

The World Ayahuasca Diaspora

Ayahuasca is a psychoactive substance that has long been associated with indigenous Amazonian shamanic practices. The recent rise of the drink's visibility in the media and popular culture, and its rapidly advancing inroads into international awareness, mean that the field of ayahuasca is quickly expanding. This expansion brings with it legal problems, economic inequalities, new forms of ritual and belief, cultural misunderstandings, and other controversies and reinventions.

In *The World Ayahuasca Diaspora*, leading scholars, including established academics and new voices in anthropology, religious studies, and law fuse case-study ethnographies with evaluations of relevant legal and anthropological knowledge. They explore how the substance has impacted indigenous communities, new urban religiosities, ritual healing, international drug policy, religious persecution, and recreational drug milieus. This unique book presents classic and contemporary issues in social science and the humanities, providing rich material on the burgeoning expansion of ayahuasca use around the globe.

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The World Ayahuasca Diaspora

Reinventions and controversies

**Edited by Beatriz Caiuby Labate,
Clancy Cavnar, and Alex K. Gearin**

First published 2017
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Photos: Benjamin K. De Loenen

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN: 978-1-4724-6663-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-55142-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

To Erik, Des and their garden.

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Foreword

Ayahuasca in the twenty-first century: having it both ways

The genie is out of the bottle, tweeting about the next shamanic bodywork leadership seminar, and the bottle; well, check and see if it isn't in the back of your fridge by the vegan TV dinner.

Who would have ever imagined that ayahuasca, the enigmatic jungle potion William S. Burroughs once referred to as “the secret” (Burroughs & Ginsberg, 2006 [1963]) and whose very botanical identity was a matter of debate through the mid-twentieth century (Schultes, 1957) would, within a matter of decades, become a household (or at least, yoga-mat) word; the subject of hundreds of scientific, anthropological, and medical studies; a magnet for international tourism; the motor behind a global religious diaspora; and the victorious plaintiff *in absentia* of an historic Supreme Court case?

The rhyme “herbal brew”/“bamboo” in Paul Simon’s 1990 ayahuasca-inspired song “Spirit Voices” already rings of kitsch, but there is still something, if not fresh, then at least compelling about Sting (2005, p. 18), in his biography *Broken Music*, revealing that “ayahuasca has brought me close to something, something fearful and profound and deadly serious.” But by the time Lindsay Lohan confides to a reality TV host in April of 2015 that ayahuasca helped her “let go of past things . . . it was intense” (Morris, 2014), Burroughs’s “final fix” has finally entered the realm of cliché.

How did this happen? What is the special appeal of this bitter Amazonian brew in the post-post-modern global village toolbox of self-realization? How has it fared in the bustling marketplace of New Age spiritual entrepreneurship and on the battleground of the War on Drugs? And what does it all mean for the multiple, religiously and socially diverse, communities and individuals who consume ayahuasca, as well as various ayahuasca-like analogs, around the world?

We can think of the global ayahuasca expansion of the past two decades as a kind of second wave to the psychedelic revolution, following upon that other, “fantastic universal . . . inevitable . . . high and beautiful wave,” Hunter S. Thompson describes as cresting in the mid-1960s only to crash so quickly, and so disappointingly:

So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost *see* the high-water mark – that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.

(Thompson, 1998 [1971], p. 68)

Many of those who sought out ayahuasca in the Amazonian rainforests in the 1970s and 1980s were indeed spiritual orphans, in some sense, of this failed revolution that, though inspired by natural psychoactive substances and indigenous medico-religious rituals of the Americas, relied heavily on synthetic substances like LSD and mescaline, often consumed in informal or recreational, rather than ritual, settings. In its initial expansion, beginning in the 1980s, ayahuasca came, first, to non-Amazonian urban centers in tropical countries, and later, to dozens of countries across the globe, in much the same form as it was consumed in its place of origin. Traditional practitioners and religious groups still export ayahuasca, brewed from the rainforest vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* and the dimethyltryptamine (DMT)-containing shrub *Psychotria viridis* and related species, to adepts in many world countries, who risk and sometimes face prosecution under international controlled substance laws. Freelance enthusiasts operating at the fringes of legality may also obtain raw ingredients and make their own preparations.

But, due to chronic problems of supply, transport, and storage, not to mention legal restrictions, a growing number of people have experimented with various ayahuasca analogs, using alternative plants or pure pharmacological substances (“pharmahuasca”) with essentially the same chemical constituents, to produce brews that have similar experiential effects, at least according to some enthusiasts. And yet, by all indications – and despite the myriad contexts of international use, from commercially adapted indigenous rituals in ecotourism lodges in the Amazon to weekend workshops at yoga academies around the world – the ayahuasca diaspora seems to have resisted what Thompson and others saw as the recreational denouement, hedonistic failure, and political marginalization of the 1960s psychedelic revolution. Instead, wherever it is used, imported, or reinvented, ayahuasca seems to quickly, almost automatically, elaborate around itself a protective cloak of ritual and social control, from the Christian-influenced doctrines of Brazilian ayahuasca religions to the idiosyncratic neoshamanic ceremonies emerging in North America, Europe, and Australia. Whether this is due to a changing social milieu of use, or something about the ayahuasca experience itself, remains to be seen.

Setting aside the hype, and respecting the cultural and individual variability inherent in such powerful subjective states, one constant element of the ayahuasca experience, attested across different cultures, spiritual traditions, and personal backgrounds, is its ability to propitiate encounters with radical otherness. Speaking myriad languages, through dozens of religious and spiritual idioms and within infinite possibilities of individual variation, ayahuasca drinkers across the globe have described visions of celestial landscapes beyond comprehension and encounters with awe-inspiring, alien intelligence that alternately tantalizes and terrorizes them with healing and bodily degradation, spiritual salvation and ego disintegration, ecological wisdom and universal apocalypse.

The ayahuasca experience defies ordinary notions of causality, space, time, and logic. Indeed, in its intensity and fundamental strangeness, the ayahuasca experience can feel like the cognitive equivalent of the far side of a black hole, spewing out new space-time tunnels and parallel universes with utter disregard for the laws

of cognition, if not of physics itself. It is perhaps the very intensity of the cognitive, bodily, and spiritual disassociation produced by ayahuasca that calls so desperately to the structuring powers of ritual, ideology, and social control to impose order, provide meaning, and even extract advantage from the boiling foam of ecstasy.

Trance associated with altered consciousness of all kinds is characterized by symbolic visual imagery and nonlinear thought processes that can result in revelatory insights or intuitions about self, others, nature, and the cosmos (Winkelman, 1986). Gregory Bateson's (1972) cybernetic theory of mind sheds light on the adaptive functions of trance and altered states. In his reformulation of Freud, Bateson suggests that, for reasons of sheer economy, mental processes that are repetitive or that surpass the boundaries of the individual self become "sunk" into the subconscious. Bateson (1972) views art and certain kinds of religious beliefs as serving a corrective function, allowing integration of the narrow, individual consciousness with larger circuits of mental process, including collective and environmental "ecologies of mind." In the light of Bateson's theories, psychoactive plants like ayahuasca can be seen as tools for loosening up mental processes, blurring ego boundaries between individuals and their larger social and ecological context (Shepard, 2005). By amplifying the unexpected, nonlinear associations of the subconscious, this "ecstatic mode" of consciousness allows for the perception of new patterns and relations among things, experiences, and events.

