of salvation. Physical exercises combined with rituals and the ingestion of entheogenic substances are standard practices in this process. For many Brazilian New Agers, body practices, alternative cures, natural nourishment, and other material activities are identified with spirituality. This is in keeping with the holistic view that sees no difference between matter and spirit.

However, one of the New Age main characteristics is that religious experiences are psychologized. As such, much of those practices and discourses revolve around abstract things such as "expansion of consciousness," "cosmic evolution," "extracorporeal experiences," "chakras," "energy fields," and "the development of the perfect self." New Age is guided by a holistic perspective in which mind, body, and spirit are interconnected (Cornejo Valle et al. 2014, p. 4489; Hanegraaff 1996, p. 54; Heelas 2008, p. 5; Stern et al. 2018, pp. 273–274).

According to Teixeira (2020, p. 77), the New Age therapeutic practices in Brazil aim, ultimately, at the elevation of consciousness rather than actions explicitly directed to the body. Since consciousness is responsible for constructing all reality, New Agers believe physical problems come from the mind, and only through the mind they can be cured.

The immanence of the New Age, instead of the traditional transcendence of traditional Christianity, is useful in the empirical world itself. One cannot speak of an escape from the material world, but precisely the opposite. There is a centrality of mediations in the rituals of the New Age. Through this materiality, mainly through the body, the New Agers realize their most in-depth religious experience. The spiritual elevation takes place through the immanence of matter.

Body in the Brazilian New Age

Under the aegis of holism, one will notice a strong belief in the New Age that the organism possesses a “hidden anatomy,” which is ultimately something metempirical that escapes the material study of religions. However, the belief that such “hidden anatomy” manifests in the physical body as much as through the physical body makes it possible to alter that “hidden anatomy” fosters a plethora of material practices. As Teixeira (2020, p. 63) explains, although the tone of New Age discourse is given to the individual self as a divine emanation, it is on the human body that the spiritual and therapeutic practices of the New Age fall.

As far as Brazil is concerned, New Age body practices are not very different from those observed outside the country. It is possible to notice dances, alternative therapies, the use of psychotropic substances, the call to free love, sexual experimentation, specific diets and clothing, body modifications such as piercings and tattoos, and one’s own body identity.

Although most New Agers seem to seek developing mind and spirituality, it is on the body that their rituals mainly act (Teixeira 2020, p. 64). Even practices that at first contact are metempirical can have a strong relationship with corporeality. In the case of channeling, the body of the medium is essential. The New Age medium acts as a channel to the spiritual world, in which beings of light communicate materially with the adepts through the organs of speech or the automatic writing of the medium (Hanegraaff 1996, p. 23). In other words, the channeled entities would objectively use the medium’s body to communicate with the other New Age practitioners (Hanegraaff 1996, p. 29).

As D’Andrea (2000, p. 71) explains, Brazilian New Agers use channeling to soften the Christian and Kardecist cosmology, the two largest religious groups in the country,¹ easing the Catholic burden of suffering and the Spiritist possibility of obsession. In this sense, Spiritist mediumship is re-signified in New Age channeling, and they cultivate the idea of free will more affirmatively and optimistically. In its extreme expression, Brazilian New Agers believe channeling promotes instantaneous transmutation of karma, diminishing the pain of redemption. This means that they choose to channel to avoid, on the one hand, the “adverse effects” of traditional Spiritist mediumship — the partial or total loss of the medium’s individuality during trance — and on the other, as an alternative to the physical suffering of the body, as opposed to practices for the spiritual development advocated by Christianity (e.g., fasting, penance, vigil, self-flagellation).

Since the New Agers believe that anyone can develop the ability to channel, many groups use practices to allow such a phenomenon to occur in the participants’ bodies. They can do this through breathing exercises and more specific forms of induction into altered states of consciousness, such as the ingestion of entheogens (Hanegraaff 2012). In the latter case, the scholar should note that when New Age

¹ According to Brazil’s religious census, 93% of the Brazilian population considers themselves Christian, and 2% Spiritist. All the other 13 religious groups officially listed by the Brazilian census are distributed among the remaining 5% of the population (IBGE 2010 Chart 1.4.1).

practitioners use substances such as LSD, marijuana, peyote, coca, or ayahuasca, they do not do so in search of recreational use. The alterations of consciousness provoked by neurochemical action are used as a means of spiritual connection.

