



Ayahuasca Religions in Acre: Cultural Heritage in the Brazilian Borderlands

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ABSTRACT

The Brazilian ayahuasca religions, Santo Daime, Barquinha, and União do Vegetal, have increasingly sought formal recognition by government agencies in Brazil and other countries to guarantee their legal use of ayahuasca, which contains DMT, a substance that is listed. This article focuses on new alliances and rifts that have emerged between and among different ayahuasca groups as they have sought and in some cases achieved formal recognition and legitimacy at the state and national levels in Brazil and abroad. It presents a historical overview of the origin of the main ayahuasca religions, and their connections to the Amazon region and the state of Acre in particular, where the political environment has facilitated petitions seeking the elevation of ayahuasca as cultural and historical heritage in Acre and Brazil. This process has resulted in the active selection of certain symbolic, cultural, and historical elements and subtle changes in the ways various ayahuasca groups represent themselves in the public sphere. It also resulted in the reconfiguration of political alliances and a recasting of the historical facts regarding origins. The article reflects on notions of origin, place, authenticity, and tradition throughout the ongoing transformation of ayahuasca from “dangerous drug” to state and national heritage.

KEYWORDS: ayahuasca, Santo Daime, União do Vegetal, Amazon, cultural heritage

The use of ayahuasca by the so called “Brazilian ayahuasca religions” (Labate, Rose, and Santos 2009), established syncretic religious groups such as the Santo Daime and the União do Vegetal (UDV), has spread from the

northern Amazon region to the rest of Brazil, especially since the late 1970s. Currently, there are innumerable groups dispersed throughout Brazil, the result of multiple combinations of cosmology and practices of the original branches with contemporary urban religious and therapeutic trends, as well as other cultural and religious elements (Labate 2004). It is very hard to establish the total number of groups and practitioners, but the phenomenon appears to be flourishing both numerically and in terms of sociological impact. This expansion has resulted in an extensive public controversy. These debates are of interest not only from the perspective of cultural and religious studies but also in the area of human rights. The expansion of ayahuasca use nationally and internationally has been addressed by authors from different theoretical perspectives and disciplines. To date, however, few have touched on an important and emerging aspect of this debate, which is the recent attempt of some religious groups to have ayahuasca recognized as “immaterial cultural heritage” of Brazil. This article aims to provide initial reflections on this movement.



FORMALIZING HISTORY

In April of 2010, the Legislative Assembly of the state of Acre in Amazonian Brazil recognized the following deceased religious leaders with the honorary title “Citizen of Acre” (Assembleia Legislativa do Estado do Acre 2010): Raimundo Irineu Serra or “Mestre Irineu” (founder of the Santo Daime), Daniel Pereira de Mattos or “Frei Daniel” (founder of the Barquinha), and José Gabriel da Costa or “Mestre Gabriel” (founder of the UDV). Exactly two years before, in April 2008, representatives of these three ayahuasca religions² in Brazil had filed a petition with the Institute of National Historic and Artistic Heritage (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, IPHAN) to recognize ayahuasca as immaterial cultural heritage of the Brazilian nation. Their petition is still being analyzed (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional 2008; Meyer 2008; Queiroz et al. 2008; Santos 2010). In September of 2006, the governor of Acre, Jorge Viana, together with the mayor of the capital city of Rio Branco, Raimundo Angelim, signed a decree recognizing the installations of the Santo Daime branch at Alto Santo known as “Centro de Iluminação Cristã Luz Universal—Alto Santo” (Alto Santo Universal Light Christian Illumination Center) as state historical and cultural heritage (Labate and Goldstein 2009). These successes at obtaining formal state recognition represent a major victory for the ayahuasca religious groups, which have suffered frequent persecution throughout their history (Goulart 2004; Labate 2005; MacRae 2008, 2010). The relationship of these groups with public authorities in Acre, and the concomitant transition of

ayahuasca from stigmatized, dangerous drug to regional and possibly national cultural heritage represent an important process of historical and legal transformation that has been little studied to date. This sort of recognition represents an important aspect of the social legitimacy of these groups in Brazil, which may also influence the course of legal cases in different countries.