Although trance states emerge for the individual through specific alterations in brain function, these personal experiences become framed and imbued with meaning by the social group, often in a ritual context. Victor Turner's (1974) classic writings on ritual, structure, antistructure, and the countercultural movement of the 1960s provide a framework for understanding what several authors call the "re-traditionalization" of ayahuasca (Labate & Cavnar, 2014). For Turner, people participating in rituals occupy a *liminal* or transitional social state, clearly distinguished in space and time from ordinary social life. During ritual, social structure is temporarily suspended and replaced by an undifferentiated *comunitas* of equal individuals who share a mutual sense of identity and belonging. The social distinctiveness of ritual is accompanied by a distinctive cognitive state in which ordinary logic is suspended and replaced by the nonlinear, inductive, combinatorial logic of symbols. Thus, ritual itself represents a kind of altered state of consciousness that, when amplified through trance techniques or the use of psychoactive substances, only reinforces the social, spatial, and temporal distinctiveness of the ritual state (Shepard, 2005).

Though he began his work studying rites of passage in a Zambian village, Turner realized that these concepts could also be used to understand the social upheavals of the 1960s. Although serving to maintain the functional stability of "institutionalized and preordained" social structures, liminality and *comunitas* can also emerge in moments of "radical structural change" (Turner, 1974, p. 248). The difference, for Turner, is that institutionalized rituals, when they conclude, facilitate the orderly return of individuals from liminality and *comunitas* back into the social order, whereas revolutionary and countercultural movements attempt to create permanent liminality: not a passage, but rather a constant state (1974).

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Perhaps ayahuasca is the contemporary world's way of having it both ways; of being both traditional and modern, ecstatic and scientific, heterodox yet messianic, transgressive but safe and (eventually) legal, altruistic and selfish. It is precisely around this set of contradictions – or dialectics, or challenges – that the current volume is organized. Moving beyond the ethnological purists' snubbing of neo-ayahuasca practices as mere drug tourism, and yet also avoiding the intellectual pitfalls of naïve enthusiasm, the authors in this volume apply the classic tools of critical sociocultural analysis to the universe of the global ayahuasca diaspora. The chapters present a multitude of voices, from "Aussie-huasca" (a native Australian analog) enthusiasts hoping to save the planet from the evils of capitalism, to indigenous Amazonian communities torn apart by rivalries and economic disparities brought on by the "ayahuasca boom." Though sympathetic to this diversity of experiences and opinions, the authors take an unblinking look at the legal and social conflicts and ideological contradictions produced as indigenous shamans and Brazilian ayahuasca churches have entered the global marketplace of New Age spiritualism. Contributions discuss troublesome emergent issues, including the commodification of ayahuasca practices, the reconfiguration of shamanic worldviews to attend to the modern self-as-project, health and safety concerns (drug interactions, ayahuasca-related accidents, sexual harassment), legal disputes, the "bureaucratization of enchantment" in ayahuasca religions, and the sanitization of darker aspects of traditional Amazonian shamanism, such as witchcraft and attack sorcery.

Will the "re-traditionalization" of global neo-ayahuasca ceremonies provide adequate social controls and ideological coherence to ensure that this "second wave" psychedelic revolution doesn't crash and dissipate somewhere between the headwaters of the Amazon and the Great Barrier Reef? Will the contradictions of the modern self and the temptations of capitalism undercut the radical vision of individual and planetary healing that some neo-ayahuasca enthusiasts prophecy? Will ayahuasca become another battlefield casualty in the global War on Drugs, or will legislation evolve to protect ayahuasca as a religious sacrament, as a medicine, as a tool of experiential freedom? We don't yet have all the answers to these questions, but the authors of this book are on the crest of the wave, and if anyone can see ahead to the far shore, it is they.

Glenn H. Shepard Jr.
Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi

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3 The religion of the forest

Reflections on the international expansion of a Brazilian ayahuasca religion¹

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In the 1930s, a new religious community emerged from the rubber camps of Brazil's Amazonian hinterlands, founded by a charismatic leader, Raimundo Irineu Serra, referred to by his followers as *Mestre* (Master) Irineu. He was born in the impoverished state of Maranhão, the grandson of black slaves, and had no formal schooling. The nascent church of Santo Daime represented a fusion of multiple folk religious and spiritual influences centered on the consumption of a psychoactive beverage best known in the academic literature as ayahuasca, but referred to by the group as *daime*. The initial community was small and included mostly Afro-Brazilian migrants from northeast Brazil. Their social milieu included the rubber camps and military bases in the Amazon frontier, a traditional view of gender roles, and cultural exchange between Europeans, Afro-Brazilians, and indigenous Amazonian peoples. The group remained small, stable, and mostly unknown elsewhere in Brazil until the 1970s.

Four decades later, the situation has changed drastically. Santo Daime is no longer a small, unified community, but rather a widely dispersed network that includes thousands of adepts, many of them educated and middle class. There are dozens of churches in all parts of Brazil, as well as affiliates in several other countries, where Daime is presented as a religion of universal salvation. The church has also attracted wide (and not always positive) media attention, appearing on the cover of important news magazines and on national television news networks. It also provided a paradigmatic example in national and international discussions over the medical and legal status of ritually used psychoactive drugs.

The rapid expansion of Santo Daime, both geographically and in terms of its broader social and political repercussions, has transformed this relatively small, localized, and tradition-bound religious community into a heterogeneous, transnational phenomenon at the cutting edge of modern religious, scientific, and legal scholarship. While many scholarly works have addressed the origins, maintenance, and diversification of various religious influences within Daime, few studies have examined the effects of these profound transformations on Daime religious practice and its relationship to Western religion more generally. This chapter analyzes the expansion and internationalization of Santo Daime within the context of the contemporary global religious scenario.

We draw on extensive bibliographic research as well as multisite fieldwork by both authors at various Daime centers in Brazil (Acre, Amazonas, Minas Gerais, São Paulo) as well as Europe and North America. Fieldwork activities included participation in rituals, interviews with church members and leaders, and personal correspondence that is ongoing with Daime church members from several localities. Labate conducted fieldwork between 1998 and 2014, and Loures de Assis from 2009 to 2014.

We describe and analyze how this religion has crossed regional and international boundaries, and we reflect on how the international setting of contemporary religiosity has facilitated this process. We argue that the expansion of Santo Daime is not only a unique phenomenon, but is also integrated into a broader diaspora of Brazilian religious traditions responding to the contemporary zeitgeist. Thus, the expansion of Santo Daime helps to illustrate and lets us understand the current trends and ambiguities within Western religion more generally.

Santo Daime: historical genesis

After Brazil lost its monopoly on rubber production to the Malaysian plantation system in the early 1900s, the Amazon region went through a sudden economic collapse that affected millions of migrants who had initially fled from poverty in the drought-stricken northeastern region to seek land, rubber income, and a better life in the Amazon. When rubber prices collapsed, these people found themselves abandoned and in dire social, health, and economic conditions. Many moved to the urban peripheries (MacRae, 1992). It was in this socioeconomic context that Raimundo Irineu Serra founded the religious group we now know as Santo Daime.

