

Promises from Paradise

The NewBridge Project

1 April - 25 June

A note from the curator

Growing up in Brazil and throughout my childhood I would visit the local folk healers — *curanderos*, *benzedeiras*, *santeros*, and many others. Who you saw was dependent on where you were from and where you lived. They were usually elders (men and women) that would listen to you and then pray for you using various herbs. They would ask you to light a candle and at times they would offer some form of life advice. I'm still unable to explain why those interactions made me feel better. Given the recent global pandemic, and the current health crisis here in the UK, I have been reflecting on my past experiences and interactions with the folk healers and the role they play within their communities. Through my reflections, I have been recollecting my memories and experiences of care, what this means to me now and how I can feel closer to home.

With very limited support given by the state in contemporary societies, we could look at folk healers as figures that go beyond curing illness. They are figures who compose a self-organised system to offer well-being and comfort to communities. Across contemporary societies, there are so many needing care but very few providing it, and this weighs only heavier for those communities from low socio-economic backgrounds. Since the 1970's, mental health practitioners have played a valuable role similar to folk healers in communities of colour in the USA. Differing from mental health practice, the knowledge required to become a folk healer is often passed from generation to generation, or is received as a spiritual gift. It is independent of formal education or institutional approvals, and dynamic in its own doing and redoing.

If you Google folk healer, you will find a Wikipedia explanation that under *a contemporary Western perception, is an unlicensed person who practices healing using traditional practices*. The Western point of view is generally taken as universal, as *normal*, but it is only one of many ways of existing, thinking, loving, creating relationships, and caring for each other. Once you acknowledge all the other possibilities that exist and start imagining new worlds, you can disrupt the institutionalisation of care and healing.

With today's background noise of *fake news* and *anti-vaxxers*, it is hard to propose ideas for 'alternatives' to Western health care norms without

being considered anti-science. However there are valid reasons that some people reject science. It is my belief that academic knowledge production, particularly scientific knowledge, creates a chasm between professionals and the public. Scientific language, and academic knowledge are tools used to create and discuss academic practices amongst experts, yet are isolating for non-experts and can aggravate those without the same knowledge or experience. There is a lack of accountability of the scientist to their neighbour down the road. Perhaps a *holistic approach to knowledge* could allow science to become more accessible and relatable to different communities and increase the level of trust, as it is hard to rely on what you do not understand.

According to the Andean perspective, knowledge is not only rational but also affective, emotional, bodily, mystic and can have origin in experience, memory, and suffering (Posey 2002; Sillitoe 2002), as well as in the possibility of changing the point of view (Viveiros de Castro 2004). The base of knowledge is emotional, not scientific; spirituality is the most elevated form of conscience, and conscience is the most elevated form of knowledge (Estermann 2009). In relational epistemological terms, knowing is loving and working is creating (Medina 2011, 42).

While the conversation between Rebeca, Igor and I departed from speculating what folk healers meant within societies, it quickly evolved bringing up further questions, from **'who taught you about care and how do you pass it on?'** to **'who is allowed to create and exchange knowledge?'**. We understood that there's healing in everyday life. We rely on the comfort of everyday rituals as we seek elements that bring us confidence and wellbeing. And there's also healing in getting together and building community, as we long to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

In one of the texts that Rebeca shared with us, Grace Dillon explains how within Indigenous Futurisms, artistic practices are used for imagining and speculating possible futures, emphasising decolonial uses of technologies, while questioning the current colonial structures ingrained within science. *Promises from Paradise* unfolded through questions around what is yet to come. We asked ourselves **'what are the rituals that we will practise in the future?'** and **'what does the future of care look like?'**. Although we have got to this point without any concrete

answers, the possibility of imagining realities that we wish for brought us a step closer to creating those realities.

When we first started this project, I had a song called *Bença* on repeat. Djonga wrote it to his grandma. It ends with a little prayer from her to him and his fans, while the chorus goes:

*Ganha esse mundo sem olhar pra trás e vai
Só não esquece de voltar pra...
Vai e vai
Anda esse mundo sem olhar pra trás e vai
Só não esquece de voltar*

Only a few months later, I understood that what actually made sense in this song was not only how well it translates the relationship between Djonga and his grandma, but also the idea of return. When I look back at our conversations, we repeatedly went back to the idea of belonging, identity, and a need for reconnection – with ourselves, our communities and with the planet. Through *Promises from Paradise*, we discussed ways of existing that could make us feel closer to a world that we haven't necessarily lived in.

While we discussed ideas around imagined futures, we kept aiming for parts of our lives that either no longer exist, or that we haven't ever experienced. And now when I think about return, I understand it as the possibility of recreating what we once lived as well as the aftermath of something that we're creating right now – for the Promises of returning to our futures, and the possibility of recreating Paradise.

Thanks for joining us.

Beatriz