In this article, I analyze the process leading up to bestowing the honorary title of “Citizen of Acre” on Mestre Irineu, Frei Daniel, and Mestre Gabriel. I reflect on how the formal recognition of ayahuasca religions as cultural heritage depended on a selective depiction of certain aspects of the cultural and symbolic repertoire of each group for purposes of public representation. I focus especially on discourses about the origins of UDV³, one of the main actors in this movement. I speculate as to why Mestre Gabriel received honorific titles in Acre even though his religious movement emerged in the neighboring state of Rondônia.⁴ I also attempt to understand why the Santo Daime branch known as CEFLURIS or ICEFLU,⁵ associated with “Padrinho Sebastião” (Sebastião Mota de Melo, a disciple of Mestre Irineu), has been excluded from this process to date. The association of the UDV—a religion founded in Rondônia—with the history of Acre is especially ironic given the exclusion of the CEFLURIS/ICEFLU Daime tradition, which indeed has deep cultural and historical roots in Acre.



RODÔNIA AND ACRE; BRAZIL AND BOLIVIA

One could summarize common conceptions about the origins of ayahuasca religions as follows: both Santo Daime (consisting of two main branches, Alto Santo and CEFLURIS/ICEFLU, each with various internal divisions) and Barquinha were thought of as having originated in Acre, while the UDV was considered native to Rondônia. This geographical division, which placed Santo Daime and Barquinha in contrast to the UDV, also reflects the symbolic genealogy of the former two traditions, which both descended from the teachings of Mestre Irineu. Frei Daniel of Barquinha was a disciple of Mestre Irineu, and both the Santo Daime and Barquinha groups refer to the sacred psychoactive beverage as *daime* and to their disciples as *Daimistas*. Mestre Gabriel, on the other hand, founded his religious group independently from M. Irineu and refers to the beverage as *vegetal* or *hoasca*; the disciples are called *Hoasqueiros*.

Yet, these classifications in the field of ayahuasca religions in Brazil oscillate depending on the context and the interlocutor (Goulart 2004; Labate 2004) and are now undergoing a process of reorganization. Thus, recent public debates have included the UDV within the category of “ayahuasca religions of Acre” (Redação 2008) or “traditional centers of Acre” (Neves 2008).

Historians of the UDV like Afrânio Patrocínio de Andrade (1995), Sérgio Brissac (1999), and Sandra Goulart (2004) affirm that Mestre Gabriel lived between Porto Velho and various rubber camps in the region between 1950 and 1965. It is said that he drank ayahuasca for the first time in the rubber camp of Guarapari, on the border of Bolivia, in 1959. That same year, he made his first trip to Vila Plácido (now known as Plácido de Castro) in Acre. The UDV was founded on the 22 of July in the rubber camp of Sunta, a date referred to as “Recriação da União do Vegetal” (Re-creation/Reestablishment of the UDV). In 1962, Mestre Gabriel is said to have met in Plácido de Castro with the 12 “Masters of Curiosity” (Mestres de Curiosidade)—a somewhat pejorative term in the UDV pantheon for false or lesser ayahuasca masters—who declared him the “Superior Master.” On November 1, 1964, Mestre Gabriel is said to have “confirmed the UDV in the Superior Astral plane” and then moved to Porto Velho in early 1965. It is worth remembering that by this time there were already Santo Daime adepts in Porto Velho associated with Mestre Irineu, who later organized themselves into the group known as Centro Eclético de Correntes da Luz Universal—CECLU (Currents of Universal Light Eclectic Center) led by Virgílio Nogueira do Amaral (Cemin 1998; Goulart 2004). Some of Mestre Gabriel’s disciples are said to have participated in this group. In 1967, still in Porto Velho, UDV elaborated its first statutes and in 1970 adopted its official name “Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal.” The next year, Mestre Gabriel died. From his first experience with ayahuasca at the rubber camp to his death (or “dis-incarnation” [*desencarnação*] as his adepts refer to it), only 12 years had passed. During approximately this same period, Padrinho Sebastião took ayahuasca for the first time (1963) in Barquinha and for the second time (1965) with Mestre Irineu, initiating his own hymnal ceremonies in 1969 at Colônia Cinco Mil outside Rio Branco (Eduardo Bayer, personal communication, July 2010) and ultimately officially founding the CEFLURIS branch of Santo Daime in 1974 (MacRae 1992; Goulart 2004).

