

The Internationalization of Ayahuasca

edited by

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LIT

Dedicated to Rolf Verres

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The Historical Origins of Santo Daime: Academics, Adepts, and Ideology¹

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Santo Daime is a Brazilian religion established in the 1930s in the city of Rio Branco, in the state of Acre, Brazil by Raimundo Irineu Serra, now referred to as Mestre (“master”) Irineu. “Santo Daime,” or simply “Daime,” are synonymous terms for this religious movement whose practitioners and members are referred to by scholars and by some of these religious branches as “Daimistas.” At the center of the religion’s ceremonial practices is the consumption of *daime*, a psychoactive brew also known as *ayahuasca*, *hoasca*, *caapi* and other local names. Daime is prepared from the Amazonian liana *Banisteriopsis caapi*² and the leaves of *Psychotria viridis*,³ a shrub that belongs to the coffee family. The main psychoactive ingredient of the beverage is dimethyltryptamine (DMT) derived from the *Psychotria* leaves, which is active when ingested orally due to the action of harmaline and other ingredients found in the *Banisteriopsis* liana.

There are in fact multiple, largely independent religious groups denominated Santo Daime, all of which claim to follow Mestre Irineu’s teachings. Among these, two principal factions can be identified. First, there are a number of smaller groups, mostly restricted to the state of Acre, known collectively as “Alto Santo” or “Alto Santo line.” The main current within the Alto Santo tradition is the Centro de Iluminação Cristã Luz Universal (The Universal Light Center of Christian Illumination,” or CICLU), led by Madrinha Peregrina Gomes Serra, Mestre Irineu’s widow, and located in Rio Branco, in Acre. The second major, and much larger, Santo Daime faction, is known as Centro Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra (“The Raimundo Irineu Serra Eclectic Center of the Flowing Universal Light,” or CEFLURIS), based in the community of Céu do Mapiá, in the state of Amazonas and with branch centers located in various cities throughout Brazil and in other countries. CEFLURIS claims allegiance to Sebastião Mota de Melo, or Padrinho Sebastião (“Godfather Sebastião”), himself a former disciple of Mestre Irineu. Padrinho Sebastião died in the early 1990s, and his role within CEFLURIS was taken over by his son, Alfredo Gregório de Melo, or “Padrinho Alfredo.” Sebastião’s widow, Madrinha Rita Gregório de Melo (“Madrinha Rita”), also remains active within CEFLURIS. The various churches belonging to the Alto Santo line, by contrast, do not recognize the authority of Padrinho Sebastião and his heirs. Here, we investigate the historical origins of the broader religious phenomenon known as Santo Daime without overly concerning ourselves with the various divisions and competing claims of authority that arose after the death of Mestre Irineu. Aside from Santo Daime, there are two

other distinctive ayahuasca religions found in contemporary Brazil: the Barquinha, founded in 1945 in Rio Branco, Acre by Daniel Pereira de Mattos, and the União do Vegetal (UDV), founded in 1960 by José Gabriel da Costa in the city of Porto Velho, Rondônia. In addition to these formally constituted religions, there are also numerous, more recent groups found in urban centers and created largely by various “dissidents” of the three established ayahuasca religions (Labate, 2004a). Although we restrict our discussion here to the Santo Daime tradition, the arguments we develop are certainly relevant to the broader phenomenon of ayahuasca religions in Brazil. At the outset, it is important to point out that to some extent, members of Santo Daime construct their own identities in dialog with and in contrast to other ayahuasca religions, and vice-versa.

The beliefs and practices that constitute Santo Daime draw on a diverse set of cultural and religious elements, many of which are widespread in Brazil, including folk Catholicism, Kardecist Spiritism and other European esoteric traditions, Afro-Brazilian religious practices, indigenous shamanism, mestizo ayahuasca traditions, and Amazonian *caboclo* culture. It is sometimes difficult to identify and isolate these various strands of influence since many of these traditions had already undergone centuries of mutual borrowing and syncretism prior to being incorporated within Santo Daime, as is the case, for example, in the mutual affinities in belief and practice between Afro-Brazilian religions, mestizo divining, and folk healing in northeast Brazil, and similar practices among assimilated indigenous peoples (Pacheco, 2004). Nonetheless, both scholars and Daimistas themselves have attempted to trace the migration of these various cultural elements and study their process of re-signification within the symbolic corpus of Santo Daime. While recognizing the merits of these various studies, we note their tendency to conflate the historical formation of Santo Daime itself with the various authors’ personal representations of this religion as constructed through time and in relation to Brazilian society. This article focuses on the historical formation of Santo Daime by means of a panoramic but critical review of the relevant anthropological and other literature, while analyzing the implications of the different interpretations presented by various authors.