Serra arrived in Acre in 1912 and came into contact with ayahuasca, a psychoactive beverage made by cooking the liana *Banisteriopsis caapi*, known locally as *jagube*, with leaves of the shrub *Psychotria viridis*, known to Daime adepts as *rainha* or “queen,” sometimes with other admixtures (Labate, 2004). The main psychoactive agent is N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), present in the *Psychotria* leaves. Because DMT is included on the United Nations’ list of prohibited drugs in the Convention on Psychoactive Substances from 1971 (UN, 1971), the use of ayahuasca in Brazil and other countries has generated significant controversy. Still, there is some discussion as to whether ayahuasca should really be treated under the UN Convention, because it is prepared from natural materials and does not consist of pure DMT per se. Related to such legal issues, ayahuasca has also generated debate and controversy in political, social, and medical spheres, especially with regards to the question of freedom of thought, consciousness, and religion. Thus, the debates surrounding ayahuasca are relevant to broader discussions about the “war on drugs,” health, public safety, and freedom of religion (Labate & Feeney, 2012, Feeney & Labate, 2013; Labate, 2014).

Although ayahuasca is used ritually by indigenous peoples in countries such as Peru and Colombia, it is only in Brazil that the substance has been incorporated into syncretic religious traditions – which are referred to as Brazilian ayahuasca religions. They emerged in the Amazon region and some have spread broadly

throughout Brazil and the world. The three main religions are Barquinha, União do Vegetal, and Santo Daime. Though all three emerged in similar Amazonian contexts and feature ayahuasca consumption, as adopted from indigenous populations and as central to their spiritual practice, they are quite different one from another.

This chapter focuses on Santo Daime as founded by Irineu Serra in the 1930s. After drinking ayahuasca, he received a spiritual revelation from the Queen of the Forest (*Rainha da Floresta*) in the interior of the state of Acre. He then created his own group in the capital city of Rio Branco. He referred to ayahuasca as “daime” and, though this psychoactive beverage used in indigenous shamanism was always central to the group’s practice, elements from many other Brazilian religious and spiritual movements were present, including folk Catholicism, European esoteric practice, and Afro-Brazilian religions. Santo Daime rituals focus on the performance of “hymns,” considered to be divine messages received from the spiritual plane (MacRae, 1992).

Mestre Irineu remained at the helm of this spiritual group in Rio Branco until his death in 1971, and most of its membership throughout that time was Afro-Brazilian with very limited formal education. The church became formally institutionalized in 1963 with the creation of the *Centro de Iluminação Cristã Luz Universal* (“Universal Light Center for Christian Illumination”), known more frequently by the abbreviation CICLU. This constitutes one of the more orthodox groups, known as Alto Santo, a denomination that aims to distinguish itself from the more expansionist Santo Daime church, as discussed below. Though Mestre Irineu remained the undisputed leader of the group throughout his lifetime, after his death (*passagem*) in 1971, the church split as a result of disagreements over the process of succession. It was at this point that Santo Daime ceased to be a relatively small, homogenous group in terms of both its social composition and religious practices, and this process has only continued as parts of the group have also expanded geographically.

Leôncio Gomes, Mestre Irineu’s disciple and son of Antônio Gomes, one of the most important companions of Irineu Serra, took over leadership of the original CICLU community. The CICLU community is currently led by Mestre Irineu’s widow – also Leôncio Gomes’s niece – Peregrina Gomes Serra, who is referred to as Madrinha (“Godmother”) Peregrina. Also at this time, Sebastião Mota de Melo, a charismatic recent disciple of Mestre Irineu (from the 1960s), who was experienced in Kardecist and spiritualist religiosity, created his own independent group. Padrinho (“Godfather,” as he later became known) Sebastião’s branch is currently based along the Mapiá River in Amazonas State, in a community called *Céu do Mapiá* (Heaven of Mapiá). This is now a village of religious character and the largest Santo Daime center in the world, with approximately 1000 active members, including residents and visitors, according to our field research.

In 1974, Padrinho Sebastião’s group formally registered itself as *Centro Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra* (“The Raimundo Irineu Serra Eclectic Center of Universal Flowing Light”), or CEFLURIS. The name was changed once again in 1998 to *Igreja do Culto Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal* (“Church of the Eclectic Cult of the Universal Flowing Light”), or ICEFLU.

The presence of the term “eclectic” in both the CEFLURIS and ICEFLU names is indicative of the spiritual and symbolic plurality of the newer group, and reflects its openness to new ritual components (see the discussion of “miscibility” below). These features stand in sharp contrast to the original CICLU community now known as Alto Santo, which was less open to change and novelty, and which remains through today restricted mostly to the state of Acre.

Padrinho Sebastião’s group initiated a particular interpretation of the “spiritual works” (*trabalhos espirituais*) inherited from Mestre Irineu, adding to them ritual elements borrowed from Kardecist spiritism and Afro-Brazilian religions (including spirit possession), as well as sanctifying the consumption of *Cannabis*, referred to as *Santa Maria*, in certain kinds of rituals. This group also began to distinguish itself from the original, traditionalist group, CICLU, because of its geographical expansion throughout Brazil and, eventually, the world. But until 1975, Padrinho Sebastião’s group included only about 40 families who lived with him in a community that shut itself off from outside influences in a kind of “other-worldly asceticism” (Weber, 1997), and were restricted to the Amazon until the late 1970s.

The transformation and expansion of Santo Daime

Santo Daime began its period of expansion in the early 1980s. The 1970s were characterized by a countercultural movement that began in the U.S. and was associated with the protests surrounding the Vietnam War, but eventually spread to youth throughout the world, that combined political and social protest with an interest in experimentation with psychoactive drugs and the search for mystical and spiritual experiences. The 1970s also saw the international oil crisis, which shook confidence in unquestioned Western economic dominance, as well as the emergence of the environmental movement: Greenpeace, for example, was founded in the early 1970s. The period also witnessed a crisis of belief in traditional religious institutions (Hervieu-Léger, 1999) and the progressive proliferation of new religious movements (NRM). In this context, exotic religions and new spiritual experiences became a topic of curiosity among some sectors. Carlos Castaneda’s popular books on native psychedelics rekindled interest in shamanism and Latin America. Notable “Beat Generation” guru William S. Burroughs traveled to the Amazon in the 1950s in search of ayahuasca (Losonczy & Mesturini, 2011).

Brazil, too, underwent a period of political and social opening with the end of the harshest phase of the military dictatorship in 1978 and the amnesty law of 1979. The 1970s in Brazil were also an era of optimism toward the idea of developing the Amazon region and integrating it with the rest of the country with highway, colonization, and infrastructure projects. Traditional Catholicism also started to lose its hegemony over Brazilian religiosity in the 1970s with a growing Christian pluralism, as well as the emergence of esoteric and “New Age” religions (Assis & Rosas, 2012).

