

Introduction

My first experience of Santo Daime occurred in 2005 during research for a book on the non-mainstream religious scene in Brazil (A. Dawson, 2007). Pretty much unprepared for the sensory feast of a Santo Daime ritual, I was visually struck by the colourful 'uniforms' and brightly decorated ceremonial space. The strongly rhythmical and fervently sung 'hymns' also made an impact, as did the powerful smell and bitter taste of the religious sacrament which practitioners call 'Daime'. A psychoactive beverage more commonly known as 'ayahuasca', the sacrament of Daime and its psychotropic effects further added to the intense sensory stimulation which abides as an enduring memory of my earliest encounter with Santo Daime. Staged within the mountainous terrain of a national park hundreds of miles north of São Paulo, the ritual contents and format originally forged in the Amazon region of north-west Brazil did not seem particularly out of place. However, unlike the poor, mixed-race community which first elaborated Santo Daime as part of its semi-rural subsistence lifestyle, the ritual participants with whom I was celebrating were overwhelmingly drawn from Brazil's predominantly white urban middle class. Whereas the uniforms, songs and sacrament were very much of the Amazon region, those wearing, singing and consuming the ceremonial accoutrements of Santo Daime certainly were not. By no means discordant, the juxtaposition of Amazonian origins and urban-professional appropriation nevertheless piqued my academic interest.

Subsequent to finishing the book which first took me to Santo Daime, a British Academy Research Grant followed by a Leverhulme Trust Fellowship generously provided funding which enabled the questions raised by my early encounters with 'the doctrine' to be pursued at length. And so it was in 2007 that a research project commenced that would take me initially to the Amazon region, then to a miscellany of states across Brazil before taking in parts of Europe and North America. As well as the usual academic engagement with written and electronic sources produced by or about Santo Daime, research chiefly comprised periods of participant observation during which formal interviews, impromptu conversations, casual interactions and ritual practice took place. Since its founding in 1930, Santo Daime has split into a variety of different branches, most of which remain relatively small and concentrated

within the Amazon region of their birth. In contrast to other branches, however, the organization known commonly as 'Cefluris' is significantly larger, more geographically dispersed and, as a result, the most demographically diverse.¹ Except where explicit qualification is made, this book concerns Santo Daime Cefluris (hereafter, Santo Daime) which was originally led by Sebastião Mota de Melo (1920–90) and is today headed by his son, Alfredo Gregório de Melo.

Building upon questions raised by my first experiences of Santo Daime, the research undertaken from 2007 to 2011 primarily focused on three areas. First, research concerned the origins and ethos of Santo Daime as a religious system. Here, attention was paid to the socio-cultural conditions of the Amazon region that gave rise to Santo Daime, the historical trajectory of the movement (from its Amazonian beginnings to international status) and the various practical and symbolic components which combine to form its hybrid ritual repertoire and variegated religious world view. Second, consideration was given to the processes of transition and transformation associated with Santo Daime's initial expansion beyond the Amazon region and subsequent internationalization as part of the non-mainstream, alternative religious scene. Importantly, Santo Daime's geographical spread and ongoing growth is intimately connected with a significant shift in its demographic profile and concomitant modification of the practical-symbolic dynamics at play across its ritual repertoire and religious world view. In this respect, research focus rested upon the implications for traditional beliefs and behaviour of Santo Daime's progressive insertion within the alternative religious scene populated by middle-class members of late-modern, urban-industrial society. Third, attention was paid to Santo Daime's relationship (as a now established occupant of the non-mainstream religious landscape) with the overarching societal processes and socio-cultural dynamics constitutive of Western late-modernity in general and urban middle-class subjectivity in particular. Here, research centred upon the ways in which the practical-knowledge furnished by Santo Daime speaks to and articulates the life-experiences, aspirations and concerns of its urban-professional membership. It also engaged Santo Daime relative to the overarching interface between late-modern society and contemporary religiosity.