Anthropological Literature on the Origins of Santo Daime

There is a general consensus as to the three main cultural traditions present in the formation of Santo Daime: the “indigenous” or more broadly “Amazonian,” associated with the preparation and use of the ayahuasca brew and certain aspects of the ritual; the “European,” namely Catholic and esoteric (notably Kardecist) religious and spiritual elements; and the “African,” including the presence of various Afro-Brazilian entities in the Daime cosmology. Here, we review the main works dedicated to analyzing the historical formation of Santo Daime, pointing out the specific elements they discuss without necessarily evaluating their broader theoretical arguments (for a full literature review on ayahuasca religions, see Labate, 2004b; Labate, Rose and Santos, 2009). We will position these intellectual works within the larger frame of the “Brazilian myth (or fable) of the three races.” This can be considered as a kind of origin myth for Brazilian society. Authors from different historical mo-

ments have echoed a recurring narrative about the multi-ethnic origins of the Brazilian population, constituted over the past five centuries largely through the cultural and biological "miscegenation" between indigenous natives, European colonizers, and slaves brought from Africa. Inspired by 19th-century evolutionist thought, popular understanding held that this mixing would make Brazil home to a "degenerated race." In the 1930s the scholar Gilberto Freyre (1951, 1958), considered the father of the "racial democracy myth," developed a positive reevaluation of "Brazilian miscegenation," claiming that the process reduced the distance between social and ethnic classes. The idea of Brazil as a "racial melting pot" was used in the official discourse of the military dictatorship in the 1970s to emphasize the harmony between different regions and social and political realities. This "myth of the three races" also has tremendous currency in Brazilian popular culture and the social imagination, reflected in such popular phrases as, "one good thing about Brazil is the mixture of races." If, on the one hand, this myth serves to disguise enormous problems of racism and social inequality, on the other hand, it should not be considered merely a falsifying ideology, since so many of Brazil's national symbols indeed reflect such mixed origins (capoeira, candomblé, carnival, the national dish of "feijoada" bean stew), and since, in both national literary production and in manifestations of popular culture, the three main ethnic sources — indigenous, African, Portuguese — are indeed combined side by side (Goldstein, 2003; Da Matta, 1987; Schwarcz, 1996; Ortiz, 1988).

The first major anthropological study of Santo Daime was presented as a conference paper in 1981 and later published by Clodomir Monteiro da Silva (1985). According to this author, Daime is notable for "traces of medium-based religions of African acculturation," but the predominant influence is "Amerindian" (ibid., p. 105). He makes a vague reference to the "survival of Dahomey [elements]" (ibid., p. 102) — referring to a religious cult of West African origin — an argument which he develops further in later publications (see below). In his Master's thesis, which followed this first paper (1981/1985), Monteiro da Silva (1983) suggests that Santo Daime emerged in response to social turmoil in the wake of the collapse of the Rubber Boom economy after 1912, when tens of thousands of unemployed rubber tappers — many of them migrants from the poorest regions of northeast Brazil — abandoned the idle rubber tapping concessions (*seringais*) in the forest to seek employment in Amazonian towns. In this context, the early communities of Daimistas can be seen as alternative social formations to the chaotic situation in cities overrun by landless, unemployed rubber tappers; a kind of "halfway house" between the *seringais* and the new urban lifestyle. In this interpretation, Santo Daime is seen as an adaptive cultural system, or "rite of passage," for rubber tappers expelled from the *seringais*, and more generally for northeastern Brazilians displaced to the Amazon. The resulting syncretic religion is thus characterized as an "individual and collective shamanic trance" (ibid.) that mediates between Amerindian and Afro-Brazilian culture, and between rural (or forest-based) and urban social life.

In more recent work, Monteiro da Silva (2004) pays more attention to the Afro-Brazilian influences in Santo Daime, which he characterizes as an "Afro-Amazonian" religion. Citing other authors, he notes that the arrival of Afro-Brazilian rubber tappers from northeast Brazil, especially the state of Maranhão, began around the turn of the 20th century, before the spread, beginning in the 1930s, of Kardecist

Spiritism and the Afro-Brazilian *umbanda* religion throughout the larger cities in Brazil. In this revised interpretation, Santo Daime shows equal borrowings from both Amazonian ayahuasca shamanism as well as from the Afro-Brazilian religions of northeast Brazil, notably the Vodún cults of Maranhão. Specifically, the author mentions *tambor de mina*, the name given in Maranhão to the possession cults of African origin known elsewhere in Brazil as *candomblé* in Bahia, *xangô* in Pernambuco, and *batuque* in Rio Grande do Sul. Among the most important divinities in *tambor de mina* are the Vodún, entities from the Fon (Jeje) pantheon, equivalent to the *orixás* in Afro-Brazilian cults of Yoruba (Nagô) origin. As in other Afro-Brazilian religions, *tambor de mina* includes multiple “nations,” or internally differentiated ritual systems, each associated with distinctive ethnic origins: for example Jeje, Nagô, Cambinda, Cachêu, and Fulupa are among the nations present in the memories and oral traditions of Afro-Brazilian religions in Maranhão. However only two of these, the Jeje and Nagô have persisted as clearly demarcated religious entities, both descended from the two oldest *terreiros* (Afro-Brazilian worship centers) in Maranhão, the “Casa das Minas Jeje” and “Casa de Nagô” respectively, both dating to the mid-19th century. Although it is perhaps the more prestigious and better-studied of the two *terreiros*, Casa das Minas Jeje never developed additional branch centers in Maranhão or elsewhere. In contrast, the Casa Nagô cult spread through the creation of multiple branch *terreiros* in Maranhão, and later, Amazonia.

