



Shrine at the 2nd Floor

Seekers and Magic

The search for spirituality in the Rainbow Temple, NSW, Australia

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The Rainbow Temple in NSW, Australia is a spectacular site in a sense that a complex array of cultural and religious behaviours occur. The Rainbow Temple is a wooden structure built in 1981 and is constructed in the shape of the Star of David, two opposite triangles entangled and entwined, symbolizing the unification and balance of two contrasts. The Rainbow Temple serves a colourful community of people who associate with and orientate themselves to what the researcher call "Rainbow Culture".

This culture is constituted by the symbolic behaviours that exhibited and derived from the gatherings and activities of the Rainbow Tribe (or the Rainbow Family), an international affiliation of individuals who share common belief and identity systems, who gather periodically and intentionally to practice exclusive rituals and ceremonies (Figure 2). Main themes manifested in these gatherings include aspirations for world peace, non-violence, unity and harmony among participants and ideas of reorganization of ecological systems.

The Rainbow Temple is a stationary congregation that serves not only a fixed, local group of adherents, but also a wider crowd of participants. This article argues that the majority of the people who participate in rituals and ceremonies, sojourn at the Rainbow Temple and

constitute its sacredness are best described as "seekers". These seekers, people who are discontent with their existing lifestyle and are searching for satisfying alternatives, are in a phase of constant negotiation of their political, spiritual and social locale. The researcher have noticed that during their engagement with alternative ideas and rituals at the Rainbow Temple, seekers are introduced to and use a discourse of "magical thinking" to explain and justify their behaviour. This engagement, and the "magical thinking", connect two contrasting realms of the real and the magical, and is reminiscent of similar ideas utilized by indigenous culture discussed by Malinowski (1925) and Lepowski (2004), and this article intend to draw inspiration from their analysis of the function of magic. Seekers at the Temple borrow ideas and narratives

from indigenous cultures (such as Australian Aborigines or Native Americans), reinterpret and utilize them to organize a meaningful logical understanding of their own reality. While doing so, they reshape and recreate aspects of their individual "self", and of their identity.

Seekers and spirituality

Based on ethnography and fieldwork in the Rainbow Temple during 2007 and 2008, the majority of the people dwelling in the Rainbow Temple identify and situate themselves as seekers. These people report that they are discontented with the existing lifestyle and social systems in mainstream society, and they are determined to re-negotiate and contemplate aspects of the self and their beliefs in profanity or spirituality, in search for satisfying alternatives. While some of

these seekers situate themselves in this phase reluctantly, but most of them reported that they do so with intent; either way it seems that these seekers were always awaiting for something to occur in their life or perhaps an answer or a revelation that would be satisfactory for them.

Most seekers are in a phase of being “inbetween” jobs, careers, decisions, social circles, affiliation with institutions, or spiritual understanding. During interviews dwellers at the Temple often mentioned that they want to “be”, to seek and explore ideas they contrast with urban places, like the city, where they do not want to be, or situations they do not assimilate with. Recurring themes discussed by informants include conflicts or quarrels encountered in mainstream society, and dissatisfaction with the lifestyle in the city environment, an environment they often refer to as “Babylon”¹. Consequently, these seekers are looking for attention, sense of belonging and salvation, they seek the profane as much as they look into religiosity, they search for practicalities and for spirituality, and they also look into traditional patterns of behaviours from the past and they seek or contemplate the future, there are no rules for the search hence the extreme sensations of freedom they report, the sensations of carefree, sovereignty or the “abundant play”.

The prevalent concept at the Rainbow Temple towards these seekers is very lenient, accepting even the most conspicuous negligence. The length of stay for sojourners in the Temple is not fixed, and while some people stay for days or weeks, others spend months and even years. Seekers state that they feel at home and are welcomed at the Temple because they describe a sacred sphere in which they feel comfortable intensively contemplating and negotiating questions of belonging and spirituality. The Temple reciprocate by providing a stimulus sphere for seekers to practice alternative culture, innovative religious activities, seek, question and contemplate political, social and spiritual ideas. Thus, seekers reciprocate with the Temple’s ideology by initiating and participating in rituals and everyday lifestyle: full moon raves, music circles, yoga and meditation seminars, gardening, or even preparing a shared meal; demonstrating diversity of religious behaviours through art, music

or shared activities and ideas, while concurrently reflecting, experiencing and digesting the Rainbow Temple’s concept.

