

CULTURAL RELATIVISM, HUMAN RIGHTS AND COSMOETHICS: FRONTIERS AND INTERPARADIGMATIC INTERSECTIONS CONCERNING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Patricia Gaspar Mello

ABSTRACT. For some decades now conventional science has discussed the complex relationship between cultural relativism and human rights. It considers that relativism tends to adopt a stance of non-judgement and limited intervention in some contexts, while human rights sets some universal parameters for the reality of individuals independent of the culture. This article, in addition to conceptually revising this discussion, incorporates it into the concept of Cosmoethics, as proposed by Conscientiology, demonstrating the intersections with previous paradigms and broadening the vision of understanding and intervention in different contexts. To do so, the topic of female genital mutilation, a procedure still common in various countries will be adopted, and the positions of each paradigm on this subject will be exposed.

Key words: cultural relativism, human rights, cosmoethics, female genital mutilation, holophilosophy.

INTRODUCTION

Conventional science has debated the theme of cultural relativism and human rights for decades. With the systematization of the Consciential Paradigm and the proposition of the reality of Cosmoethics, the dialogue – already controversial – becomes more complex, taking on another dimension. This article proposes to dialogue with these realities and to demonstrate the frontiers and intersections between the aforementioned elements, using the case of female genital mutilation as an object of study and positioning each of these paradigms. The theme was chosen because it is one of this century's greatest controversies, being the focus of debates between human right activists and cultural relativists (Piacentini, 2007), besides being the target of campaigns and manifestations around the world (Kelly & Hillard, 2005) and directly dealing with the consciousness' holosomatic health. This work will be divided in three subsections, namely (1) preliminary concepts, where the necessary definitions will be presented to un-

derstand the themes; (2) an interparadigmatic discussion between the concepts, considering the casuistics verified through data obtained from cosmograms, conscientiological encyclopedia entries and tertulias; (3) final considerations with propositions of frontiers and intersections among the contents.

This brief essay aims for a more open and lucid perspective on themes that permeate the multidimensional reality. It is hoped that this knowledge will facilitate a better understanding of consciousness, its environment and evolutionary conditions, in order to promote greater lucidity and subsequent interassistential improvement.

1 PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS

Comprehension of the topics covered in this article is of fundamental importance to understanding the dialogues derived from them. Because the themes are broad, both in the framework of the conventional paradigm and the conscientiological paradigm, it is possible to find different strands and interpretations of the terms. In this article, priority will be given to the classical concepts, based on their more traditional proponents, set out below.

1.1 Cultural Relativism

The expression Cultural Relativism was first registered in the mid-twentieth century by the philosopher Alain Locke; but its content predates the term, having been proposed by anthropologist Franz Boas in the end of the nineteenth century. In short, it refers to the idea that the values and attitudes of an individual can only be comprehended by others from the understanding of that individual's culture. According to Donnelly (1984), the most extreme positions associated to the concept refer to Radical Cultural Relativism – which suggests that culture is the only source of moral validation of a rule or value – and the Radical Universalism – which proposes that there are elements of the human condition inherent to any subject, which are independent of and overlap culture. Figure 1 represents the continuum of these elements.



Figure 1. Continuum cultural relativism – radical universalism

In the 21st century, the researcher Milton Bennet proposes a model of intercultural sensibility using the two extremes of the aforementioned continuum (1993). The so-called “Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity” (DMIS) proposes six steps in the development of intercultural sensitivity, and divided into two stages: the ethnocentric and ethnorelative. In the ethnocentric stage, an individual coming from a particular culture (A) understands the culture of another

(B) from the perspective of the own culture (A), that is, centered in themselves. In the ethnorelative stage, the individual of culture A understands culture B from the perspective of the culture B, that is, centered on the other's paradigm. For Bennet, in order to have a transition between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism, the subject experiences the stage of minimization, being still in the ethnocentric phase, but with greater tolerance and less moral judgement. In this phase, there is an attempt to compare cultures A and B through their similarities, that is, trying to understand what both cultures have in common. For researchers in the area, this phase includes the understanding of so-called Human Rights. Figure 2 demonstrates a continuum proposed by Bennet, as well as all the steps of his model.