At this point, it is important to analyze the geography of Mestre Gabriel’s peregrinations. UDV is said to have been founded at the site still referred to as rubber camp Sunta. Border areas are prone to hybrid identities: while Sunta has typically been described as a site on the border with Bolivia, what most accounts fail to point out is that it is on the Bolivian side of the border. An old map of the Federal Territory of Acre from 1917, drawn by João Alberto Masô, provides more reliable names for rubber camps than more recent maps. Following this map, “Sunta” is probably the rubber camp indicated on the map as Assunta, or Asunta in Spanish orthography. The map also shows Guarapari (or Guarapary) and Orion, other rubber camps where Mestre Gabriel worked.

According to field research I carried out in this region with the local population, the name Assunta or Asunta is an abbreviation for “Nossa Senhora da Assunção”/“Nuestra Señora de la de Asunción” (Our Lady of the Assumption), a name that referred to the whole region encompassing the rubber camp at Sunta/Asunta. To get there, one must cross the Abunã River, which marks the border between Brazil and Bolivia. The nearest town is Plácido de Castro in Acre, 15 kilometers by land and 19 kilometers by river. Thus, the UDV was actually founded on Bolivian soil, a fact that is not mentioned in any of the scholarly literature on this subject that I have reviewed. However, the local people are in fact aware of the UDV’s Bolivian origins. For example, one of the UDV centers at Candeia do Jamari (Rondônia) produced a commemorative card for one of its anniversaries showing a photo of Mestre Gabriel and a short text about the history of UDV, mentioning that it was founded in Bolivia. These facts regarding the geographical origins of the UDV do not appear in the public representations on the religion, perhaps because of the ayahuasca groups’ construction of their identities as authentic Brazilian religions (Labate and Pacheco 2005, in press).

And yet, despite being on Bolivian soil, the region of the old rubber camp at Sunta/Asunta (now a ranch) is populated mostly by Brazilians who do not consider themselves to be Bolivian. The main language is Portuguese, and strong social, economic, and social ties are maintained with Acre, especially Plácido de Castro, where births are registered. Thus, despite the borders drawn on the maps, one could say that this area is, culturally speaking, part of Acre and thus that UDV has historical roots in Acre. These historical ties, which were formerly overlooked or de-emphasized, have gained prominence as the three religious groups have worked together to gain formal recognition as cultural heritage with strong support from the state government of Acre.



CONSOLIDATING ACREAN ALLIANCES

Setting aside the question of the actual point of geographical origin, it is clear that the UDV developed as a religious institution, established its social and legal structures, inaugurated its first historical center, and consolidated its first cohort of leaders (*mestres*) in Porto Velho. It was from this base in Porto Velho and, later, Manaus—where the first “nucleus” was founded—that the UDV began to spread throughout Brazil and the world. Porto Velho was the “Mecca” where the first generation of urban *hoasqueiros* from southern Brazil went in search of their Amazonian origins (Lodi 2004, 2010) and remains an important place of pilgrimage for Brazilian and international disciples. Within the UDV there appears to be an ongoing debate between those who focus on the group’s rubber camp origins and those who

emphasize its formal consolidation in the city of Porto Velho. Yet despite this internal discussion, which I mention only in passing, the group has historically represented itself as being, in the first place, Brazilian not Bolivian, and in the second place, as having originated in Porto Velho not in Acre. This does not mean, however, that the group maintains strong political ties with the state of Rondônia; if anything, UDV's center of gravity lies now in Brasília, the capital of Brazil.