Monteiro da Silva (2004) associates the origins of Santo Daime with Fon (Jeje) religious practices originating in Dahomey (since 1975, the Republic of Benin in West Africa) by means of several pieces of evidence: (1) some of the founding families of Santo Daime in Acre had belonged to the Casa das Minas Jeje in Maranhão; (2) the names *Titango*, *Tintuma* and *Agarrube*, invoked as the three wise men in Mestre Irineu’s hymnal and applied to three varieties of *Banisteriopsis* liana used in preparing the daime beverage, are associated by this author with the royalty of Benin (for alternative interpretations of these terms, see La Rocque Couto [1989], discussed below), and (3) the words *Daime* and *Juramidam* (the most important spiritual entity in Santo Daime) supposedly possess a secret meaning associated with the cult of Dã, the sacred serpent of the Fon. However, we consider these conclusions to be embryonic and insufficient to suggest any direct connections between *tambor de mina* (and thus religious practices of West African origin) and Santo Daime. Nonetheless, Monteiro da Silva’s (2004) article represents the first, and for a long time, the only (cf. Labate and Pacheco, 2004, discussed below) study that dealt specifically with the influence of Afro-Brazilian religions in the genesis of Santo Daime.

A second important early study on Santo Daime is the book by Vera Fróes Fernandes (1986). The preface, written by Acre state Senator Mário Maia, affirms that Santo Daime is “the result of a complex syncretism, where shades of exuberant ritual richness are mixed, combining fragments of Afro-Amerindian belief and culture that are interlaced with the practices and habits of popular Catholicism” (p. 21). According to Fernandes, Daime possesses indigenous, Afro-Brazilian, and Christian, as well as Kardecist religious traits. Indigenous elements include the use of ritual rattles, divinization of natural elements, and the presence of a guardian spirit in the beverage, invoked for curing purposes. Thus for Fernandes, Santo Daime is a kind of shamanism. The founder, Mestre Irineu, passes through a period of “initiation in the

interior of the forest, typical of indigenous shamans” (Fernandes, 1986, p. 34). Padrinho Sebastião, a “shaman” figure, also received guidance from a “shaman,” Mestre Oswaldo, a practitioner of Kardecist spiritism. Regarding African influences, Fernandes (1986) mentions in passing that “informants from Alto Santo state that Mestre Irineu obtained knowledge in Maranhão from the famous Casa das Minas [Jeje], traditional center of preservation of African culture and religiosity in Brazil” (p. 36). With regards to European esoteric influences, Fernandes notes that Mestre Irineu belonged to the *Círculo Esotérico da Comunhão do Pensamento* (“the Esoteric Circle of the Communion of Thought”), a Brazilian spiritualist society founded in the early 20th century and dedicated to developing humanity’s latent mental and psychic powers (see Cemin, 1998; MacRae, 2000), as well as the Rosicrucian Order, a worldwide humanistic and spiritual society which claims descent from the enigmatic Rosy-Cross Brotherhood of 17th century Europe and even more ancient mystical traditions (see Amaral, 2000, p. 221).

Fernando de La Rocque Couto (1989) follows previous authors in noting the combination of elements from “native culture, represented by indigenous societies in the region” and the “colonizer’s culture, represented by poor northeasterners fleeing the droughts” (p. 16). While affirming that Santo Daime resulted from the encounter of the “Catholic priest with the indigenous shaman and the *pai de santo* of popular spiritism” (ibid., p. 17), he confers near absolute centrality to a supposedly indigenous origin. He sees Santo Daime as the “Christianization of indigenous shamanism,” side by side with the “indigenization of Christianity,” through the “use of rattles, the ritual dances, the use of names like *tucum*, *currupipiraguá*, *marachimbé*, *titango*, *tintuma* and *tarumim*...as well as the ritual consumption of ayahuasca” (ibid., p. 17). As in Amazonian folk medicine, Daime is used to diagnose and cure illnesses. For La Rocque Couto, Mestre Irineu first learned about the ayahuasca brew from a “shaman instructor” named Antonio Costa, who formed, together with André Costa and Irineu Serra, the so-called *Círculo de Regeneração e Fé* (Circle of Regeneration of Faith, CRF), an esoteric center for ayahuasca consumption that preceded Santo Daime. La Rocque Couto defends the idea that Daime constitutes a form of “collective shamanism” whereby all “shaman’s apprentices” or “potential shamans” are able to partake of magical flight. He also notes that Padrinho Sebastião employed the *mesa* (“table”) works of spiritual incorporation of the spiritist tradition, where he “manifested” popular spirit such as José Bezerra Menezes and Professor Antonio Jorge.

Alberto Groisman (1991) produced a very good ethnography of the Santo Daime community at Céu do Mapiá. He claims that Daime demonstrates an “evolutionary eclecticism” which permits coexistence “among diverse cosmological systems: *umbanda*, *candomblé*, Kardecist spiritism, and others, picked by adepts as they integrate themselves, and connected with other spiritual traditions” (Groisman, 1991, p. 89-90). Like La Rocque Couto (1989), Groisman notes Padrinho Sebastião’s association with Kardecism prior to joining Daime. He goes further, however, analyzing certain elements of Santo Daime cosmology — notions of reincarnation, spiritual evolution, ridding oneself of karma to achieve salvation — that show a strong influence of spiritism. Although he also mentions Padrinho Sebastião’s pact with “Tranca Rua,” an entity from *umbanda*, Groisman places much less emphasis on the Afro-Brazilian matrices within Santo Daime. Citing Monteiro da Silva (1983), he states briefly that

Mestre Irineu “came from a religious context in which Afro-Brazilian cults represented, perhaps, the strongest source of religiosity” (Groisman, 1991, p. 36). The key to his explanatory model, however, rests mostly on the affinities he draws with shamanic systems. He develops the useful concept of “shamanic praxis,” and, after demonstrating various points of contact and affinity, concludes that within the context of this non-indigenous religious movement, indigenous shamanistic traditions associated with ayahuasca use are only partially present.