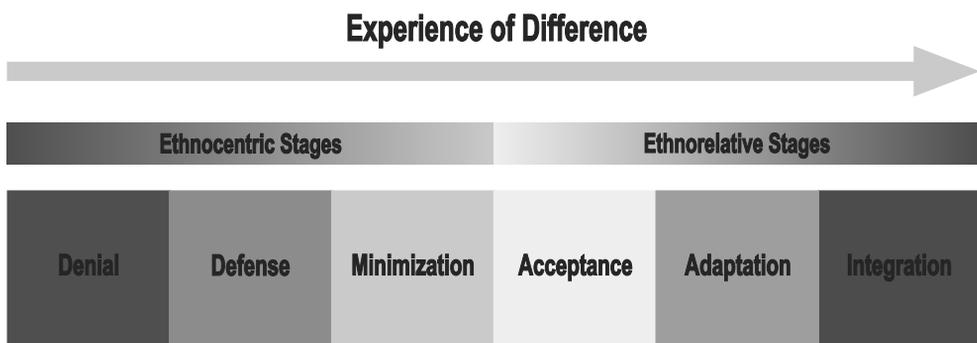


Figure 2. Intercultural Sensitivity Development Model (Bennet, 1993)

1.2 Human Rights

Human Rights have a long history, and for some have roots in the Middle Ages, with Christianity, which, in a rather oblique way, suggested equality between all men, but still dependent on Divine guidance. The concept evolved with rationalists in the Modern Age, eliminating the Divine element from the equation based on naturalistic theories. The evolution of such currents culminated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proposed in 1945 by the United Nations (UN). In the Declaration, Human Rights are described as the basic rights of any human being, regardless of gender, race, socioeconomic status or sexual orientation. There is, therefore, a proposition of there being needs and rights common to all individuals, because they are inherent to the human condition. Thus, the cultural element could only be considered after these elements are secured. Therefore, a certain universality of needs is assumed, overlaying the culture – which would, then, be secondary to fundamental rights and needs. Even though it preceded a very incipient stage of what Conscientiology would later propose with the introduction of the notion of cosmoethics, an elaboration of this declaration of

human rights already reveals itself to be, in some way, the precursor of the ethical norms and universalist aspects consonant to the Human Being.

1.3 Cosmoethics

Conscientiology (the Science that studies the Consciousness, the ego, the self) proposes that consciousnesses are reborn on the planet to evolve. Thus, at the end of the evolutionary process, as described by the evolutionary scale of consciousnesses (figure 3), all individuals will arrive, in their own time, to a common evolutionary stage.

EVOLUTIONARY SCALE OF CONSCIOUSNESSES			
01.	Transmigrated Consreu	<i>Conscientia transmigrans</i>	10% of Serenissimus
02.	Resomated Consreu	<i>Homo sapiens reurbani-satus</i>	20% of Serenissimus
03.	Vulgar Pre-serenissimus	<i>Homo sapiens</i>	25% of Serenissimus
04.	Unconscious Bait	<i>Homo sapiens assistens</i>	25% of Serenissimus
05.	Penta Practitioner	<i>Homo sapiens tenepessistae</i>	25% of Serenissimus
06.	Conscious Projector	<i>Homo sapiens projectius</i>	30% of Serenissimus
07.	Lucid Epicon	<i>Homo sapiens epicentricus</i>	35% of Serenissimus
08.	Conscientiologist	<i>Homo sapiens consciencio-logicus</i>	40% of Serenissimus
09.	Permanintfree	<i>Homo sapiens despertus</i>	50% of Serenissimus
10.	Semiconsciex	<i>Homo sapiens semiextrap-hisicus</i>	60% of Serenissimus
11.	Self-critical Teleguided	<i>Homo sapiens teleguiatus</i>	65% of Serenissimus
12.	Evolutiologist	<i>Homo sapiens evolucion-logicus</i>	75% of Serenissimus
13.	Serenissimus	<i>Homo sapiens serenissimus</i>	100% - Evolutionary Model
14.	Free Consciex (FC)	<i>Conscientia liber</i>	

Figure 3. Evolutionary Scale of Consciousness.

The term Cosmoethics was proposed by researcher Doctor Waldo Vieira (1994). It is a neologism of Conscientiology formed from the agglutination of the words cosmo (order, universe) and ethics (natural moral). The author proposes the expression to refer to the sets of universal norms that govern the cosmos and, therefore, the existence of consciousnesses, in every dimension, galaxies and on every planet. Cosmoethics is superior to the common, traditional ethics, and operates by its own laws, non-vengeful, non-moralistic, non-judgmental, non-emotional, and therefore, supposedly just. Cosmoethics considers the evolutionary level

of each individual and the attenuating and aggravating variables of each behavior. Additionally, it also establishes parameters that optimize consciencial evolution.