The state of Acre has shown itself to be friendlier, in political terms, to the ayahuasca religions than Rondônia. Although there are UDV, Santo Daime, and Barquinha groups present in Rondônia, the state government has shown no interest in calling attention to these ayahuasca traditions as part of its heritage. The state government of Acre, by contrast, has shown a continuous and growing interest in the ayahuasca phenomenon due to a number of factors that I will only summarize here. First of all, Santo Daime is the oldest of the three ayahuasca religions, having emerged in Acre some three decades prior to UDV in Rondônia. Secondly, Mestre Irineu maintained a strong network of relationships of friendship and respect with important figures in Acre politics, including governors Guiomard Santos and Jorge Kalume, Colonel Fontenele de Castro, and Senator Wildy Viana who is the father of Acre's governor and Rio Branco's city mayor, Jorge Viana. Mestre Gabriel, on the other hand, apparently did not maintain such ties with the political elite of Rondônia. At a broader historical scale, it is worth remembering that the history of colonization of these two neighboring Amazon states was very different. Rondônia was considered a territory of Brazil since the early 20th century and only gained statehood in 1982. Acre, on the other hand, as the source of the Amazon's best rubber, was contested territory at the turn of the 20th century, caught up in a border dispute between Bolivia, Peru, and Brazil. Acre became a Brazilian territory through armed conflict between migrant rubber tappers from Northeast Brazil, supported by their "rubber bosses," and Bolivians and Peruvians. Acre gained statehood in 1962 and through the 1970s was considered in the popular imagination to be a place populated by rubber tappers, rubber barons, and soldiers, united under the flag of the "Revolution of Acre." In the 1970s, historically discriminated indigenous peoples began to emerge as a political force by joining with rubber tapper unions under the leadership of Chico Mendes, transforming Acre's political and social reality (Carneiro da Cunha and Almeida 2001, 2002). At this point, there emerged what might be called a unique "Acrean" identity, incorporating rubber tappers and Indians as well as local religions within their own tradition (Aquino 1977). These true Acreans are now seen as resisting and reacting to invasion and exploitation by colonists, ranchers, rubber bosses, and speculators from the richer, southern Brazilian states. Thus, the people of Acre, who first had to "fight to become Brazilian" in armed

struggle against the Bolivians, are now seen as fighting for political and economic dignity against exploitative southern Brazilians—in a word, there is valorization of the local, the traditional, and the native. The colonists in Rondônia, by contrast, arrived earlier than they did in Acre, mostly in the 1970s, with the opening of new highways in the Amazon, when the rubber camps did not have the importance they had in the Acre State. Rondônia has not shown the same trend toward social agglutination around the notion of the “native.”

The three most recent government terms of the Worker’s Party (PT) in Acre have further contributed to establishing this notion of a unique, native Acrean identity uniting indigenous and forest peoples. Santo Daime and the ayahuasca religions have allied themselves with the notion of Acrean identity in this political context. This process can be understood as a tightening of political and personal ties between the leaders of Alto Santo, especially, and the Worker’s Party government. At the state level, Jorge Viana was governor for two consecutive terms (1999–2002, 2003–6), followed by Arnóbio (Binho) Marques de Almeida, Jr. from 2007 to 2010. Jorge Viana knew Mestre Irineu since childhood through his father, while Binho Marques drank daime on a few occasions at Alto Santo in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Antonio Alves, personal communication, July 2010). In Rio Branco, Jorge Viana was mayor from 1993 to 1996, then the PT went out of power for two terms and returned in 2005 with two consecutive terms by the current mayor, Raimundo Angelim, who remains in the governorship through 2012. One of the main players in the alliance between Daime and the government of Acre is Antonio (Toinho) Alves, a member of Alto Santo/CICLU for 25 years who has acted as a kind of ambassador for the group in government circles. He served as president of the Garibaldi Brasil Foundation during Viana’s first term as mayor and the as president of the Elias Mansour Culture and Communication Foundation during his first term as governor. Currently, Alves is cultural advisor to Viana’s successor, Governor Marques. Alves was also an important intellectual behind the concept of “forest citizenship” (*florestania*) that has been important throughout the PT’s government in Acre (Labate 2009b).

Other important figures in the political scene in Acre who have helped articulate the establishment of ayahuasca as cultural heritage include the district attorney, Cosmo Lima de Souza, and especially the federal judge, Jair Araújo Facundes, both from the Centro Rainha da Floresta (Center of the Queen of the Forest), a branch that can be classified under the general umbrella of the “Alto Santo line.”

Public figures from Acre who have been important in this process include Congresswoman Perpétua Almeida⁶ and Senator Sebastião (Tião) Viana,⁷ anthropologist Clodomir Monteiro, Marcos Vinícius Neves who is the current president of the Garibaldi Brazil Foundation, and a number of other

artists, university professors, urban professionals, public sector employees, policy makers, and elected officials who maintain relationships with ayahuasca communities. More recently, the UDV has also managed to establish and maintain important political connections in Acre at the state and municipal levels and in the judicial and legislative branches.