In Brazil, it has attracted the attention of scholars of shamanism that white New Agers go to indigenous tribes to get in touch with entheogens. As Brazilian law tends to tolerate the consumption of plants such as ayahuasca and jurema only in a traditional and religious context, it is common for New Agers to go to indigenous tribes to have access to entheogens for their psychedelic spiritual experiences. Bezerra (2012, p. 81) and de Castro (2015, p. 296) mention how some Brazilian Wiccan covens tend to declare themselves as “shamanic” in addition to the title of “pagan” to use ayahuasca, wachuma, and peyote in their rituals. Gomes (2013, pp. 202–205) describes how New Age “urban shamans” in Brazil appropriate entheogens — especially ayahuasca and jurema — in large cities, even though they have no direct ethnic link to native-Brazilians. Stern (2019a, p. 81) has also shown that some Brazilian Reiki practitioners use ayahuasca in their initiations, a bricolage they call “Shamanic Reiki.”

Despite this legal tolerance for the indigenous use of ayahuasca, jurema, peyote, wachuma, and other entheogens, marijuana and coca remain strongly criminalized in Brazil, even for medical use. Marijuana is a plant native to Asia, brought by the vicious Portuguese slave trade from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. In this sense, marijuana is not part of the Brazilian indigenous peoples’ herbarium. Nonetheless, coca is part of the traditional practices of some Amazonian peoples, but since it is connected to the production of cocaine, Brazilian law widely prohibits its use even in traditional contexts (Henman 1990). The war on drugs is one of the main political agendas of the Brazilian right, and the Brazilian left has never had a majority of seats in the Brazilian National Congress or Senate² to change this, even during the Lula and Dilma Rousseff governments. It means that even in legal contexts, Brazilian society strongly stigmatizes those who consume entheogens. Even though Brazilian New Agers are primarily white upper-middle-class people, they also suffer prejudice for consuming such plants. Stern (2019b, pp. 350–351) demonstrates that Brazil stigmatizes entheogens users even within New Age’s circles. In other words, many Brazilian New Agers do not look fondly on fellow New Agers who use these plants, reproducing the typical discourse of the average Brazilian right that ayahuasca and jurema are gateways to illegal drugs like cocaine or crack.

² Usually, the Brazilian far-right considers anyone who is not a far-right conservative Christian who worships the U.S. to be a communist. In this sense, many center, center-right, and even right-wing politicians who advocate national sovereignty rather than colonial submission to the U.S. are considered leftists by Bolsonaro, Sérgio Moro, and their supporters. However, Brazil has never had a left majority in power. Historically, Brazil has been in the hands of physiological parties of the center-wing, which adapt themselves to the social-political waves of left and right to stay in power indefinitely. Furthermore, there were periods when only right-wing parties were allowed in Brazil (e.g., the 1964–1985 military dictatorship sponsored by the U.S. and the U.K. against Brazil). Many of the current Brazilian senators and congress members are sons or even grandsons of former congressmen and senators. Power has always been in the hands of the same wealthy families since the First Republic, who were the former slavers and landowners in the country. One of the current members of Congress elected by São Paulo — Luiz Philippe de Orleans e Bragança — is even a direct descendant of the Portuguese royal family. Brazilian “independence” and “democracy,” in this sense, behaves more like a hereditary succession Monarchy of several “royal families” disguised as republic. For more information on this, see Jessé Souza (2019).

Alternative therapies and body exercises are also central to the New Age universe. As New Age practitioners believe that by healing the body, they are also healing the soul (Hanegraaff 1996, p. 48), and it is common for them to seek ways to maintain health, develop the body, and promote well-being as something spiritual (Heelas 2008, p. 35). In this sense, the New Age followers differ from the more general population, which usually seeks medicine to cure diseases.

Numerous studies record New Age healing practices in Brazil. Stern et al. (2018) report a New Age medical rationality of its own among Brazilian New Agers. Of our interest here, they describe conceptions of the body in the Brazilian New Age which corroborate those described in international settings: belief in holism and the interrelation between the physical, psychic, rational, and spiritual bodies (Stern et al. 2018, pp. 273–274). Tavares (2002), on the other hand, says that the diversity of the New Age therapeutic network in Rio de Janeiro is too wide to allow a rigid delimitation. The author reported how the New Age referential blends with the Brazilian religious culture, creating new localized forms of New Age therapies. De Oliveira (2011) goes in the same direction, arguing that the Brazilian New Age is much more mixed with local religious practices than its North American and European expressions.