We argue that this political, social, and religious context provided a natural synergy with two structural features of the Padrinho Sebastião’s CEFLURIS branch

of Santo Daime, namely, “miscibility” (*miscibilidade*) and “psychoactivity” (*psico-atividade*): at the end of the 1970s, many hippies, backpackers, and restless middle-class youths set out from southern Brazil to get to know the Amazon region and the visionary world of ayahuasca, laying the ground for the subsequent expansion of the Santo Daime religion.

The idea of “miscibility” was used in Gilberto Freyre’s (1986) classic study of how a relatively small nation like Portugal managed to expand and maintain, at least initially, such a vast overseas empire in huge areas of different continents, the biggest of them comprising what is Brazil today. For Freyre, the success of the Portuguese expansion was only possible because of the Portuguese people’s capacity to mix with other peoples and cultures, i.e., their miscibility. This miscibility responds to the “imprecise” character of Portuguese people and their history, or their bi-continentalism, their dualism of race, their balance between cultures. According to Freyre, the miscibility, rather than any other aspect of Portuguese culture, was the reason why the “Portuguese made up for their deficiency in human mass or volume in the large-scale colonization of extensive areas” (Freyre, 1986, p. 11). We understand the multiple valiances of Santo Daime as a reflection of a similar aptitude for creative confluence, exchange, and mixing with multiple religions, incorporating elements of their cosmology and ritual practice.

The term “psychoactivity” refers to the central importance of the use of psychoactive substances for this group. The group gets its name, *Daime*, from the psychoactive beverage that is the religion’s main sacrament. The use of Santa Maria (*Cannabis*) also sets Padrinho Sebastião’s group apart from other ayahuasca churches, and this same penchant toward psychoactive substances has led the group to adopt, in more recent years, other substances, including tobacco snuff, kambô frog venom, *sanango*, and others (Labate & Coutinho, 2014; see also below).

These structural features were important in the expansion of Santo Daime. Its miscibility makes the movement theologically porous and capable of adapting to different cultures, localities, and religious concepts, permitting various arrangements and *bricolage* of beliefs. This miscibility converged with a broader movement of subjectivization of religiosity, in which traditional ecclesiastical orders lost their traditional totalizing, regulatory function (Hervieu-Léger, 1999). Although involving some similarities, “miscibility” is not synonymous with notions of hybridity or syncretism; it is more than that. Santo Daime’s miscibility enables it to be molded to different, sometimes divergent, conceptions of the world. It facilitates the pluralization of daimistas groups, the internationalization of the religion, and the adaptation of its faith in varied contexts, but it hinders the control of the ICEFLU on Daime centers by weakening the power and relevance of institutional logics. It makes Santo Daime’s trajectory quite different when compared with the parallel, but quite distinctive, process of expansion of the Brazilian ayahuasca religion União do Vegetal (UDV), which is characterized by a strong, centralized institution, bureaucratic organization, and less room for local transformations and reinterpretations. In this sense, UDV is, like Santo Daime, hybrid and syncretic, but unlike the daimista expression, not miscible.

“Psychoactivity” gave Santo Daime an enchanted, exotic, and mysterious aura, both because of the difficulties of obtaining and producing the beverage and its legendary visionary and curing properties. This aspect also puts Santo Daime within the realm of psychedelic or shamanic tourism, responding to people’s search for altered states of consciousness, alternative therapies, exotic peoples, and voyages into nature (Labate & Cavnar, 2014). Beyond that, daime’s psychoactivity attracted media attention, as well as the curiosity of ordinary people, while motivating academic research on the ritual consumption of drugs. Santo Daime enthusiasts from the early 1980s included the hippie Lúcio Mórtimer, the psychologist Paulo Roberto Souza e Silva, and the former left-wing militant Alex Polari. These prominent Brazilian countercultural figures, as well as people like the journalist Nilton Caparelli, stand out in the history of the expansion and spread of the CEFLURIS branch of Santo Daime. Mórtimer was one of those responsible for introducing *Cannabis* into the Santo Daime ritual and for the codification of the oral tradition of Daime hymns into written form, thereby greatly facilitating their transmission. Paulo Roberto Souza e Silva was at the forefront in founding the first Santo Daime church in Rio in 1982, and soon thereafter Alex Polari established his own Daime community at Visconde de Mauá in Rio de Janeiro State.

During the following years, other centers were created in various Brazilian states, initiating the demographic and social transformation of Santo Daime from a religion of lower-class Afro-Brazilians and rubber tappers to a middle-class, urban phenomenon. Also during the 1980s, strong emotional and personal ties developed between the centers in the Amazon region and southern Brazil, eventually crossing national boundaries as Brazilian Daime practitioners became involved with, and sometimes even married, foreign adepts of many nationalities. Santo Daime ceased to be a unified religious group tied together by bonds of kinship, social class, and regional identity (see Clarke & Beyer, 2009). In previous times, membership in the church was determined by ethnic and geographical identity, and other traditional social ties (*compadrazgo* or godparent relationships), or personal knowledge of some episode involving Padrinho Sebastião; this ceased to be the case as Santo Daime spread and became an international phenomenon. However, abroad, personal alliances with relevant leadership in the “Doctrine” are still an important means of legitimation.

As it spread to urban centers in southern Brazil, Santo Daime found itself within an entirely different social dynamic from that created by the migratory flux of rubber tappers to remote parts of Amazonia. Instead, Santo Daime was transformed into a global religion with a universal appeal and mission. In this context, the group must constitute itself as a religious entity to gain formal legitimacy and recognition. On the other hand, religion itself becomes progressively a more plural, subjective, and individualized conception (Beyer, 2006). Thus, as Santo Daime affirmed itself as an institutional religion, the group also underwent a period of profound reflection, redefinition, and restructuring, both in regions of expansion and innovation, as well as in the traditional centers of origin in the Amazon region.

Bricoleurs, gurus, and atheists: Santo Daime and contemporary religion

Contrary to sociology's positivist predictions about secular modernity and the eclipse of religion when faced with the triumphant hegemony of science (Durkheim, 1995), contemporary society is in fact replete with fervent religiosity. The contemporary world is full of televangelists, religiously specific political parties, messianic leaders, gurus, Eastern religious centers, neoshamans, an ascendant conservative Islam, Christian pop music, and diverse other creeds that coexist today with several forms of secular eschatology. In the modern Western world, the individual has become freer to experience religion in his or her own fashion (Hervieu-Léger, 1999). At the same time, the West has imported religious traditions, as much from the Orient as from the decolonized southern hemisphere. Noninstitutional esoteric spiritual traditions have flourished among the middle class (Freston, 2009), while peripheral religious movements and Latin American religions in general have undergone a process of expansion and internationalization. Moving from the periphery toward the economic and political centers, this trend is significantly different from the historical process of Europeanization of Latin American religiosity. The new situation is also motivated by migration, cultural exchange, high-speed communication, and intense mobility ushered in by globalization. Unlike the previous colonial situation, this new process does not involve political imposition or forced religious conversion, but is rather a matter of individual freedom and choice.