THE CEFLURIS “PROBLEM”

The various ayahuasca religions have been cooperating since the mid-1980s toward the mutual goal of obtaining social legitimacy and formal recognition and regulation of the legal use of ayahuasca in Brazil (MacRae 1992, 2008, 2010; Goulart 2004; Labate 2004, 2005). The CEFLURIS branch of Santo Daime, founded by Padrinho Sebastião, however, has proven polemical. Part of the controversy involves a dispute between various Alto Santo and CEFLURIS centers regarding the legitimate succession of the spiritual heritage of Mestre Irineu. However, the main source of controversy is the use of *cannabis*, referred to as “Santa Maria,” as a sacrament by CEFLURIS (MacRae 1998; Goulart 2004). Cannabis was formerly used in CEFLURIS rituals in the Amazon and continues to be used in Amsterdam. CEFLURIS has also been associated with urban and counterculture values, in contrast with some more conservative and locally oriented groups. Despite the internal disputes typical of the ayahuasca field, CEFLURIS was probably the group that did the most to make ayahuasca known throughout Brazil and the world. In the Brazilian national debate, CEFLURIS was always associated with popular, religious, and cultural traditions of the Amazon. CEFLURIS has also long been active, alongside UDV, in the legalization of ayahuasca in Brazil and elsewhere. And yet, in recent years there has been a progressive distancing and isolation of CEFLURIS from the ayahuasca scene in Rio Branco, while the UDV, Alto Santo, and Barquinha have formed an ever-closer network of alliances with each other and with state and local authorities.

Alto Santo, Barquinha, and the UDV have managed to insert themselves in the public debate in Acre, and to a certain degree throughout Brazil, with the status of “original” or “traditional” branches or “roots” of the ayahuasca traditions. (It should be noted that Alto Santo and Barquinha sometimes restrict decision making to the dominant centers of CICLU and “Casa de Jesus, Fonte de Luz⁸” respectively, and sometimes broaden the process to include other centers and branches). Traditionally, some Alto Santo centers consider CEFLURIS/Santo Daime as an “inauthentic” or “dissident” movement from the legacy of Mestre Irineu.⁹ But in any case, CEFLURIS has been, alongside the UDV, at the forefront of national and international efforts to legitimize ayahuasca use as a traditional Amazonian religion and has been recognized as

such. Now, the group is being increasingly reclassified as a “non-original” ayahuasca tradition by Alto Santo, Barquinha, and the UDV. The “traditionalists” appear to have recast CEFLURIS as an “eclectic” or “New Age” group, placing it in the same category as various new forms of ayahuasca use that have appeared in urban centers in the more developed southeast part of Brazil since the 1990s (Labate 2004). Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, this recasting of, and distancing from, CEFLURIS/Santo Daime is found not only within the other ayahuasca religious groups but has also emerged in the discourse of local political agents and representatives (Neves 2008; Neves 2011a, 2011b; Labate 2009a, 2009b). At any rate, it is notable that CEFLURIS—the Santo Daime branch established by Padrinho Sebastião that has spread most widely throughout Brazil and the world, and which remains active in the public arena—has not been invited to participate in the discussions going on in Acre about ayahuasca traditions as cultural heritage. This situation results from a process that works both ways: exclusion by the other groups is met with CEFLURIS’ isolation, as well as their lack of interest in, or capacity for, political articulation in Rio Branco, along with a certain institutional fragility and other factors to be discussed below.



EXPANSION, TRADITION, AND LEGITIMACY

A number of more or less subtle transformations have been noted in the consolidation of this core block of Alto Santo, Barquinha, and the UDV in the public debates about ayahuasca in Acre. In the first place, the term “Santo Daime” is used less and less, as the term is so closely associated with the CEFLURIS branch and its wide dissemination of Padrinho Sebastião’s version of the religion. Another phenomenon is the recent elevation of Mestre Irineu to the status of pan-ayahuasca founding father of this suite of religions in Acre and Brazil more generally. Although the autonomy and particularities of the UDV are recognized and respected, the new political alliance has resituated UDV implicitly under the umbrella of a single ayahuasca genealogy descended from the unanimous figure of Mestre Irineu within the State of Acre. It is significant that most of the important meetings throughout this process have been held at the Alto Santo center in Rio Branco. This has consolidated Alto Santo’s image as the oldest and original ayahuasca church in Brazil.