Leite (2017) studied the in-betweens of constructing a specific New Age therapeutic field in southern Brazil. Her study finds a mixture of Western esotericism typical of the European New Age and elements of the traditional Chinese medicine, Daoism, Confucianism, Ayurveda, shamanisms, and spiritual interpretations of science among this Brazilian therapeutic milieu. There are many conflicting understandings of the body in the Brazilian New Age in this sense, and they understand it by creative and individual symbolic inflations of conceptions from different cultures and references. In the end, what each Brazilian New Ager does with his or her body is something very personal. The material therapeutic practices may be the same, but the meaning of such practices is idiosyncratic. In other words, the usage of the body by Brazilian New Agers and its symbolic meanings are experienced and felt internally at the individual level. However, it follows the broader logic of the New Age ethos, and it is not a pure individual invention. How each person feels, experiences, and re-signifies their own body is based on the techniques propagated by the milieu and the symbolic logic underlying its ethos. Although not perceived as such by the practitioners themselves, one can understand these body techniques from the classical perspective of Marcel Mauss (1973 [1934]). Contrary to what Mauss would expect, one will not find a tradition among the New Age, but the very selection of techniques follows the same principle of social fact pointed out by the French scholar.

On this, disease prevention and health maintenance can be done through Asian (e.g., yoga, qigong, taiji quan) as well as Western (e.g., pilates, circular dance, therapeutic touch, Feldenkrais) techniques of the body. However, the emic Brazilian New Age concept differs from Marcel Mauss' concept of techniques of the body. In the Brazilian New Age, such techniques are exercises and routines of movements aimed at developing the body. For the classic French anthropologist, they encompass aspects related to these techniques' traditions and transmissions. Mauss (1973 [1934]) thinks of techniques of the body as the primordial element of a given culture's technology and material apparatus. The body is the technical medium and tool that provides human beings with everything around them. Techniques of the body are how people from different societies use their bodies to achieve the most different results. There

are different techniques for each social, sex, or age group. Mauss sees a link of “total social fact” in the body, that is, a bundle in which biological, sociological, psychological, and political elements intersect. In the Brazilian New Age, there is an impoverishment of this. Techniques are used and discarded depending on the tradition that is in fashion at that moment. One will not find what Mauss emphasized so much about the transmission of tradition through different cultures’ education. However, there is a common point: such New Age techniques of the body realize the conjunction between matter and spirit, transmitting and reproducing the New Age ethos. Therefore, they are a total social fact in the very sense used by Marcel Mauss (1973).

There is a belief in the New Age that the physical body, mind, and spirit would interconnect through the immune system (Hanegraaff 1996, p. 54). It is not uncommon that the various endocrine glands are related to the chakras or energy centers, so people treat these glands to awaken different emotional and spiritual qualities. In the words of Heelas (2008, p. 53), such activities “enable the spiritual flow to help overcome ‘blocks,’ or dams, within subjective-life and the body.” With such blocks released, vital energy could flow freely, promoting health and well-being.

Also in the Brazilian New Age, different physical symptoms achieve amplified meaning. Teixeira (2020, p. 73) comments on how Brazilian New Agers read and interpret the body to solve their deep existential questions. A headache, colic, or wry neck is much more than merely a physical problem. Through such symptoms, Brazilian New Agers believe they materialize broader psychological and spiritual issues, and the treatment of this also helps them solve other problems in the world around them. The illness, in this sense, acts as a reminder for connection and spiritual development.

Among the different forms of New Age healing, the Shamanic Consciousness Movement is a sub-branch exceptionally centered on the body that is also present in Brazil. According to Hanegraaff (1996, p. 53), New Age shamans focus on extracting “harmful intrusions” and “hostile energies” from the sick person’s body. The practices aim at the metaphysical dimension but under some concrete actions. Citing the shamanism of Brazilian naturologists, empirical research showed that they adopted several material practices. Some examples are massages, reflexotherapy (massage in reflex points of the human body), music therapy, therapeutic application of entheogens, *temazcal* (sweat tent), drum-making workshops, dream catchers, shamanic bags confectioning, circular dances, and shamanic offerings (Stern 2019a, p. 110).

On the female body, the Goddess Movement is a sub-branch which borders into the New Age — but not exclusive to it — that overvalues sensory and sexuality (Hanegraaff 1996, p. 88). This branch is also present in Brazil (Leite 2020). In it, the female body is sacred; the vulva, breasts, and menstrual blood inspire devotion objects as much as they can be used ritualistically to awaken female power in women and men. The menstrual cycle and the women’s life cycle are eventually used as metaphors for natural cycles (e.g., seasons, moon phases). In these groups, the woman’s body is central to religion, used militantly to oppose patriarchal domination and the neglect that Christianity has given them historically (Woodhead and Heelas 2000, p 128; Hanegraaff 1996, chapter 4). Female sexuality ceases to be understood as damnation and begins to acquire the status of a path to salvation. All female bodies — be they girls, adult, or older women — are deified as the Goddess’s manifestations.

