

The Light from the Forest: The Ritual Use of Ayahuasca in Brazil. Special Issue of *Fieldwork in Religion*, 2 (3). By Beatriz Caiuby Labate & Edward MacRae (Eds.). London: Equinox Publishing (2006). Paperback. Pp. 218. ISBN 9787774548334

This special edition of the academic journal *Fieldwork in Religion* contains eight articles that were either previously unpublished or originally published in Portuguese in 2004 or 2005, but now translated and published in English for the first time. As suggested in the title, this collection of papers concerns the ritual use of ayahuasca in Brazil, but it does so by focusing solely on the three largest Brazilian religions that make sacramental use of ayahuasca – Santo Daime, União do Vegetal (UDV) and Barquinha - and consequently says very little about the 72 indigenous groups who use ayahuasca in the Western Amazon region, except that which concerns their introduction of the psychedelic brew to the former three groups. Nevertheless, regarding the main non-indigenous religious ayahuasca groups in Brazil this book offers a unique and invaluable academic coverage of the cultural history and ethnography of ritual not yet presented elsewhere in the English language. This addition to the growing literature on the ritual use of ayahuasca is all the more unique because all but one of the eight lead authors are based in institutions in Brazil, thereby opening up local academic perspectives on a truly Brazilian phenomena to the fast expanding English-speaking ayahuasca research community.

The eight chapters are comprised of a literature review chapter of Brazilian papers on ayahuasca religions (not including that of indigenous groups), a chapter situating the genesis of these religions among those rubber tappers first encountering the indigenous peoples of the forests, two chapters each on the ritual use of ayahuasca in the União do Vegetal and Barquinha churches and one among the Santo Daime, and finally a chapter on the controversial use of cannabis in a branch of the Santo Daime.

The first chapter does a good job of contextualising the Brazilian religious use of the ayahuasca brew. A psychedelic decoction, ayahuasca has been used traditionally as a shamanic tool for accessing visionary altered states of consciousness among Amazonian tribes people for hundreds if not thousands of years. Scouring the Brazilian literature, both academic and non-academic, co-editor Beatriz Caiuby Labate addresses the general cultural history of the three main churches from their rubber tapper origins. The first of which was founded during the 1930s in the city of Rio Branco (in the state of Acre) by Mestre Raimundo Irineu Serra, who was a rubber tapper, a soldier of the Territorial Guard and, later, a respected *curandeiro* (healer). This first Santo Daime community was called *Alto Santo* and fractured in the 1970s when Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo broke away and founded the *Centro Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra* (CEFLURIS) branch.

Having also practiced with Mestre Irineu in Rio Branco the ex-sailor Frei Daniel Pereira de Mattos established the Barquinha (little boat) religious community in the same city in 1945. Unlike both the Santo Daime and the UDV, which have both spread across Brazil and even to other countries, including the USA, the Barquinha has never reached any further than the state of Acre. The last group of the three, and indeed the last to be formed, the UDV, began its lineage independently of the Santo Daime and was officially established in Porto Velho (state of Rondônia) in 1965 by the rubber tapper Mestre José Gabriel da Costa, although it was reputedly founded in 1961 at the Sunta rubber camp on the Bolivian-Brazilian border.

As well as exploring the history this comprehensive guide offers an essential insight into viable future directions, such as the under-investigated rise in spirit incorporation (i.e. voluntary possession) within the CEFLURIS Santo Daime church, particularly during the last decade. It might well be asked how such mediumship has come to infuse Santo Daime. The following half dozen chapters neatly unpack the various doctrinal influences on the three religious movements, delineating how these new groups incorporate (quite literally in some cases) a wealth of religious influences. To varying degrees, each of the three groups have clear tri-continental spiritual inspirations. There are European influences, such as Catholicism and Kardec Spiritism in all three, and even Masonry in the case of UDV. Afro-Brazilian influences from the Umbanda cult, for example, are also apparent in all of them, with elements of the African Casa das Minas and other traditions in the UDV. Finally, each group is ultimately defined by its utilisation of Brazilian indigenous practices through the utilisation of ayahuasca itself, and the reverence for and utilisation of the *caboclos* (spirits of dead indigenes) in some cases.