Subsequently, Walter Dias Junior (1992) analyzed the spread of Santo Daime to urban centers. Like other authors, he identified the plurality of traditions underlying Santo Daime. In his words, “this doctrine can be seen as a cauldron where different influences blend together, encompassing indigenous magico-religious thought, primitive Christianity, Western esoteric traditions, and spiritism (including Kardecism as well as *umbanda* and *candomblé*)” (ibid., p. 47). For Dias Junior, such syncretism is made possible by the “ecstatic” characteristics of Daime, both through “divine possession” and “direct contact with divinity” (ibid., p. 51). Belief in the existence of a “God within,” and the importance of “mystical revelation” situate Santo Daime within the “adorcist tradition” (i.e., the internalization of spiritual entities, hence the inverse of exorcism) and thus is distinctive from “Western Christian dogmatism” (ibid., p. 66). According to Dias Junior, the earliest Daime groups were composed “basically of blacks [Afro-Brazilians],” only later coming to “incorporate white [Luso-European] elements” (ibid. 65). Like other authors, he confers a shamanic character to the initiation process of both Irineu and Sebastião. He presents the interesting, if speculative, interpretation that Mestre Irineu distanced himself from *umbanda* by seeking syncretism with popular Catholicism and esoteric philosophies mostly as a strategy for social legitimization and perpetuation of his cult, thus permitting the “translation of shamanic experience into the religious conceptions of Western society” (ibid., p. 69). Finally, he suggests that contact with urban centers facilitated the incorporation of aspects of Kardecism, *umbanda*, *candomblé* and Eastern religious philosophies.

Edward MacRae’s (1992) book is perhaps the most significant reference to date in Santo Daime studies. He affirms that Daime was used from the beginning by urban populations during the urbanization process. He recognizes remnants of “Amerindian traditions” and “rural northeastern culture.” For MacRae, Irineu’s initiation, as well as the idea that plants are inhabited by “spirits,” “spirit-owners” or “mother-spirits,” reflects basic elements found in Amazonian shamanism. In Daime, however, teachings are perceived as coming from the Virgin of Immaculate Conception, revealing Christian influence. In terms of social organization and religious conduct, Santo Daime also has much in common with folk Catholicism. MacRae points out that the Christian ethic of good and evil distinguishes Daime from the moral ambiguities inherent in the Peruvian ayahuasca tradition known as “vegetalismo” (see Luna, 1986). MacRae incorporates the concept of “collective shamanism” from La Rocque Couto (1989), noting this as a “democratic” aspect of Daime. Unlike the latter author, however, MacRae characterizes Santo Daime as a millenarian movement with messianic tendencies.

MacRae also analyzes changes in the CEFLURIS Daime branch brought about by a growing middle-class urban membership beginning in the 1980s. In his analysis,

this influence did not produce a further “whitening” or “Christianizing” of Daime, but instead a reaffirmation of African and Oriental concepts and practices by new adepts from the urban alternative or New Age sub-culture. In this context, illnesses have been reinterpreted as emerging from psychosomatic causes, and healing through Daime is associated with achieving “self-knowledge.” Daime is seen, moreover, as providing a structured ritual setting for the consumption of psychoactive substances (see also MacRae, 1997b on the role of socially sanctioned consumption of hallucinogens in reducing adverse effects).

In another article, MacRae (1997a) notes Mestre Irineu’s ties to *tambor de mina*, but observes that syncretic Afro-Brazilian rites were not popular at that time in Acre. He suggests that, along the continuum of Afro-Brazilian medium-based religions, Santo Daime is closer to the Kardecist pole than to *umbanda*. From Kardecism, Santo Daime inherited notions of karma, reincarnation, spiritual evolution, “soul indoctrination,” charity for suffering souls, and the “Prayer of Caritas” (a spiritist prayer received psychically by a 19th-century French medium). Influences from *umbanda* are also noted in the establishment of a series of new spirit-possession or incorporation rituals (with or without loss of consciousness; cf. Labate, 2004b) by CEFLURIS such as *giras*, *trabalhos de banca* and *trabalhos de São Miguel*. MacRae also points out the “Esoteric Circle” (mentioned above) as the source for certain Daime doctrines such as the principle of “Harmony, Love, Truth and Justice” and the practice of *concentração* (“concentration”). The Cross of Caravaca, associated with the Knights Templar, and certain apocalyptic predictions in Daime are attributed to European esotericism and Christian mysticism. Daime also shares certain undercurrents of early Gnostic Christianity, such as the notion of intra-psychic divinity, where God is located within the human soul, not outside it. Yet the latter notion is also consistent with indigenous Amazonian shamanic religiosity.