The de-centering of religion on a global scale has facilitated the emergence of a new religious consciousness (Soares, 1994) associated with a broad and diverse "market" of religious options. This "alternative religious network," although wide and varied, is relatively connected around the world due to the intense production of religious goods and events, and to an effervescent cultural exchange through books, religious seminars, and workshops. In this scenario, hybrid and syncretic movements placed under the "New Age" label have special relevance. The New Age, according to Beyer (2006, p. 279), is defined as a "religious complex rooted in Western esoteric traditions," combining cultural and religious elements from diverse sources, including Eastern and indigenous traditions. Generally speaking, the New Age movement suggests that all religions are but diverse, historically and socially contingent versions of a single, universal spiritual truth. New Age religiosity also reflects values and forms of conduct emerging from the 1960s countercultural movement: environmentalism, antiestablishment sentiment, the search for mystical experiences, and an aversion to industrialism and consumerism. Thus, the New Age emerged as a network of alternative religiosities emphasizing new kinds of spirituality allied with holistic, ecologically conscious values associated with religious traditions "uncorrupted" by institutionalized religious hegemony. Despite these overall observations, it should be noted that the New Age movement is highly heterogeneous, and some groups within it are opposed to the use of psychoactive substances, even while others are strongly drawn to this path of spiritual experience.

It was within the broad social, political, and religious context of the New Age movement that Santo Daime gained significant numbers of followers in the educated, urban, middle class, discontent with majoritarian religion and open to alternative religiosity networks. Thus, to borrow Weber's metaphor, there are "elective affinities" between the New Age "spirit" and the Santo Daime (Assis, 2013).

In Brazilian urban centers, Santo Daime became part of what might be called the "mystical left": humanistic, antimaterialist, and philanthropic people, opposed to capitalist patterns of accumulation and consumption, but worn out by frustration in the political sphere and seeking revolution and societal change through spiritual practice and the transformation of the self (see Soares, 1994).

While part of a broader diaspora of Brazilian cultural and religious practices like capoeira, Afro-Brazilian religions, spiritism, and neo-Pentecostal Christianity (Rocha & Vásquez, 2013), the particular configuration of Santo Daime is quite distinctive. For example, Brazilian neo-Pentecostal religion, represented especially by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG; also Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, or IURD), acts through a model of direct transplantation and strongly centralized hierarchy, and its spread is seen mostly among the Latino, black, and Portuguese-speaking population. Some have viewed it as a kind of "Black Church" or ethnic religion, even though it is present in over 80 countries, appealing to foreign disciples by offering services in many local languages (Freston, 2009).

Santo Daime shares with UCKG and other Brazilian exports, like capoeira and Afro-Brazilian religions, a strong appeal. Even though the expansion of Santo Daime is largely coeval with that of the UCKG, and like UCKG, its expansion does not owe to any massive migratory movement of Brazilians overseas, its movement through class lines has been roughly the opposite. Santo Daime began among mostly poor, marginal Afro-Brazilians and mestizos, and spread to white, middle-class populations in urban Brazil and other countries. Although Santo Daime maintains Portuguese as a fundamental language for rituals, and even though its founder was an uneducated black man, and the main sacrament is originally from the Amazon, most initiated members of Santo Daime outside Brazil are white and do not speak fluent Portuguese.

The internationalization of Santo Daime

In the second half of the 1980s, Santo Daime expanded beyond Brazil's borders to several countries, mostly in Europe and North America. Initially, the Daime ceremonies took place in an informal workshop setting, gradually becoming more structured (Balzer, 2005). Santo Daime arrived in the United States in 1987–88. The first CEFLURIS ritual in Europe took place in 1989 in Spain, led by the church Céu do Mar from Rio de Janeiro (Groisman, 2000; Pavillard & de las Casas, 2011). That same year, the first international Daime encounter was held at Céu do Mapiá. By 1990, there were Daime groups established in Spain, Belgium, and Portugal (Blainey, 2013), and Padrinho Valdete (Padrinho Sebastião's eldest

son) had made his first visit to Germany (Rohde & Sander, 2011). But that same year also saw the church's first legal problems in the U.S.

In 1992, Alfredo Gregório, or Padrinho Afredo, another son of Sebastião Mota, and the church's top authority, made his first trip outside South America. The year 1992 also saw the first Daime church founded in Holland, Céu dos Ventos, followed by Céu de Santa Maria, currently one of the largest and most respected Daime centers outside Brazil, which is led by a Dutch woman, Geraldine Fijne-man (Groisman, 2000). This in itself was an important innovation, since a male hierarchy had traditionally dominated the church. Around this time, so-called *comitivas* – small groups of singers, musicians, and leaders – began traveling together, serving as cultural emissaries and strengthening the sense of group identity in both national and foreign Santo Daime centers. The *comitivas* typically are hosted in the houses of local members or in special accommodations. They are treated with great reverence and have an intense agenda. Usually, they visit as many churches as possible. Their activities include things such as long hymn rehearsals, advice to members on ritual and personal matters, interpretation of the meaning of the hymns, tips on how to handle the *fardas* and *maracás* (a percussion instrument typical in Santo Daime rituals) or conflicts in the church, and stories about the old leaders and the “Doctrine.” When a *comitiva* is in town, members from all regional churches tend to show up; these are considered special or “better spiritual works [rituals].” Extra fees are charged in order to cover the travelling expenses and projects in Mapiá. Being part of a *comitiva* is a sign of great prestige and personal status; members of the *comitivas* tend to have a better material situation than people who do not have the possibility to travel outside the Amazon.

Santo Daime arrived in the mid-1990s in Italy (Menozzi, 2011), where two centers were formed; and in the late 1990s, it arrived in Ireland, brought there by people associated with the centers in Holland (Watt, 2013). Centers also spread to Uruguay (Scuro, 2012) and Canada, where a church was founded in 1996 (Tupper, 2011).

However, this rapid process of expansion has also produced a complex history of conflicts within the group and other ayahuasca religions, legal problems, and several media scandals. In 1994, Germany was one of the first countries to take legal action against Daime groups active overseas, accompanied by a sensationalist media story about the group in the important news magazine *Der Spiegel* (Rohde & Sander, 2011). In 1999, authorities in the U.S. detained two Daime practitioners. That same year, two Santo Daime leaders from Holland were jailed for violating Dutch antidrug laws, while in Germany, a group of 100 heavily armed police raided a Daime campsite (Rohde & Sander, 2011). In Spain, church members were detained in 2000. In 2004, in Italy, 27 liters of the daime beverage were confiscated, and a year later, 20 Daime practitioners were jailed. Sensational media coverage described the group as a satanic cult practicing black magic and orgiastic rituals (Menozzi, 2011). In Ireland, a Daime leader was detained for ayahuasca possession in 2007 (Watt, 2013), and in Belgium, 47 liters of the beverage were confiscated between 2011 and 2013 (Blainey, 2013). Such cases continue

to happen in various countries around the world where Daime groups are active (Labate & Feeney, 2012; Feeney & Labate, 2013).