This thesis² analysed that seekers are in a constant state of “stress”, in the same sense which Wallace (1956, pp. 265-7) uses the term “stress”. They experience uncertainties, changes and doubts that make them start asking questions about “God” and “existence” or the “essence of reality”, and these confusing experiences construct stress or a cognitive dissonance. The act of seeking resolutions or alternatives involves changes in the individual sphere, followed by a process of collective cultural change aim to reduce those levels of stresses. On the individual level, people are seeking answers and exploration of the self, because they believe it can resolve the uncertainty, or at least, to reduce the doubts or dilemmas. Wuthnow (2007, p.124) probe that for seekers, these questions lead to constant negotiations and correspondence with other ideas or realities which leads them to examine alternatives, and such alternatives can be found in the Rainbow Temple.

Seekers tend to react to symbolic messages rather than rules, to group congregations rather than institutions, which feature substantially in spirituality of seeking discussed by Wuthnow (1998, pp.8-9). Thus, the more they engage in the intensive theoretical act of seeking resolutions, alternative lifestyle and of exploring symbolic messages the more they likely to attach deep meanings and intimate sentiments to the momentary experience of the “sacred” time they experience in the Rainbow Temple. According to the researcher, participants in Rainbow culture activities, in particular rituals at the Rainbow Temple, are searching for sacred moments or situations rather than sacred places, because these moments reinforce their beliefs in divinity, uncanny and in spirituality. While doing so, seekers are borrowing religious properties exhibit in the Rainbow Temple (and respectively in Rainbow culture) and inventing meanings which suit their contemporary local environment and logic, utilize them, manipulatively, for their own exploration of their individual self. Thus, they are re-inventing the “self” through the process of searching meanings and reshape their identity in the same sense that Folts (2006, pp.132-134) recognized this pro-



Exterior View of the Rainbow Temple

cess among participants in drumming workshops in the U.S.A. This idea is similar to a notion Clark (2006, p.vii) described as Inner-directed spirituality, in which a spiritual occurrence is based on the premise that the individual’s “self” is the source of the supernatural, the magic and the mystery.

This notion of inner-directed spirituality is primarily concerned with the idea that self-transformation will induce a greater social transformation. This notion is also reminiscent of the way Wuthnow (1998, pp.3-5) distinguishes between the traditional spirituality of inhabiting sacred places, and the spirituality of seeking. In this sense, seekers at the Rainbow Temple negotiate various instances of competing glimpses of the sacred, magic and the uncanny, seeking partial knowledge and practical wisdom. The sacred in this case is found momentarily in ephemeral transient experiences or rituals at the Rainbow Temple as different as drumming circles, gardening, digging a tunnel or viewing the full moon.

Magic and spirituality

“Early man seeks above all to control the course of nature for practical ends, and he does it directly, by rite and spell, compelling wind and weather, animals and crops to obey his is will”

(Malinowski 1925, p.22)

The Rainbow Temple is a place which facilitates alternative lifestyle and rituals which the researcher classify as competing glimpses of the uncanny and of spi-

ritual experience. For these seekers, the Rainbow Temple is more than a place where they can gather to explore and perform rituals and communal activities; it is a sacred sphere where “magic”, in the sense of a deep spiritual experience or revelation, is facilitated (Figure 3). In this case, magic is described as mystical, uncanny and supernatural experience, one that leaves a strong impression on participants, which tends to fluctuate between two different and somewhat contrasting realms of the “real” and the “magic”.

In this article the term “magic” is used to describe a deep spiritual experience, particularly through the participation in the ritualistic process in the Rainbow Temple. Practitioners commonly use magic discourse (for instance during rituals such as drumming circles, full moon raves or even everyday lifestyle) to describe otherworldly spiritual experience, senses of uplift, correspondence with divine powers, animism, mysterious, or as an experience which belong to an alternate reality. Magic also enhance sensations of a total communion and unity among participants where maximum cooperation and total submission to the common sphere is demonstrated to a level of utopianism. During full-moon raves rituals at the Temple practitioners describe sensations of connectedness and togetherness which proliferates an atmosphere of a total communion and bonding on an immediate level. However, it is important to note that magic also invokes

senses of delusion and fantasy. The total submission to the common sphere functions to enhance shared goals of an immediate spontaneous community, and in this case the total submission is reported to invoke strong sensations of collaboration through an exclusive spiritual experience or a “journey” of magic.