Sandra Goulart (1996) carried out a sophisticated analysis of the historical origins of Santo Daime. As in Monteiro da Silva (1983), Goulart situates Santo Daime within the cultural and social reorganization that occurred after the end of the Rubber Boom. She also notes the eclectic nature of Daime’s cultural and religious borrowings and re-elaborations. However, Goulart claims a primary role for age-old popular Catholicism in structuring Santo Daime’s social and institutional forms including *compadrio* (godfather/godmother relationships), *irmandades* (brotherhoods), *mutirão* (communal labor) and *festas dos santos* (Saints’ festivals). Citing various studies on folk Catholicism, she notes how social relationships and leisure activities are given a sacred character. The Daime ritual system, however, was also strongly influenced by the syncretic *vegetalismo* ayahuasca healing traditions of Amazonia. According to Goulart, Mestre Irineu’s encounter with ayahuasca is experienced by Daimistas as a mythical transformation of man into plant. This myth is relived in the rituals by each adept, who claim to metamorphose into “plant spirits.” However, she states the behavioral and dietary restrictions observed by Daimistas are perceived, in their understanding, as a kind of moral apprenticeship akin to Christian values, unlike the restrictions observed by *vegetalista* ayahuasca adepts.

Goulart, like other authors, notes the influence of Kardecist spiritism in Amazonian popular culture, which, alongside folk Catholicism, also influenced Amazonian folk healers. Allan Kardec’s teachings resonated with the individualizing socio-

economic trends of the 1930s by permitting direct communication between adepts and the spiritual world; in this way “democratizing” trance. She also sees the Kardecist influence as representing a movement toward individuals’ “internalizing” their life goals and orientations. This fusion or substitution of traditional Amazonian shamanism with spiritism shifted the locus of spiritual power and privilege from specialized shamans to the individual adepts and their personal experience of ayahuasca. Santo Daime expresses numerous spiritist concepts such as “relationships of opposition, tension and complementarity — between the Visible and Invisible Worlds, the Material and Immaterial, Perfection and Imperfection, Good and Evil, Free Will and Determinism — [which] are reproduced in Daime’s doctrine, although they take on new and particular meanings” (ibid., p. 156). Kardecist influences in Daime also emerged from Mestre Irineu’s association with the Esoteric Circle, which he joined in the late 1940s. According to Goulart, some of the prayers and concepts found in Daime doctrine—for example “mind control,” and the “Higher Self” and “Lower Self” — come from the Esoteric Circle. Goulart notes that the process of formation of Santo Daime has been rife with conflicts, as orthodox Catholicism has sought to combat such religious heterodoxies.

Arneide Cemin (1998) carried out pioneering research with the Alto Santo line, focusing especially on the Centro Esotérico de Correntes da Luz Universal (“Esoteric Center of Currents of the Universal Light,” or CECLU), in Porto Velho, Rondônia. Cemin criticizes Goulart’s (1996) work, claiming that Santo Daime’s roots should not be sought in the social changes affecting Amazonian society after the 1930s, but rather in the encounter between “the religious culture of northeastern Brazil” and the “culture of the forest” which took place in the last few decades of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century. Her central thesis is based on the idea that Santo Daime emerged from three main sources: Amazonian shamanism, folk Catholicism, and esotericism (via the Esoteric Circle). While recognizing references to Afro-Brazilian cosmologies and entities found in Mestre Irineu’s hymnal (for example she mentions, *Papai Velho*, *Mamãe Velha*, and *Caboclos*), Cemin rejects the claim that *umbanda* and spiritist influences are fundamental to Daime, since possession/incorporation and loss of consciousness, so important in these latter practices, are not found in Daime. For Cemin, Santo Daime is a strictly shamanistic system, whereby contact with the sacred is obtained through ecstatic flight, not spirit possession.

Also criticizing Groisman (1991), she argues that Santo Daime fully preserves the basic pattern and ethos of ayahuasca shamanism, belonging to the broader phenomenon which she calls “forest ayahuasca culture.” Cemin suggests, moreover, that the important Santo Daime entity, Juramidam, is a reflection of the “Jurupari” masculine initiation ritual found widely in Amazonia, especially in the Upper Rio Negro, where it serves as a bridge across multiple indigenous cultures. Some elements of the Jurupari that Cemin notes in Daime include: vomiting as ritual purification, masculinity as representing courage, restrictions on female participation, the notion of discipline and initiatory tests, dance and the use of rattles, and an “astral” space where divine beings and categories of power reside. Thus, according to Cemin, Juramidam carries out the same mythic mission as Jurupari, seeking the perfect spouse for the male sun divinity. We, however, do not see sufficient evidence to attribute historical continuity

between the figure of Juramidam in Daime and the “mythical civilizing heroes” described for Amazonian peoples practicing the Jurupari.

Another important historical source for Santo Daime, according to Cemin, is “divine magic” or “astral magic” as practiced by the Esoteric Circle, thus affiliating Daime with the Western occult tradition. Shamanism of “excorporation” in Daime is thus seen as adapted to the model of European occultism, whereby contact with various entities is only mental or spiritual (and hence not corporeal, as is the case for Kardecist spiritism). Finally, Cemin offers an original contribution by suggesting that Santo Daime religion, in its broadest sense, is organized along the lines of state ideology, or rather, “the general model of Acre social formations: the rubber camp (*seringal*), the military base, the military model, ultimately, everything that was constitutive of ‘territoriality’ and thus identity of the Brazilians in Acre” (ibid., p. 95). From the rubber camps, Santo Daime incorporated a form of patriarchic, agrarian social organization based on a model brought by immigrants from northeast Brazil. As is found in peasant groups in Brazil, Santo Daime at its origins also valued the “civilizing” role of the military. Wearing of uniforms (*fardamento*), hierarchy, discipline, and other values of Santo Daime doctrine are thus seen as related to a certain military *zeitgeist* found in Acre at the turn of the 20th century, undergoing a process of territorial conquest and militarization of social relations.