Such problems are relevant to understanding the ongoing process of organizing, adapting, and resignifying Santo Daime in new contexts, but they have not impeded the transnationalization of the group. Current fieldwork by others and ourselves confirms that Daime rituals are being carried out in at least 43 countries on all the inhabited continents (Blainey, 2013; Dawson, 2012), including the following:

- 22 European (Eurasian) countries: Germany, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Holland, England, Ireland, Italy, Britain, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey;
- 7 South American countries: Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay, in addition to Brazil;
- 3 North American countries: the U.S., Canada, and Mexico;
- 3 Asian countries: India, Japan, and Russia;
- 3 African countries: South Africa, Morocco, and Kenya;
- 3 Middle Eastern countries: Iran, Israel, and Palestine; and
- 2 countries in Oceania: Australia and New Zealand.

In Europe, there are an estimated 600 uniform-wearing members (*fardados*) belonging to 40 different Daime groups, including both full-fledged churches as well as *pontos* (“points”: small centers that distribute the beverage but don’t carry out all official rituals) (Blainey, 2013). Spain alone has some 250 *fardados* (López-Pavillard & de las Casas, 2011). After two decades of activity, Holland’s Daime centers are among the most highly structured outside of Brazil (Groisman, 2000; Rehen, 2011). Whereas it is true that, numerically, the number of *fardados* is almost insignificant, the depth of transnational expansion is impressive and, most importantly, the sociological issues it raises are important.

All ongoing research indicates that these numbers are only growing. Unlike the case of UDV, Santo Daime congregations overseas have tended to become increasingly independent from their original institutional networks in Brazil (Dawson, 2012). The fluidity of the less-institutionalized *pontos*, the clandestine nature of the religion in many countries, and the dynamic nature of the movement make it almost impossible to catalog the exact number of Daime groups and adepts, either within or outside of Brazil. This situation is amplified by the large number of sporadic participants who occasionally attend ceremonies but are not *fardados*, or by *fardados* who leave the group after a few years.

The transnationalization of Santo Daime (CEFLURIS/ICEFLU) has been a diverse, nonlinear process, involving a unique dialogue with the culture and legal situation in each context. These contingencies likewise impinge on liturgical and religious questions. But before analyzing this situation, we return to Brazil, where the process of expansion occurred in parallel, and as a vivid complement to, the international scene.

Change and growth of Santo Daime in Brazil

While foreigners were first coming into contact with Santo Daime, the religious group also continued its process of expansion within Brazil. The structural miscibility of the group stands out during this time period, producing relevant modifications. The first of these was reflected in a changing membership profile. In urban centers in Brazil, unlike in its Amazonian region of origins, Daime adepts were mostly educated professionals, artists, and intellectuals. At this time, Santo Daime ceased to be based on what Weber (1997) called “other-worldly asceticism.” Social, family, and gender relations came to reflect middle-class standards of southern Brazil, such as the professional independence of women and small numbers of children per family – standards that were quite different from those of the founding members of the church from poor, rural communities of northern Brazil. Another important transformation was the proximity and opening of the CEFLURIS branch of Santo Daime toward other religious movements, notably the Afro-Brazilian tradition of Umbanda. This contact was initiated by Padrinho Sebastião’s first visit to southern Brazil in the mid-1980s, when he met an Umbanda priestess (*mãe de santo*) known as *Baixinha* (“Short Lady”) from the Fluminense neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro. This contact led to the development of what is now known as “Umbandaime,” a mixture of Santo Daime and Umbanda found in many Brazilian cities as well as overseas.

Although the miscibility of Padrinho Sebastião’s group was characteristic of Santo Daime’s initial expansion, this is not to say that this openness and adaptability was unlimited. Each group developed its own particularities, and its own conflicts and discontinuities in such interreligious dialogs. Certain Daime branches welcomed borrowings from Umbanda, but this acceptance was by no means unanimous and created dissent in some quarters. Daime branches or individual adepts with a stricter attachment to Christianity, for example, rejected these innovations as contrary to their interpretations of the Christian nature of “the Doctrine.” However, according to our fieldwork observations, the practice of spirit possession and incorporation, strongly associated with Umbanda, is especially important in overseas Daime branches.

Toward the end of the 1980s, Sebastião Mota’s son, Alfredo Gregorio, gradually took over his father’s role in the church, and he was already leading the group in 1990 when Mota died. Thus, there was no dispute over leadership succession as had happened in the original CICLU group when Mestre Irineu passed away. Nonetheless, the death of Padrinho Sebastião did result in a process of fragmentation and pluralization of Santo Daime. Many churches, without ever contesting the role of “Padrinho Alfredo” as their legitimate spiritual leader, became progressively more independent from the CEFLURIS/ICEFLU organization in institutional terms (Assis, 2013).

Each time Santo Daime opened itself to new religious tendencies and local expressions in this process of expansion, the new groups gained autonomy in relationship to the institutional roots in Amazonia. Involvement with new practices and cultures differentiated and distinguished each of these new Santo Daime

groups, which became ever more heterogeneous and distant from the traditionalist, “hard core” Daimistas of Rio Branco.

The process of expansion was thus closely associated with liturgical and theological innovations and resignifications, leading to major institutional reorganization in the 1990s. In 1998, an effort was made to formally separate Santo Daime into different administrative spheres: the CEFLURIS religious institution was reorganized and renamed as ICEFLU, and a distinct entity was established to handle social and environmental issues, the CEFLURIS Institute for Environmental Development (IDA-CEFLURIS).

Expansion into southern Brazil and overseas also forced the group to deal with the important question of religious freedom and the use of their sacrament. Although Santo Daime had been stigmatized and persecuted over the use of the psychoactive beverage since its earliest days under Mestre Irineu (Goulart, 2004), its growth and increasing visibility took these conflicts to a higher level, resulting in national and international legal disputes that persist to this day (Labate & Jungaberle, 2011; Labate & Feeney, 2012; Labate, 2014).

From the Amazon to the world: particularities and resignifications

The expansion of a religion to new horizons always results in transformations. In the case of Santo Daime, two kinds of transformation stand out distinctly in the case of overseas movements: a particularizing character, which favors growth and promotes both differentiation and conflict; and an opposing, generalizing character, which contributes toward religious self-reflection and produces integration and shared identity. The former is apparent in the way various Daime churches develop idiosyncratic differences. This, in association with Daime’s structural miscibility and CEFLURIS/ICEFLU’s institutional weakness, results in each church becoming a particular microcosm. Ritual idiosyncrasies include the choice of music and hymns, ways of preparing and storing the beverage, and various other aspects that can be summarized as follows:

- The introduction of nontraditional instruments like the violin, marimba, charango, and others;
- Production of the *daime* (ayahuasca) beverage over gas stoves rather than over wood fires; new varieties of *daime* (see below); refrigeration to avoid fermentation; and
- Various ritual innovations, including meditation, Hindu-style mantras, North American indigenous shamanistic practices, the use of other psychoactive plants, etc.

In overseas Daime groups, although the official hymnals are in Portuguese, and although the Portuguese language and all things Brazilian maintain an elevated status within the Daime milieu, many parts of the ritual are carried out in the local language, and hymnals are sometimes translated into bilingual versions.