The end result of this research, the book before you now addresses each of these three sets of concerns. It does so by combining the data acquired during fieldwork with insights offered by a variety of academic disciplines and approaches, not least of which are the sociology of religion, religious studies, social anthropology and cultural studies. By way of overall balance across the following chapters, the second and third sets of concerns receive the lion's share of attention. The issues and questions comprising these concerns would not, though, make much, if any, sense without a prior and sufficiently

thorough treatment of the origins, early trajectory and practical-symbolic composition of the ritual repertoire and religious world view of Santo Daime. As such, Chapter 1 and a considerable portion of Chapter 2 are given over to delineating these matters. After detailing the birth of Santo Daime at the hands of its founder Raimundo Irineu Serra (called 'Master Irineu' by his followers), Chapter 1 concentrates upon the organizational offshoot of Cefluris established by 'Padrinho Sebastião' (Godfather Sebastian) and led today by his son, 'Padrinho Alfredo'. In addition to identifying the most important religio-cultural sources on which Santo Daime draws, the opening chapter traces the initial spread and subsequent internationalization of Cefluris. Chapter 2 continues the introductory theme by describing the ritual repertoire of Santo Daime along with its use of ceremonial space and time. Employing the insights of Michel Foucault, Santo Daime's ritual repertoire is engaged as a disciplinary regime preoccupied with physical probity and symbolic order. The chapter then moves, by way of Pierre Bourdieu, to explore contemporary ritual space as a dynamic arena characterized as much by fluidity and contestation as by fixity and hierarchy. Here, the disciplinary regime of Santo Daime ritual is treated as a mutable and evolving 'field of force' which, at the hands of a now dominant urban-professional constituency, is undergoing a variety of practical and symbolic modifications typical of its newfound late-modern context.

Chapter 3 combines the concepts of 'dislocation' and 'performative utterance' to explicate Santo Daime's religious world view. Santo Daime's world view is thereby treated as a dislocutory speech act which situates believers (known as *daimistas*) in a relationship of constructive tension vis-à-vis society at large. Although relativizing *daimista* relations with their prevailing socio-cultural environment, Santo Daime's contemporary world view does not fully foreclose on the practical and symbolic possibilities made available by the late-modern, societal context. Exemplifying the principally apolitical character of Santo Daime, two important emphases are identified and treated as narrative leitmotifs which inform the *daimista* world view. While each orchestrating leitmotif embodies a countercultural stance in respect of the world at large, they articulate two relatively contrasting views of the triadic relationship between the Santo Daime community, its individual members and their overarching socio-cultural context. Whereas the more established leitmotif of an 'apolitics of social transformation' reflects a traditional communitarian ethos, the later but increasingly popular leitmotif of an 'apolitics of self-transformation' embodies the strongly subjectivized character of Santo Daime's urban-professional practitioners. Chapter 4 explores the growth of spirit-oriented practice across the contemporary *daimista* movement and explains why certain novel forms of spirit mediumship are gaining in popularity relative to established modes

of supernatural engagement. Santo Daime's understanding of the self as 'possessable' by spiritual agencies is first outlined, along with the notion of 'alternate' rather than altered states of consciousness. The spiritual entities engaged by Santo Daime are then treated, followed by a detailed look at the ritual context, types and modes in and through which spirit-oriented practice occurs. In addition to highlighting the hybrid, variegated and rapidly evolving nature of the contemporary *daimista* repertoire, these discussions identify novel modes of expressivity and alterity (otherness) as instrumental to the progressive transformation of traditional belief and practice in respect of the self, the spirits and the overarching ritual context by which spirit-oriented activity is framed.