According to Vieira (1993), the basic principles that govern Cosmoethics treat (1) Intraconscienciality, that is, the values of each person; (2) Megauniversal-ity, considered as the personal sense of antisectarism; (3) Holosomaticity, considered as the practical experience of the vehicles of manifestation identified in Conscienciology as soma, energosoma, psychosoma and mentalsoma; (4) Thosenity, an expression that represents the agglutination of the terms thoughts, sentiments and energies, as expressed in the personal manifestation; (5) Multidimensionality, quality of who experiences the multiple dimensions in which the consciousness can transit with its vehicles; (6) Multiexistentiality, that is, the assumption and self-knowledge of the multiple lives experienced by the individual; (7) Holomaturity, considered as the condition of the individual's integral maturity; (8) Maxifraternity, characterized by a high rate of altruism in the personal manifestation; and (9) Polykarmality, that is, the understanding of the mechanisms of action and reaction that exist in the cosmos. Thus, for the author, a cosmoethic individual fully experiences the aforementioned elements: they have discernment and self-awareness of their own manifestation, seeks the best for all in their performance and invests in their own evolution as an opportunity to contribute to the growth of other evolutionary companions.

In addition, cosmoethics suggests a series of laws that govern the manifestation of those who are guided by it. Initially, Vieira proposed a law of the economy of evils, that is, faced with two evils, one must always choose the lesser evil. Next, a law of the economy of goods was postulated, which suggests a constant search for useful investments, obtained by ethical means and of concrete interassistential applicability, to the detriment of useless objects, obtained by illicit means and of weak applicability. In the following publications, Vieira (2013) expands the concept of Cosmoethics from the constructs of Self-unforgiving and Heteroforgiving. For him, a cosmoethical manifestation implies the self-absolutism of refusing to commit the same mistake twice (self-unforgiving) and repeatedly forgiving the multiple misconceptions of others (heteroforgiving). Lastly, he suggests the evaluation of attenuating and aggravating variables (multidimensional and seriexiological) behind a certain behavior, before determining a course of action.

On the other hand, this course of action can result in active assistance, as in truly performing an act to help another; a surplus omission, that is, to inhibit an action in order not to harm the other; or a deficitary omission, the latter being harmful, as it rejects an assistential attitude, when should it be prioritarily applied in the situation. By introducing this set of elements to the notion of traditional ethics, Cosmoethics presents itself as a broader proposal than does common ethics. It considers more variables associated to a determined situation than solely those observed using the magnifying glass of the conventional paradigm. Thus, and returning to the previous point, Cosmoethics constructs itself under a para-

digm that, on the one hand makes it more relative, and on the other also presents itself in a more equanimous and impartial form than the propositions that precede it in the history of humanity.

1.4 Intersections

Based on the elements previously exposed, figure 4 graphically represents the intersections between the themes here approached.

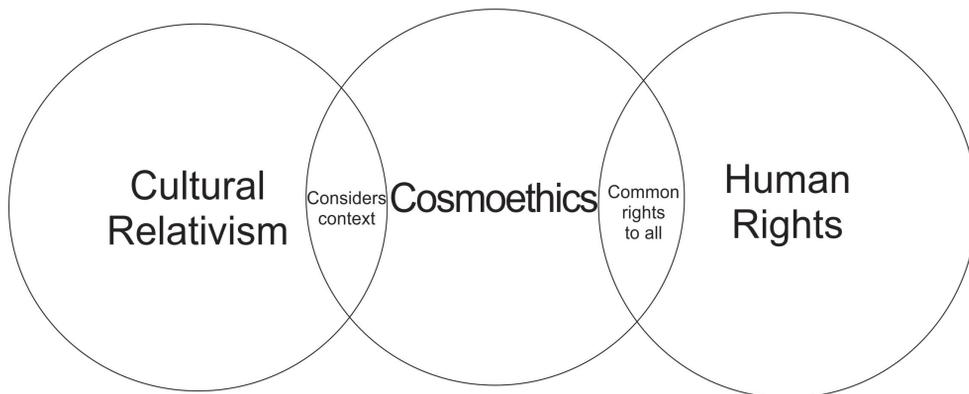


Figure 4. Intersections between the approached themes.