The better-known hymns are sometimes sung in the local language, and there are already several examples of “received” hymns in languages besides Portuguese (Rehen, 2011). These sometimes contain cultural references entirely alien to the Amazonian or Brazilian Daime universe, for example, Nordic and Celtic mythology (Rohde & Sander, 2011; Watt, 2013).

Another important aspect is access to the daime beverage. For climatic as well as legal reasons, foreign groups have tremendous problems in producing and importing their sacrament. Temperate climates in Europe, much of the U.S., and Canada make cultivating the *jagube* (ayahuasca) vine and *rainha* (*Psychotria*) shrub almost impossible. In Hawaii, by contrast, the tropical plants grow remarkably well, and several different religious and psychonautic groups prepare the beverage there. The dubious or illegal status of the beverage also greatly restricts access in many countries, whether for production or importation.

For the most part, Daime groups overseas must import the beverage from Brazil, resulting in sometimes-difficult negotiations with church leaders in Brazil, as well as problems with storage, shipping, customs, and drug enforcement laws. All of this has resulted in a series of ritual and symbolic innovations as well as practical adaptations. One recent example is the development of a highly concentrated “daime gel,” even more viscous than the honey-like *daime mel* (“daime honey”), which itself was an innovation, being a concentration of the original liquid beverage prepared by Mestre Irineu. Daime gel is cooked to evaporate almost all the liquid to the point that it becomes a paste, facilitating its transport to Daime centers in Brazil distant from Amazonia and making it easier to avoid customs problems internationally.

Because of its centrality to all Daime liturgy, ritual, and belief, obtaining the beverage is fundamental to this religious practice. This creates a chain of producers and distributors, both within and outside the religious group proper, and can also sometimes engender disputes. Producing, obtaining, or acquiring access to the sacrament becomes a form of increasing one’s personal status and rising in the internal hierarchy of the group.

Other particularities are tied to the place of worship. In Brazil, there are churches and centers built exclusively as Daime temples, but in Europe and the U.S., services may be held in rented recreation rooms, spiritual centers, Christian churches, or private homes. Often, these groups structure themselves as “moving churches,” without a fixed place of worship and carrying with them all ritual paraphernalia. The lack of their own facilities does not necessarily mean a lack of organization or membership, but it does present significant challenges when compared with the situation even in southern Brazil, outside the Amazonian center of the religion. Groups in different localities constitute themselves more or less institutionally. In Holland, for example, where daime use is not prohibited, churches are highly structured and institutionalized, with a significant membership and group identity (Groisman, 2000; Rehen, 2011). On the other hand, in Germany, where the beverage is illegal, groups are small, dispersed, not very cohesive, and institutionally precarious.

Another example of how legal context influences the internal organization of religious groups is found in the case of *Cannabis* (the Santa Maria sacrament for

Daime practitioners) in Holland, where the drug is tolerated. Thus, in Holland, Santa Maria plays a central role in Daime ritual, contributing to group cohesion and integration. It is used regularly by both men and women in certain rituals and is a normal part of the religious life of church members. This represents an effective and singular example of *endogenous cultural regulation* of a psychoactive substance governing how the plant is grown, how the cigarettes (*pitos*) are prepared (conical instead of cylindrical rolling), characteristic liturgy for specific celebrations, a specialized vocabulary, and the habit of introducing new members to the rituals at first only with Santa Maria. This exemplifies how the cultural and legal context can permit informal social controls to develop in relation to psychoactive plants, such that new ritual modalities appear in opposition to marginal, unregulated uses of substances for mostly recreational ends (with no concern for origins and processes of production and use).

Such practices do not occur in Brazil, mostly because *Cannabis* is illegal, and hence it is not possible to fully develop the doctrinal symbolism and ritual practices around the plant. Instead, in Brazil, Santa Maria becomes a source of differentiation and conflict between groups: *Cannabis* use by some groups is cited by more orthodox Daime churches as an example of the “perversion” of Mestre Irineu’s traditions, while rival ayahuasca religions evoke this use of an illegal substance – in contrast with now regulated ayahuasca (for more information on the current legal situation of ayahuasca in Brazil, see *Resolução* n.01, 2010) – as a factor that reduces the legal and religious legitimacy of Santo Daime overall.

And yet, alongside the particularities and idiosyncrasies of each group, the process of expansion has also engendered a larger trend of religious reflection and identity concerning Santo Daime in terms of its history, origins, and spiritual practice. This process, which we might call “spiritual belonging,” has allowed Santo Daime to build a fairly cohesive culture, ethos, and worldview from which it presents itself to the wider society as a homogeneous group, despite sectarian differences, conflicts, and the lack of a strong institutional organization.

Back to the forest: the return of the “religion of the forest”

The transformation of Santo Daime is now coming full circle as the processes of resignification that occurred through its international expansion are now returning to influence the conception and practice of the religion in its place of origin in Amazonian Brazil. For example, environmentalism is a popular movement, especially among New Age practitioners, and the Amazonian origins of the religion provide additional value for the religion’s adepts in regions outside of the Amazon and Brazil. Ecology and sustainability were already significant concerns for such people, and the spiritual experience with daime has further intensified, enchanted, and mystified their connection with the forest. This connection extends to an almost utopian view of indigenous peoples and their harmony with pristine natural environments. The power of these interpretations among both non-Amazonian Brazilians and non-Brazilian practitioners has had strong internal repercussions. Santo Daime has come to represent itself as the “religion of the forest.” This connection

with the Amazon has been used by Santo Daime to gain social and legal legitimacy as an “authentic” and “traditional” religion of Amazonian and Brazilian origin.

Mestre Irineu’s original group has become a symbol of idyllic communal life, uncorrupted by the illusions of the modern world, representing the autochthonous traditional peoples of the Americas who survived despite historical repression. Irineu, the “grandson of slaves,” thus becomes a double representation of both African and Amerindian resistance, an icon of precolonial wisdom that has come to illuminate the modern mindset that has lost all harmony with the origins of spiritual knowledge and nature. In this way, the consumption of ayahuasca has been expressively reinterpreted in southern Brazil and overseas. During the early days of Santo Daime, disciples of Mestre Irineu viewed any consumption of ayahuasca outside of his ritual centers with suspicion and disdain, even use by traditional indigenous shamans. Today, indigenous practices are understood to be the traditional roots of ayahuasca, which, according to the mythology of Santo Daime as well as UDV, was associated with the Inca and other ancient South American civilizations. In this sense, and in clear disagreement with the attitudes of its founding members, Santo Daime is valued as a “shamanic religion.” This valorization of the indigenous origins of Santo Daime has allowed indigenous peoples themselves to enter into and benefit from the urban ayahuasca scene. Some indigenous groups have claimed an explicit connection to the origins of Santo Daime through their ancestor’s supposed mentorship of Mestre Irineu (Labate & Coutinho, 2014).

And yet, through its dialogue with Christianity as well as its travails in the legal realm, ayahuasca has also been reinterpreted as a sacrament analogous to the Christian host. Santo Daime and other ayahuasca groups in Brazil have consciously constructed themselves as religions – indeed, authentic, uniquely Brazilian and Amazonian religions that deserve legitimacy and respect.