If we broaden the focus of our work to include the literature produced by Daimistas themselves (though it is not always so easy, in this particular field of research, to define clear boundaries between the “researchers” and the “natives”; see Labate, 2004), we find a number of references to other proposed sources of origin of the religion, including the mention of oriental traditions, especially Hinduism (Revista do Centenário, 1992; Polari de Alverga, 1996; note that certain academic researchers also suggest oriental connections; see Fernandes, 1986; Dias Junior, 1992). Daimista-authored studies also show a general consensus that the use of Daime is descended from the supposed consumption of ayahuasca by the Inca royal family (Revista do Centenário, 1992; Polari de Alverga, 1984; Carioca, 1999; Silva, 1996; Bayer Neto, 1999). The Quechua etymology for the term ayahuasca (apparently meaning “vine of the soul”) is often cited in support of this argument, although there is no convincing historical evidence in support of this claim. In particular, Eduardo Bayer Neto (1999) develops the thesis of Inca ayahuasca consumption as a basis for Santo Daime. Tales reflecting an Incan origin for ayahuasca are also indirectly reflected in the “History of Hoasca” told within the distinct ayahuasca religion of União do Vegetal, and found in the mythology of certain Panoan-speaking peoples of the Peru/Acre border region (Luna & White, 2000; Labate, 2004a), suggesting historical connections with these indigenous traditions.

Critical Considerations

Based on this brief literature review we can make a few observations. There are several points in common across all the studies, most significantly, that Santo Daime is a highly syncretic and diversified religion drawing on a multiplicity of religious, cultural, historical and philosophical sources (see Labate, 2004b for more on syncretism

in ayahuasca religions). Among the unanimously mentioned influences are indigenous and mestizo ayahuasca shamanism, folk Catholicism and European esotericism.

At this point we would like to point out a dimension that has been largely overlooked by other researchers in this emergent field of studies. All of the mentioned authors except Cemin (1998) based their studies on fieldwork carried out mostly within the CEFLURIS tradition, though interviews with Alto Santo members are included occasionally (Goulart, 1996; La Rocque Couto, 1989). The predominance of CEFLURIS in the literature owes in part to the fact that this particular branch of Santo Daime expanded widely in Brazil, unlike the Alto Santo tradition which is restricted mostly to the city of Rio Branco. Thus CEFLURIS members, as well as those who have carried out research among them, may have unconsciously assimilated a perspective on Santo Daime associated with the values transmitted by Padrinho Sebastião and his followers, who see themselves as continuing the work of Mestre Irineu. This perspective has led to a certain research bias, since the CEFLURIS tradition shows a much stronger influence of *umbanda* and Kardecism than does the Alto Santo tradition. This difference seems clearly related to the fact that Padrinho Sebastião was involved with Kardecist spiritism prior to entering Santo Daime. Without more subtle analysis, and without more comparative studies on Alto Santo, such spiritist elements within CEFLURIS have been assumed to be constitutive of Daime doctrine more generally. The same caveat applies to elements of Afro-Brazilian religious practice, often more apparent in CEFLURIS than Alto Santo. While pointing out such influences and innovations that Padrinho Sebastião brought to the CEFLURIS tradition, we do not mean to suggest that the Alto Santo tradition reflects the “original” Santo Daime religion as founded by Mestre Irineu. (However, at least one Alto Santo group — the one still led by Irineu’s widow, Madrinha Peregrina — claims to maintain an orthodoxy in the “tradition of the Master’s time.”)

Thus the problem may lie elsewhere: the authors themselves may not be entirely to blame for the contradictions found between different explanatory models, as these contradictions may reflect underlying doctrinal differences between different Santo Daime factions. Which is to say, the authors may sometimes unconsciously assume that elements of doctrine specific for one particular group or faction are constitutive of the historical trajectory of Santo Daime as a whole. This tendency is especially evident in the sometimes heated disagreements between Cemin (1998) and Goulart (1996). Cemin (1998) utterly rejects the spiritist and *umbanda* influences in Mestre Irineu’s original teachings, noting, among other things, the fact that “there is consensus within CICLU I Alto Santo in Rio Branco and CECLU in Porto Velho [specific Alto Santo centers] that Daime has no connection with *umbanda* or spiritism” (p. 24). Thus this author appears to be reproducing, in her theoretical arguments, the doctrinal self-representation of the Alto Santo faction, which rejects such affiliations in the foundation of the religion. Yet even if we accept these statements for the sake of argument, as soon as we turn our discussion to the comparatively non-controversial influence of northeastern Brazilian and Catholic sources in Santo Daime, we are immediately faced with the dilemma that these traditions are, themselves, heirs to centuries of syncretism with African and indigenous cultural and religious traditions. For example, Cemin notes that fragments of the indigenous Jurupari complex are also present in the *jurema* and *candomblé de caboclo* rites found in Af-

ro-Brazilian traditions. We are not suggesting that attempts to identify the (admittedly diverse and complex) religious sources of Santo Daime should be abandoned; however we do feel it is important to point out the difficulties, and at times circular logic, of some arguments. Indeed, we ourselves have encountered similar problems in identifying elements of Maranhão religiosity in the constitution of Santo Daime (Labate and Pacheco, 2004).