1.5 Interparadigmatic Discussion

Conscientiology as a multidimensional, seriexiological, interassistential and cosmoethical paradigm, broadens human understanding about several situations experienced daily by every consciousness. This process of expansion finds points of intersection between the conventional paradigms accepted by common society, as well as points of divergence. Next, the topic of female genital mutilation was selected to be exposed in accordance with each paradigm – cultural relativism, human rights and Cosmoethics – and their respective positions.

1.6 Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a procedure which seeks to castrate the erogenous zones corresponding to the prepuce, clitoris and, in some cases, the large lips of the vagina. The procedure is performed in some countries in Africa and Asia and has generated social mobilization due to the brutality of the act, usually motivated by religious beliefs that seek to control women's sexuality (UNICEF, 2013). The United Nations (UN) has expressed its rejection of these practices as a violation of human rights by postulating gender inequality and violating women's health and physical integrity. There are 3 categories of FGM:

1. **Clitoridectomy:** first level of FGM, with more superficial mutilation, removal of the prepuce of the clitoris or of the entire clitoris.

2. **Excision:** second level of FGM, removal of the prepuce, the clitoris, and partial or total ablation of the smaller lips.

3. **Infibulation:** third and more brutal, there is removal of the prepuce, the clitoris, the smaller and largest lips.

Because it is a ritual, not always carried out in sterile environments, nor always by trained professionals, and because it represents series physiological violation, FGM can present a series of postsurgical complications. The instruments used for the procedure are rudimentary, non-sterile and range from knives and razors to shards of glass. The procedure alone is usually not accompanied by anesthesia, so that women experience excruciating pain throughout the process. In addition, it is common to find serious infections that can lead to death. If there is survival, in general and specially in cases of infibulation, the woman suffers from chronic pain for the rest of her life, urinary problems (Agugua, 1982) and will find it difficult to have a healthy sex life (Akotionga, Traore, Lakonde & Kone, 2001).

2.1.1 Relativist Paradigm

Despite the obviousness of the abuse, from the standpoint of cultural relativism, there is no right or wrong on the issue of FGM, as the procedure would be part of a specific cultural tradition. There are several nations that use this practice as an important rite of passage for girls, and without which they would not avail themselves of a future marriage and subsequent constitution of a family – elements that are significant to such individuals. Even though the procedure is often painful and violent, it can also be an occasion celebrated in different cultures (Abusharaf, 2007; Piacentini, 2007).

Thus, cultural relativism suggests that judging this practice from the point of view of those who do not experience it, is a classic example of colonialism, comparable to the catechization of Indians in the Americas. As such, an ostensive action to stop the practice of FGM is not indicated by relativism.

2.2.2 Human Rights Paradigm

For human rights the issue is clear: it is a violation of women's basic rights, an imposition based on dogmas, characterized by gender-based violence and, therefore, should be a practice that is extinct in any society, independent of the beliefs of its members (Piacentini, 2007). There is no tolerance for such violence and its existence on the planet is of no use (WHO, 2008). Today there are several initiatives by the UN and other nongovernmental organizations to ban FGM on the planet.

2.2.3 *Consciential Paradigm*

For cosmoethics, the issue is even more complex than simply supporting FGM or not. There is a great diversity of facets to be analyzed to reflect on the theme. Additionally, the very concept of Cosmoethics itself is still very recent and, therefore, it is not possible to be exhaustive regarding the subject – much more research is need for this and, even so, it would be complex to define, since the Consciential Paradigm deals with leading edge relative truths (verpons). It is known, however, that Cosmoethics defends the right of a conscin to receive assistance when exposed to such violence, which is a clear position regarding this new, broader, proposal of ethics. The other issues discussed here are arguments for reflection on what is thought, at first, to be an initial understanding on the subject from the perspective of Cosmoethics.

Considering the principle of the economy of evils, for example, one can think that, without this experience, the woman could lose the protection of her family and community, being left to drift from reality itself, often even lose her life once expelled from the community without any resource to take care of herself and be exposed to other forms of violence. Additionally, it is well known that there is much ignorance of the act and that both women victims of FGM and the agents who practice it suffer brainwashing imposed by a religious culture. All these elements, although not invalidating the anticosmoethical nature of the acts, are important attenuating variables to be considered, both for the woman submitted to FGM and the person performing it.