Wladimir Sena Araújo's chapter on Barquinha cosmology elucidates how each of these continental influences provides its own methodology for approaching the divine: Prayer in the case of Catholicism, incorporation from the African traditions, and visionary experience from the indigenes. It might be considered that each technique also offers a different relationship to the spirit world: Prayer facilitates faith in, and a reverence for spirit, visions mediate a direct experience of spirit, and incorporation enables a becoming of spirit.

In accordance with the doctrinal influences at play in each of the three ayahuasca groups we see varying degrees of recourse to these three spiritual technologies, particularly with regard to incorporation. Although heavily influenced by Afro-Brazilian groups the UDV do not incorporate, whereas the Barquinha do, although they consider it as a less complete embodiment of 'spirit', using the term 'irradiation', in that the spirit radiates through them rather than fully incorporating. Less well documented is the incorporation that occurs at some rites among certain members of the CEFLURIS branch of the Santo Daime. Consolidating the information presented in the various chapters, in each case it is apparent that the degree of physical movement allowed within the rite corresponds to the degree of incorporation. The UDV do not dance, the Santo Daime ordinarily do a highly controlled dance (the *bailado*) to facilitate group order and obedience but, as with the Barquinha, occasionally some engage in more freeform dancing or spinning and fully incorporate as a form of mediumship development. Among the Santo Daime this synthesis with the mediumistic techniques of Umbanda has been dubbed 'Umbandaimé'. As we are clearly lacking a definitive analysis of this fusion it would seem pressing to learn what the use of psychedelic plants and mediumship combined can give to each other as hitherto divergent techniques of approaching the divine, given that the two are seldom elsewhere combined but, independently, both are globally widespread.

There's much more in this dense volume than can be elucidated here, particularly with regard to the cultural history and the use of symbolism and ritual within these churches. Themes explored include the making of the ayahuasca brew (the *feitio*) among the Santo Daime, the creation of sacred and symbolic space, the different types of ceremonies and celebrations within the churches, the use of ayahuasca for

healing and as a talisman, the classification of encountered spirits, and the doctrines, beliefs and traditions of the faithful, such as the use of exorcism in the Barquinha.

The final essay, by co-editor Edward MacRae, addresses the religious use of cannabis within CEFLURIS and initially seems like the odd one out in the collection but does much to illuminate the contrasting political approaches of the groups and define the relationships between them, thereby neatly bringing the different chapters together. Outlining the cultural history of the ongoing tensions between CEFLURIS and both the UDV and the Brazilian authorities, MacRae plots the turbulent course of ayahuasca's tenuous status within Brazilian law, which, despite several challenges, remains legal for solely religious but not healing purposes. Given that both Barquinha and the Santo Daime, unlike the UDV, have both traditionally used ayahuasca within the shamanic healing context in which it was adopted, this legislative restriction to its use antagonises the former groups and underscores the Brazilian authorities' contempt for certain indigenous traditions and their corresponding favour towards a medical not magical dominion over health and wellbeing.

As much as these three religious traditions have utilised the highly psychoactive jungle decoction, ayahuasca, to bring together a culturally diverse set of theological beliefs and practices and extend its use from the indigenous Amazonians, via rubber tappers, to the urban elite of Brazil and beyond, this juicy volume brings the Brazilian analysis of these traditions to the wider English-speaking world. As dense, erudite and highly informative as this book is, in addition to the essentially cultural, socio-political and historical dimensions presented here I would have liked to have seen the inclusion of more phenomenological material, given the extraordinary effects on consciousness of the sacrament in question. Nevertheless, this book combines a wealth of otherwise inaccessible scholarship on the anthropology of consciousness with respect to ayahuasca, a substance and a subject that is becoming increasingly more popular both inside and outside of academia. Given the ancient shamanic use of ayahuasca, its intense psychological effects and ontological consequences, its unique chemical constitution (that can also be found in the human nervous system), and its exceptional status as both physiologically harmless and legal (within Brazil and certain US states at least), I can see that interest in this substance as a mediator between science and magic, and between ancient and modern culture and consciousness will only continue to grow.

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