We would also like to point out a certain elasticity in the definitions of the concept of shamanism, which is widely used to characterize Santo Daime. The argument has been laid out in greater detail elsewhere (Labate, 2004b), so we briefly note here that the presence of indigenous referents in Santo Daime also relates to an important ideological issue present within the broader field of Brazilian ayahuasca studies: namely, asserting some degree of continuity between indigenous religious practices and modern urban consumption of ayahuasca. This is a prickly problem, because Santo Daime maintains an ambiguous relationship with its historical predecessors, the indigenous and mestizo traditions. On the one hand, partaking of such a traditional and supposedly ancient religious sacrament such as ayahuasca would appear to confer legitimacy on Santo Daime's use of what is considered, at least in many parts of the world, a controlled psychoactive substance. In this regard, both Daime members and anthropologist-scholars repeatedly assert ayahuasca use as belonging to an "uninterrupted tradition" of age-old religious practice⁴: Mestre Irineu's initiation in the "forest interior" is one example of the many overt analogies drawn with indigenous shamanism. On the other hand, there is an understanding — asserted in subtle and less subtle ways — among Daimistas that Christian tendencies represent an "evolution" of this practice in comparison with indigenous and mestizo contexts, where ayahuasca use was somewhat chaotic and lacked coherent doctrines or moral direction. Ayahuasca use prior to Mestre Irineu's revelations is seen as bearing the mark of sorcery, seductions to power, and false analogies. This ambiguity as to rupture vs. continuity with indigenous ayahuasca practices, and a correspondingly ambiguous attribution of positive vs. negative value to the role of shamanism and shamanic healing, appears to vary between social classes within the Daime membership. Modern middle-class Daimistas tend to idealize indigenous peoples, while the lower-class rubber workers who founded the movement, on the contrary, sought to distance themselves from the stigmatized position of indigenous peoples within the frontier social hierarchy. Inversely, however, while lower-class, ethnically mixed Amazonian populations frequently turn to shamans, *curanderos* (healers), and *rezadeiras* (prayer-based healers) for their medical problems, urban middle class people tend to prefer Western medical care (see also Araújo, 1998; Pantoja & Conceição, 2006).

From the perspective of anthropological discourse, attributing or not attributing a shamanic character to Daime speaks to ideological references in the broader society such as the state, western medicine, and the media, which include their own representations, value judgments, and stereotypes on such issues. For example, a distinction is commonly made between "sacred" or "ritualistic" use of traditional "plant sacraments" by native peoples, in contrast to the "modern, urban" consumption of "psychoactive drugs," the former considered natural, legitimate, noble and authentic, while the latter is considered morally dubious, inauthentic, and illicit. By asserting Daime as a fundamentally shamanic practice, or some variation thereof, scholars and

enthusiasts alike inscribe the phenomenon within a field of disputed representations among such notions as indigeneity, alterity, tradition vs. modernity, cultural purity, acculturation, cultural relativism, and so on (see Labate, 2004a).

Analogous to reflections on its indigenous and shamanic heritage, the establishment of African heritage in Santo Daime also occurs within fairly elastic parameters. While many of the authors note certain African elements in the genesis of Daime, there is little in the way of concrete data and analysis in this respect. Entities such as Titango and Tintuma have been invoked differently by different authors to support opposing arguments of both indigenous (LaRocque Couto, 1989) and African influence (Monteiro da Silva, 2004). Jairo da Silva Carioca (1999) asserts that Daimista entities such as Tuperci, Ripi, and Tarumim are indigenous, while Equior and Papai Paxá are of African origin. Without entering into the merits of the various hypotheses, we ask instead: to what extent do these various explanatory models, positing an “indigenous-African-European” triad at the base of Daime, engage in a kind of ideological exercise by conferring a “truly Brazilian” identity – along the lines of the three founding races myth - or legitimacy to Santo Daime? This interpretation is supported by passages in a number of works, especially those written from the “native” Daimista perspective. Cal Ovejero (1996) states:

In the jungles of Amazonia, perhaps as nowhere else, have emerged certain currents which represent the four corners of the Earth. To wit: the animistic African universe, the indigenous Amerindian world view, Catholic religiosity and the spiritist science developed in Europe in the 19th century. (p. 92)

Francisco das Chagas Silva (1996) writes:

We know that the formation of Brazilian culture occurred from the basis of three different cultures: white European, black African, and American Indian. The historical basis of Santo Daime possesses the same cultural elements as the formation of Brazilian culture, which is to say, the three distinctive cultural elements. Therefore, when we say ‘Brazilian religion,’ we are referring to the doctrine of Santo Daime, in its history which relates to three continents: Europe, Africa and America. (p. 8).

Carioca (1999) likewise claims that one of the most important moments in Mestre Irineu’s trajectory is when he encountered Indians and mixed-blooded caboclo forest people, “where the true junction between the three formative ethnic elements of Brazilian culture is found: Indian, black and white” (p. 29). Fernandes (1986) similarly observes, “The doctrine of Juramidam results from the union of religious characteristics of the three formative ethnic elements in Brazilian culture: Indian, black and white” (p. 36). Considering these recurrent themes, and remembering the lack of significant factual data concerning Afro-Brazilian influences in the origins of Santo Daime, it is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that Mestre Irineu’s place of origin (Maranhão) and ethnic identity (black) are sometimes put to use in an ideological fashion to create a mythological representation of Santo Daime as emblematic of Brazilian national identity, analogous to similar claims made about other Brazilian cultural phenomena such as *umbanda* and the martial art form *capoeira*. This sort of interpretation tends to be even stronger when Santo Daime expands abroad: while nationally the religion struggles to obtain a sort of minimum stable public recognition in order to perform its activities peacefully (without State intervention, for ex-

ample), for some foreigners, Santo Daime is taken as an “authentic” example of a “Brazilian religion.”