On the other hand, the procedure is antiphysiological, as it violates the soma, the basic vehicle of manifestation on this planet and interacts with the sexochakra, an important element for the vitality of the energetic body, in a way that hinders the full use of the consciousness' vehicles of manifestation, and therefore, the life of the woman submitted to FGM. Furthermore, the permitting of the practice reinforces the idea that some consciousnesses are different from others with regards to their rights. In the case of FGM, one argument used for its application is that women should not feel sexual pleasure, while men should have this freedom. This issue, in addition to violating basic human rights, violates the right of the consciousness that, independent of the genre in which it is reborn, has the right to fully enjoy its vehicles of manifestation.

Finally, Cosmoethics presupposes that any consciousness, which does not wish to be part of this practice, should be assisted. The right of the consciousness to master its own soma is a fundamental prerogative for the best applicability of consciential resources. Thus, the assistencial work to shelter women who oppose FGM is essential, since they make it possible to attend to this right.

2.2 **Synthesis**

The following table summarizes the positions of each paradigm regarding FGM:

	RELATIVISM	HUMAN RIGHTS	COSMOETHICS
Position	Neither favor, nor are against. Depends on the culture	Against. Independent from the culture	Against. Though it considers attenuating variables such as the evolutionary condition of the consciousnesses involved
Gender issues	Should be considered according to the culture	Human beings have equal rights regardless of gender	Consciousness has no gender; thus, to be born in a female or male body depends on the personal needs of self-overcomings and experiences based on the Personal Evolutionary Register (PER)
Soma	If mutilated, it must be according to the norms of the culture	Should not be mutilated	You may consider mutilation in the case of economy of evils
Energosoma	Not considered	Not considered	Is violated with the practice of FGM due to the links between the soma and energosoma
Focus	On the culture	On the individual	On what is best for everyone
Is there a deficitary omission?	Yes, because in general it refuses to intervene even if consciousnesses are in danger.	No, because it seeks interventions to help consciousnesses when necessary.	No, because it seeks to assist the consciousnesses who wish to change the condition they are in, whether they be victims or perpetrators at the time.
Is there a surplus omission?	Yes, because it respects the desire of the consciousness to maintain themselves in the condition in which they are.	No, as it often sets parameters that can be perceived as an evolutionary rape by the consciousness.	Yes, because it evaluates the intra and extraphysical context before acting, considering what is best for all.

The above table is a summary of positions between the three paradigms discussed in this article. It is important to note that the theme of FGM was chosen as an illustration of how the three paradigms presented can intersect, rather than having the aim of dissecting them from every aspect. There are different views on the subject that have not been included in this summary and can be better explored

in new studies. The proposal here is, only, to reflect on the positions already in force, and to include a new vision in this context, represented by Cosmoethics.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Relativism, Human Rights and Cosmoethics intersect and diverge on different points. As far as relativism and human rights are concerned, the discussion is well described in the traditional literature: while relativism does not position itself before any subject without first understanding the culture to which the subjects refers, human rights establishes a common point of departure for all, which surpasses the culture. The proposal of this article demonstrates the entry of Cosmoethics as key to the intersection of some elements of this context and its positioning in front of the theme of FGM.

The main criticism of relativism to human rights is that there is a moral judgement based on an ethnocentric worldview, which can become a dogmatic set of rules established by a small group of people to be followed by all other human beings, independent of what each culture and individual believe. Thus, there is the risk of arbitrariness and an abuse of power in the establishment of these rules, as has been observed several times throughout history.

Paradoxically, this is of the criticisms human rights lodges against the radical relativist stance, since there are moral rules in certain cultures established by a small group of individuals or even religious sacred books that establish specific positions within a determined community and that allow individuals in that group little or no open questioning or choice in their destiny. Even more serious is the fact that such moral rules injure the dignity of the individual and can even culminate in crimes against humanity, such as those that have occurred on Planet Earth less than a century ago and which still occur, even with all the attempts to contain them.

Perhaps the main key to this problematic is the fact that the mentioned approaches are extremes on a continuum and are, still, with limited focuses of action: radical cultural relativism observes the context and has as its axis the culture as a marker of the evaluated values. Conversely, radical universalism in which the concept of human rights is based observes the validity of human dignity based on minimum conditions of survival for any individual, regardless of context. Thus, on the one hand we have the ethnocentric respect for human dignity and, on the other, the ethnorelational understanding of cultural values and attenuating factors. However, because of the extreme points of the continuum in which they are found, there is no dialogue between these paradigms, nor are they integrated. Perhaps this is the role of Cosmoethics.