Concentrating on the urban middle-class constituency which now forms the overwhelming majority of the movement, Chapter 5 explicates the contemporary character of Santo Daime. It does so by linking Santo Daime's orientation to the world at large with the typically late-modern traits of its urban-professional membership; identified here as part of the 'new middle class' which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century across the urban-industrial landscape of Western late-modernity. The notion of 'entangled modernity' is used to describe both the prevailing dynamics and practical-symbolic implications of the societal context which, as members of the new middle class, urban-professional *daimistas* hold in common. Next, and by way of contributing to academic discussions about religion and the market, the concept of 'mystified consumption' is formulated as a means of exploring the manner and extent to which the commoditized subjectivity of the new middle class can be said to impact upon the contemporary *daimista* repertoire. Subsequent to considering how Santo Daime may be classified as a religious world view, the chapter closes by identifying the contemporary *daimista* repertoire as form a 'world-rejecting aestheticism'. A short Postscript concludes the book.

The book's title, *Santo Daime: A New World Religion*, is both indicative and slightly playful. *Santo Daime* baldly refers to the religious movement with which this book is concerned. Coined by the religion's founder, Master Irineu, the term 'Santo Daime' literally means 'Holy Daime' and refers to the sacramental beverage of Daime (i.e. ayahuasca). Of Portuguese origin, 'Daime' (or *dai-me*) literally means 'give me' and is understood by *daimistas* to function in a petitionary sense of, for example, 'give me light' (*dai-me luz*), 'give me strength' (*dai-me força*), 'give me love' (*dai-me amor*). The term 'New World' has a twofold meaning. First, it refers literally to the South American continent and thereby plays on traditional renderings of Latin America as the 'new world' (*nouveau monde*). Santo Daime is, then, a religion of the new world. Second, the term refers figuratively to various countercultural strands of the *daimista* paradigm which reference a 'new world' as either imminent

or desirable by virtue of the debased condition in which our planet and its inhabitants currently find themselves (see Chapter 3). Santo Daime is, then, a religion *for* a new world. The final phrase of the title, *New World Religion*, plays on established (though contested) categorizations which differentiate between 'world', 'ethnic' or 'indigenous' and 'new' religions. Setting aside the utility or otherwise of categorical distinctions such as these, the term 'New World Religion' is intentionally mixed and serves to underline the challenge to neat and tidy typologies issued by Santo Daime's hybrid, flexible and variegated ritual repertoire and religious world view.

Compared with 'world' or 'ethnic' religious traditions, and despite its ongoing growth and international expansion, Santo Daime remains a relatively small religion. While organizational factors and societal conditions (see Chapter 1) make numbers hard to determine, at the time of writing (July 2012) regular participation in Santo Daime is unlikely to exceed 20,000 individuals world wide. As with other new religious phenomena, however, the importance of Santo Daime resides not in its size but in its significance for understanding the respective character and dynamic interface of society and religion. It is for similar reasons that the founders of sociology as an academic discipline in its own right (e.g. Max Weber and Émile Durkheim) interested themselves in novel religious phenomena as practical-symbolic barometers of overarching social transformation. For example, the non-mainstream status and countercultural ethos of new religions such as Santo Daime furnish potential insight into the nature of both marginal and minority means of socio-cultural signification and collective practice. The academic study of novel religious phenomena also engenders appreciation of socio-cultural formation and change through engaging such things as new and alternative lifestyles, unconventional modes of social integration and corporate behaviour and innovative expressions of disenchantment and protest. Organizational and interpersonal dynamics can also be explored through the study of new religions, along with group formation, the maintenance of collective identity, membership and belonging, leadership styles and the making and acceptance of authority claims. In addition, the rapid emergence and growth (along with the sometimes equally rapid decline) of new religious movements furnishes a bounded opportunity to analyse the concrete impact of the otherwise extended processes and overarching dynamics of modern social change. All in all, the study of novel religious phenomena like Santo Daime promises to shed light not only upon the present status and possible future of religion, but also upon the nature and potential directions of the societal forces and dynamics which frame religious belief and ritual practice. Barometers of both religious change in particular and societal transformation in general, movements such as Santo Daime have an analytical significance well in excess of their actual numerical size.