These two models of resignification, particular and generalist, are illustrated in the relationship between Céu do Mapiá and Santo Daime churches in southern Brazil and overseas. Though it is the spiritual heart of Padrinho Sebastião’s movement, Céu do Mapiá exerts no institutional control over a significant portion of Santo Daime churches that were never formally affiliated with, or else disassociated themselves from, the CEFLURIS/ICEFLU organization. Some of these groups produce and consume daime in a completely autonomous fashion. However, this institutional pulverization does not necessarily represent a rupture in the religious order. Representatives and members from such nonaffiliated churches make occasional visits to Mapiá and likewise receive comitivas from Mapiá as their guests. This flexibility of relationships within the network of affiliated and nonaffiliated churches allows individualized expansions based on the initiative of certain comitivas or groups that form around charismatic *padrinhos*. Church leaders in Mapiá appear to tolerate and even welcome such contacts, perhaps as a strategy for maintaining some degree of involvement with the group and as a means to advance expansion worldwide. In sum, although the institutional ties between Santo Daime groups are weak, there are a set of religious and spiritual bonds that maintain a certain level of cohesion and identity throughout the group.

Such spiritual bonds are also implicit in the widely shared hexagonal shape of the ritual space, a standardized calendar of ceremonies, shared dance rhythms (march, waltz, mazurka) for rituals, the gendered division of labor, the shared patterns in uniforms, the presence of certain religious symbols, and the reverence for certain Padrinhos and Madrinhas, Amazonia, and Brazil itself. These reflect a widely shared set of cultural features present throughout the whole loose religious network that serve as points of contact between different groups, making it possible for diverse groups to be understood under a shared designation and sense of identity, to wit: Santo Daime, the “religion of the forest.”

Built through specific historical processes, the diverse Santo Daime groups constitute an intensely mobile network of social relations and exchange among members and groups in different localities. The Daime tradition goes beyond religious practice per se and includes a series of social relations – marriage, affinity, *compadrazgo* – that goes beyond strictly economic issues.

Daime adepts from southern Brazil and other countries travel periodically to Amazonia, and some own their own houses in Mapiá, where they may reside for some time. By the same token, Daimistas from the Amazon region also visit southern Brazil and foreign countries as part of the traveling *comitivas*, and some take up residence in these places: their “spiritual capital” provides them with migratory opportunities. Knowledge of English and other foreign languages has become an asset for Brazilian Daime adepts, especially those who participate in *comitivas*.

The process of international expansion has turned Mapiá into a kind of Mecca for Santo Daime, a center for international pilgrimage that provides significant local economic activity. Such visits may include prearranged programs, especially for foreigners, such as daime preparation (*feitios*), expeditions to the forest, singing lessons, and initiation into other aspects of doctrine. Residents of Mapiá have seen changes in their social life such that doctrinal and musical knowledge that was previously a normal part of their religious upbringing in the church have become a distinctive, valued kind of expert knowledge.

In southern Brazil, the expansion and legalization of Santo Daime created a growing supply of centers and possibilities for religious mobility to urban areas. An individual unsatisfied with a particular church can find another center fairly easily. Thus, the adept’s relationship with Santo Daime has become increasingly like that of a believer in any ordinary religion, and not the specific, highly structured life of a minority religious movement.

The Internet has been another important innovation, increasingly used by the churches to aid in organizing their own groups and maintaining contact with the international Daime network. The Internet serves, on the one hand, to attract new adepts, as well as for internal communication, providing a channel for learning hymns, doctrine, and history, and thus intensifying the group’s unique social and cultural identity. On the other hand, the Internet, and especially social networks, also represent a source of conflict among different churches, leaders, and their followers, to the extent that it offers horizontal channels of communication that challenge the hierarchical structures that predominate in religious institutions.

Thus, the expansion and internationalization of Santo Daime, and the legal discussions it has provoked, constitute a dynamic, plural, and ongoing enterprise that translates into a continuous process of adaptation to the global religious context. Though it represents a single religion, we can identify three distinctive spheres: the Amazon region (notably C eu do Mapi a), where members tend to have lower income and levels of formal education, as well as mestizo (*caboclo*) and Afro-Brazilian ethnic roots; urban areas in southern Brazil, where Daime is largely a middle-class phenomenon, and its members often have more diverse religious practices related to new spiritual movements; and overseas, where the question of the different cultural and linguistic contexts, as well as legality, can be paramount, and where Santo Daime’s Brazilian, and specifically Amazonian, origins have an ever greater significance (as in the case of other religious transnational diasporas, where the image of the “homeland” takes on powerful meanings and discourses). Santo Daime’s international expansion thus provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on questions such as the tension between religious identity and individual liberty, between a universalizing doctrine of salvation and local resignifications, and on the very condition of modernity itself.

Final remarks

In the West, and in countries heavily under the influence of Western culture such as Brazil, modernity and the process of secularization did not create a society without religion and did not mandate the construction of a strictly scientific and “rational” human subjectivity. Instead, they produced a multiplication of religious groups, the individualization/subjectification of beliefs and religiosity, and even the radicalization of religious fundamentalism. The “global south,” formerly a prime site of evangelization and conquest by monotheistic Western religions, has become an exporter of diverse and distinctive religious traditions. Latin America took on a surprising level of agency in the global religious scene, and Brazil stands out as simultaneously (and somewhat paradoxically) the largest predominately Catholic country in the world, the second largest country in terms of the number of practicing Protestant Christians, and the largest in terms of Pentecostal and spiritist practitioners (Freston, 2009). In addition, Brazil is the cradle of numerous non-Christian religious movements, from Afro-Brazilian to esoteric and New Age, to the syncretic ayahuasca religions studied here: what has been called the Brazilian religious diaspora (Rocha & V asquez, 2013). In this context, Santo Daime has emerged as a new option: a rich and complex phenomenon and yet, until recently, under-studied.

Santo Daime was particularly ripe for expansion beyond its traditional regional limits due to a series of characteristics inherent to the religious movement itself – which we identify as miscibility and psychoactivity. As the religion spread to southern Brazil and internationally, a series of transformations occurred in two separate and somewhat opposing dimensions that we have identified as particularistic, referring to the establishment of differences, idiosyncrasies, and conflicts between loosely affiliated groups; and a broad generalizing tendency toward cohesion and religious identity, despite this internal diversity.

Indeed, Santo Daime only came to be understood as a true religion (as opposed to a sect or cult) in the global religious system (Beyer, 2006) after the process of expansion and resignification analyzed here. This trajectory included conflict as well as dialogic processes among various actors that contributed to new perceptions of the group, both from the outside and from within. The international and virtual (through the Internet) expansion of this religious movement touches on important questions in the contemporary world, including freedom of belief, the definition of religion, ritual use of psychoactive plants, the diaspora of transnational religious movements, and the role of Brazil in world culture. The popular expression has never been more appropriate: “God is Brazilian.”

Notes

- 1 This text was modified and translated from a manuscript originally published in the Portuguese as: Assis, Glauber & Labate, Beatriz C. (2015). Dos igarapés da Amazônia para o outro lado do Atlântico: A expansão e internacionalização do Santo Daime no contexto religioso global. *Religião e Sociedade*, 34(2).
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