Feeling good about one's own body is also vital to becoming a better person in the New Age (Heelas 2008, p. 149), which is why people may question the social beauty standards in such environments. Many Brazilian New Age practices aim at knowing one's own body through rites and sensory self-discovery workshops, which may even involve ritual masturbation and sex. Teixeira (2020, p. 71) comments that in Brazil, the search for the body's liberation aims to promote New Age subjects' greater authenticity and spontaneity. They can achieve this by rites of body discovery, self-massage, experiences with naked bodies in front of mirrors, sexual magic, and the adoption of detoxification and vegetarian diets. Stern (2019a, 2019b) documented similar statements by Brazilian New Agers.

In the specific case of sexuality, there are rites in Brazil called “womb blessing” (for women) or “phallus blessing” (for men) that can be described basically as workshops on the body itself and its erogenous zones. It is believed that such rites were initially imported here from the US Hyperborean Wicca (cf. Terzetti Filho 2016). However, today they have broken the boundaries of Brazilian neo-paganism and are found among the wider New Age public. The relationship between sexual pleasure, self-acceptance, happiness, and spirituality is powerful, which is why the very spiritual forms of sexual discoveries intend to allow the practitioners to enjoy their bodies with pride and self-esteem. Not by chance, Brazilian New Age spiritualists tend to tolerate sexual and gender diversity and stimulate sexual experimentation. In some groups, polyamory can even become so common that it is the norm. In other words, in these cases, people in monogamous relationships can be discriminated against by the polyamorous majority (Stern 2020a, p. 212).

One final important point is that the New Age people in Brazil tend to be very engaged with environmental issues. One may note this in vegan and vegetarian diets, the choice of organic food and community gardens, and the promotion of home composting centers and other more natural and alternative food styles. It is common for them to demonize ultra-processed, refined, and industrialized foods, preferring to adopt a lifestyle with less sugar, less gluten, and less salt. Many Brazilian New Agers end up abolishing meat consumption entirely, reject allopathic medicine, and some even adopt a raw food diet to keep the body and spirit healthier. Because of this, although Brazil has a long tradition of mass vaccination, Brazilian New Age groups joined evangelicals and the far right in demonizing the vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Brazilian New Agers adopted ecofascist speeches, advocating that those who need to die should die as soon as possible so the world would return to normal (Stern 2020b, pp. 163–165). Others, such as the TV host Xuxa Meneghel, famous for her public statements about having seen gnomes, even publicly advocated that if a vaccine was going to be developed, it should be tested by force on the prison population.

Final Remarks

According to Vásquez (2011, p. 5), religions often speak of “angels” and ethereal things. But to study religions empirically, as a scientific object, one must also look at their materiality. Through objects and their bodies, human beings give life to beliefs. Art, dance, clothing, spatial occupation, and physical care also comprise religions. This could be no different in the New Age, in which the scholar may notice a

perspective of holistic integration between material and immaterial things. Thus, to understand the New Age, one needs also to look at its material side.

As referred to in this text, the New Age emphasizes enhancing consciousness and feelings with a solid appeal for well-being. However, a New Age spiritual seeker cannot achieve this plenitude of mind and spirit without their body. Looking at the symbolism of corporeality, the scholar better understands what the adepts of this fluid and boundless spirituality do and feel.

We sought to demonstrate how spiritual “elevation” and “evolution,” ideals to be achieved in the New Age, requires integration of mind and body, a mind that interacts with and is part of the matter. There are no hierarchies in the process. They consider the mind and the spirit are not more important than the body. The body is not something apart, opposed from the spirit, but a fundamental element in the New Age concepts of salvation. In other words, the body of those who participate in New Age rituals and activities is the instrument that will enable their spiritual evolution. The body enables the realization of its followers. This body, however, is not alone. The set of physical and material elements used in the different practices is the instrument of spiritual realization. A diffuse religion which is not entirely a religion, a spirituality that is not entirely spiritual, and a spirit that is realized through a body are a few characteristics of the New Age, which allows us to understand a little more about religion in secular times.

The material objects that are part of New Age activities and feed the set of consumption goods proper to this milieu — such as clothing, incense, therapies, and crystals — compose the New Age ethos with its ideal elements. Thus, they contribute to the concretization of a specific way of life that feeds their beliefs, gives structure, and makes possible the realization of being a New Ager.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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