Cosmoethics establishes, as does human rights, a common starting point for all consciousnesses, but it considers attenuating cultural factors that help to deliberate on the themes it evaluates, as does relativism. Ultimately, cosmoethics

relativizes based on a common set of rules. It is universalist in the sense that it understands that all consciousnesses have the same rights, but it is also relativist, in the sense that it understands these rights will not always be fully attended, as the context in which the individual is inserted does not always have the maturity to respect them. It also considers that the consciousness is inserted in a particular context for a very specific and logical reason within its Personal Evolutionary Register (PER), following the principle that nothing happens by chance. Thus, Cosmoethics evaluates that disrespecting a human right can be explained by the multidimensional and multiexistential relations of cause and effect and that in some way, at some point on the evolutionary path, will be attended to within its most elementary norms. Any subject who has had a right disrespected will have this same right attended to at some point. This law of recomposition is an important element in the complex understanding of the cosmoethical relativism and universalism, after all, it is not enough to only look at the individual or to be marked out solely by its context; a broader integration is required including various elements such as PER, intraconscientiality, the code of personal cosmoethics (CPC), the code of group cosmoethics (CGC), the social maturity and the Planet's evolutionary level.

REFERENCES

- Abusharaf R, ed. (2007). *Female circumcision: multicultural perspectives*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Agugua NE, Egwuatu VE (1982). Female circumcision: management of urinary complications. *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics*, 28:248–252.
- Akotionga M, Traore O, Lakonde J, Kone B. (2001). Séquelles génitales externes de l'excision au centre hospitalier national Yalgado Uuedraogo (CHN-YO): épidémiologie et traitement chirurgical. *Gynécologie Obstétrique et Fertilité*, 29:295–300.
- Bennet, M. (1993). Towards ethnorelativism: a development model of cultural sensitivity. *Education for intercultural experience*. 2a Ed. Yannouth. ME.: Intercultural Press.
- Donnelly, J. (1984). Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 6(4), 400-419. doi:1. Accessed on 10 May 2016: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/762182> doi:1.
- Kelly, E., & Hillard, P. J. A. (2005). Female genital mutilation. *Current Opinion in Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 17(5), 490-494.
- World Health Organization (2008). *Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An Interagency Statement. A mutilação genital feminina não apresenta quaisquer benefícios conhecidos para a saúde*.
- Piacentini, D. Q. (2007). *Direitos humanos e interculturalismo: análise da prática cultural da mutilação genital feminina*. Masters Dissertation. University of Santa Catarina.
- Vieira, Waldo (Org.) (2013). *Encyclopedia of Conscientiology*. 8th ed. Digital. Version 8.00. Foz do Iguaçu: Associação Internacional do Centro de Altos Estudos da Conscienciologia (CEAEC) & Associação Internacional Editares.

Vieira, W. (2003). *Homo Sapiens Reurbanisatus*. Foz do Iguaçu: Associação Internacional do Centro de Altos Estudos da Conscienciologia (CEAEC).

Vieira, W. (2007). *Homo Sapiens Pacificus*. Foz do Iguaçu: Associação Internacional do Centro de Altos Estudos da Conscienciologia (CEAEC).

Vieira, W. (2009). *Projeciologia: panorama das experiências da consciência fora do corpo humano*. Foz do Iguaçu: Editares, 10th Ed.

Vieira, W. (1994). *700 Experimentos da Conscienciologia*. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Internacional de Projeciologia (IIP).

UNICEF (2013). *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*.

Patricia Gaspar Mello is a graduate in Psychology (PUCRS), a specialist in Clinical Psychology (FACCAT) and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (WP/MEC), and has a Masters and PhD in Psychology (PUCRS) along with a degree from the University of Washington (UW-USA). She is a clinical psychologist and university professor. A conscientiology volunteer since 2005, a teacher of conscientiology since 2006, the author of several entries in the Encyclopedia of Conscientiology and co-author of the book *Dual Citizenship: reports of extraphysical projectors* (1998).

E-mail: pgmello@gmail.com

Translation: Laura Bruna Araújo.

Revision: Jeffrey Lloyd e Mariana Cabral Schweitzer.