For example, a woman in her early forties, a musician, who dwelled in the Rainbow Temple for a few years in the past, but, has been familiar with its nature for more than 20 years, reflects on her own experience at the Temple:

To me the Temple like, like it's truly a Temple...magic happens there, things happen there that can't happen anywhere else, and it's not a Temple holding any particular spirituality or holding to any particular religion so its probably one of the most unique Temples you can find on the planet to this day because every other Temple is to a particular religion or to a particular guru
(Pseudonym name Janice, Field Notes, April 2008)

There is no structured belief system at the Rainbow Temple, hence the availability of a deep personal (and communal) spiritual experience and the freedom of contemplation. The magic, much like the notion of inner-directed spirituality, is enhanced primarily through the embodiment of an individualistic belief system, a concept which resembles symbolic behaviours and belief systems prevalent embodied among indigenous people,

and such concepts of magic at the Rainbow Temple are analyzed with affinity to indigenous culture.

Malinowski (1925, pp.22-23) contextualize magic with sacred and religion and say that magic is “impervious to both reason and scientific observation, lives in an atmosphere of mysticism... magic is occult, taught through mysterious initiations...a certain mystic...supernatural impersonal force”. Lepowski (2004) claims that in colonial context magical means, symbolic or corporeal, are utilized by the indigenous group to form resistance to the dominant cultural forms around them. Malinowski (1925, p.39) classified magic rituals as a means to an end (rather than religion as an end in itself) because the magical rite has a clear end for participants to strive for, and has a definite practical purpose. Further to this, according to the researcher, magical thinking as constituted in the Rainbow Temple aims directly to reduce levels of stress. Either way, the function of magic as a means to an end among indigenous societies are linked with ideas of supernatural, mystic and mysterious, in particular with spiritual realms, and similar narratives performed by practitioners can be found during rituals in the Rainbow Temple.

A closer scrutiny of magic in the case lay ahead allows distinguishing its function beyond a mere ordeal. When participants in a ritual such as drumming circle at the Temple direct their intention to a definite goal (for instance, the creation of a revitalized harmonic sphere) by the utilization of magical means such as chanting mantras (or songs) that call for divine intervention or for a higher powers to be, or the application of “energies” and “spirits” into the ritual, they aim for the subsequent goal. The function of this rite transcends the simplistic ceremonial congregation and proliferate sensations of supernatural occurrence of magic in order to achieve that particular definitive goal. During the performance of drumming circles, seekers will narrate an explanatory myth (and unveil shared mysteries or uncanny experiences) to justify the cause and reason of their behaviour, and embody sacredness in their behaviour. It is at this phase that two different, and somewhat contrasting, spheres intersect, and the shift from one realm to another is exhibited. It is also important to note that the dichotomise



The entrance to the Temple



First floor of the Temple

segregation between this two realms are crystallize for participants. Thus, seekers move (or “journeying”) between these competing glimpses of the sacred (the magic) and negotiate their location between these two spheres in search for their “true” or “real” self.

Conclusion

The function of magic is to ritualise man’s optimism, to enhance his faith in the victory of hope over fear. Magic expresses the greater value for man of confidence over doubt, of steadfastness over vacillation, of optimism over pessimism. (Malinowski 1925, p.83)

This research shows that magic (or magical thinking) explains why two independent realms of causation intersect during rituals at the Rainbow Temple. Seekers delve into various streams of knowledge and ideas with anticipation to diminish levels of stresses they encounter in other environments. While their engagement with alternative ideas at the Rainbow Temple, which are primarily concerned with inner-directed spirituality, seekers encounter ideas of magical experiences (through the ritualistic process) which belong to the realm of the sacred and of the mystery. Thus, from the point of view of the practitioners

at the Rainbow Temple, magical way of thinking explains occurrences that are not confronted by and supplied with scientific means, rather they are introduced to a culture which proliferate spiritual mythic explanations, where participants constantly negotiate and organize their understanding of reality between these two spheres; the magic and the real.

Unburdened with possessions, property or even a social role, seekers in the Rainbow Temple, like Turner’s “liminal entities,” (1969, p.95), attempt to evade time and space, and dwell in the interface between the “real” and the “magic” world. In other words, the Rainbow Temple is a sphere of “sacred time” that connects two contrasting realms, and is a stimulating environment where seekers can negotiate their “location” or existence and re-invent the self. Seekers’ stay at the Temple may be temporary, but the strong sensations of spirituality and of magic, experienced by these seekers while participating in rituals at the Rainbow Temple, are not ephemeral, nor a mere epiphenomenon, but rather, an ontological reality that constructs their identity.

Endnotes

1) *A slang word that is commonly used in hippie-culture discourse and by the Rainbow people to describe mainstream society as a capitalist, material lifestyle. “Babylon”*

is analogous to social and economical disorder, and to greed and hedonism. This analogy is also commonly used in Rastafarian discourse.

2) *Spirituality, Culture and Place: The Rainbow Temple in NSW, Australia. MA Thesis. Department of Anthropology, University of Otago, New Zealand.*

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