Finally, we note that debate over the relative importance of African heritage in the formation of Santo Daime is also significant in the definition of identities and factions within the broader field of ayahuasca religions in Brazil. Both the CEFLURIS group of Santo Daime and especially the distinctive ayahuasca religion of Barquinha practice “incorporation” of various spiritual entities. Such practices have recently gained greater legitimacy in the “path” or *linha* (line) of Padrinho Sebastião. This has generated conflicts with the Alto Santo tradition, which vehemently criticizes the practice of incorporation as a perversion of the teachings of Mestre Irineu. Goulart (2005) shows how accusations of *feitiçaria* (sorcery) and *macumba* (black magic) are a recurring theme in doctrinal disputes among various groups, which define themselves in contrast to others. It is also worth speculating whether elements of racism are reproduced in the “anti-incorporation” (and hence anti-African) stance of some groups. While the followers of Padrinho Sebastião generally invoke his alliance with the Afro-Brazilian entity (*exu*) Tranca Rua as a justification for trance and incorporation practices, other adepts of CEFLURIS refer to even more ancient customs, suggesting that African practices are the basis of the Santo Daime doctrine. According to this logic, the path of Padrinho Sebastião can represent, not just continuity with, but also an improvement upon the tradition begun by Mestre Irineu. Those who hold this belief constantly impute covert references to African entities in the hymns of Irineu and his contemporaries, all the while reminding others of the more overt references to African elements as well as Irineu’s own Afro-Brazilian heritage. Within this line of interpretation (echoed by some of the academic works mentioned above), Mestre Irineu disguised the practice of incorporation in Daime rituals because of cultural prejudice and police persecution. In other versions, Mestre Irineu left it up to the divergent and more unequivocally African-inspired Barquinha religion, whose founder Daniel Pereira de Mattos first learned of ayahuasca in Alto Santo, to fully develop the medium-based incorporation work.

When considering these debates, it is worth remembering that Mestre Irineu never actually practiced incorporation, although he did design an exorcism ritual known as the *trabalho de cruces* (“work of crosses”) or *trabalho de mesa* (“table work”), intended to drive away demonic forces (*encostos*; see LaRocque Couto, 1989; Goulart, 1996). Monteiro da Silva (2004) claims that Santo Daime includes a subtle form of incorporation through notions such as the “owner of the hymn book” (*dono do hinário*) and the “pullers” (*puxadores*), who lead the singing of the hymns. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the specifics of the diverse forms of trance present in the different Brazilian ayahuasca religions, including “irradiation” (*irradiação*) in Barquinha, a kind of indirect incorporation without direct occupation of the “apparatus” (*aparelho*, i.e., the body) by the spirit. However, interesting lines of comparison could be sought within the universe of popular religion in Maranhão state — itself located at the geographical transition between northeast Brazil and Amazonia — which includes various intermediate forms of possession including “irradiation” (Nicolau Pares, 1997; Halperin, 1999).

Conclusion

Establishing the origins and characteristics of the religion of Santo Daime raises interesting theoretical questions in anthropology, especially with regards to limitations and possibilities for research into the genesis and development of hybrid cultural manifestations, or local adaptations of Christianity. At the same time, such discussions are relevant more specifically to the emerging field of research into Brazilian (and more broadly Amazonian) religious movements and ayahuasca traditions, as well as into other areas such as: the ethnology of Amazonian shamanism and millenarian movements; research into Afro-Brazilian religions; studies of the New Age movement, globalization and post-modernity; and the history of drugs and forms of social control. While situating their research within specific theoretical domains, anthropologists also negotiate power and legitimacy for the object of their studies — the religious groups themselves — within the broader space of social discourse.

As we attempted to demonstrate throughout this text, different studies into the origins of Santo Daime also reflect ideological disputes within the arena of ayahuasca religions, providing insights into multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations and representations of the religion among its membership. In this context, we hope to have highlighted lacunae in the data, as well as the difficulties faced in trying to fill them. The difficulty of achieving complete objectivity and precision in this field of research does not mean that some degree of objectivity and precision cannot be obtained. We hope that more detailed and rigorous research will help us to better understand how and why Santo Daime developed into the form we observe today.

1 This article is adapted from “As origens históricas do Santo Daime”, in: *Álcool e Drogas na História do Brasil*, R.P. Venâncio and H.S. Carneiro (Eds.) (2005). Belo Horizonte and São Paulo, Brazil: Editora da Pontifícia Universidade Católica-SP/Alameda, p 231-255.

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2 *Banisteriopsis caapi* (Spruce ex Griseb.) C.V. Morton.

3 *Psychotria viridis* Ruiz & Pavon.

4 For a discussion on how scholars and common sense discourse draw uncritically on representations of ayahuasca’s ancient origins to bolster the phenomenon’s public legitimacy see Brabec de Mori in this volume.