Within this context we can better understand why CEFLURIS, excluded from the political configuration in Acre, filed its own heritage petition with the state government of Amazonas about five months prior to the date when Alto Santo, Barquinha, and UDV filed the paperwork with IPHAN for recognition of ayahuasca as Brazilian cultural heritage (Melo 2007; Alverga 2010). In truth, CEFLURIS founder Padrinho Sebastião was born in 1920 on the

upper Juruá River in Amazonas State. Its main community and center of worship at Céu de Mapiá, founded in 1983, is within the municipality of Pauini in Amazonas state, details of which were all highlighted in the group's petition to the governor of Amazonas (Melo 2007). And yet, Céu de Mapiá is closer to Rio Branco than to Manaus, capital of Amazonas state. Both culturally and historically, Padrinho Sebastião's movement has strong roots at the Cinco Mil agricultural colony on the outskirts of Rio Branco. And throughout the history of the ayahuasca religions, CEFLURIS participated alongside the other traditions in many important debates, always held in Acre.

The consolidation of the "traditionalist" triumvirate and the distancing of the UDV from CEFLURIS are somewhat paradoxical when one considers how much the UDV and CEFLURIS have in common: First, they are the most recent among these traditions, having emerged about the same time. The UDV is larger and had expanded to the southeast of Brazil one decade before CEFLURIS. Its first nucleus outside the Amazon region, Samaúma, was founded in 1972 in São Paulo (Brissac 1999). In 1982, CEFLURIS opened its first temple outside the Amazon, Céu do Mar, in Rio de Janeiro (Goulart 2004). This pair, UDV and CEFLURIS, are the only ayahuasca religions to have significantly expanded out of Acre throughout Brazil and the world, attracting adepts among the urban middle class and gaining international recognition as traditional Amazonian religious movements.¹⁰ And yet, the CEFLURIS communities tend to be isolated in distant places in the Amazon interior, such as Céu de Mapiá in Amazonas and Céu do Juruá in Acre, with less numerical and political expression in Rio Branco, where the key agents (noted above) and articulations surrounding ayahuasca as cultural heritage have been active. The UDV, in contrast to CEFLURIS, and despite its historical origins in Rondônia, has well-structured temples in Rio Branco, and the centers located elsewhere in Acre maintain strong ties to the capital.



FUTURE PERSPECTIVES FOR RESEARCH

Much research still needs to be carried out behind the scenes regarding the process of establishing ayahuasca as cultural heritage. In particular, we need to learn more about the history of the formation and consolidation of the current so-called traditionalist block of "roots" ayahuasca groups formed by Alto Santo, Barquinha, and UDV. A key moment in this process was the commemoration, in 1992, of the centennial of Mestre Irineu's death (*Revista do Centenário* 1992). On this occasion, it became clear that some Alto Santo centers had stronger ties to Padrinho Sebastião's CEFLURIS tradition than others. The event also initiated a process of approximation between Alto Santo and Barquinha. Further, it prompted a change in the relationship of

the UDV to Alto Santo and Barquinha. The UDV had previously maintained some distance and independence from the other ayahuasca religions. Historically, UDV referred to all other ayahuasca uses other than its own as part of the legacy of the “Masters of Curiosity” (see above), considered to be inferior to Mestre Gabriel and based on false or speculative knowledge (Andrade 2004; Goulart 2004; Henman 2009; Labate, Meyer, and Anderson 2009; Melo 2010).

The role of the UDV in articulating political alliances in Acre is also not entirely clear, as its actions are more discreet and thus might be more significant than we currently imagine. According to an anonymous source, there are three state and two federal representatives allied to this religious group in the current political regime.¹¹ It will also be important to better understand the connections of Alto Santo with the PT governments in Acre as well as at the national level. In 2006, Alto Santo members Jair Facundes and Cosmo Souza occupied two of the six seats reserved for representatives of ayahuasca religions in Brazil within the Multidisciplinary Working Group on Ayahuasca at the National Council on Drug Policies (CONAD; MacRae 2008, 2010). In 2010, three Alto Santo members (Facundes and Souza plus Antonio Alves) participated in public hearings at the House of Representatives in Brasilia to debate a proposed legislative decree submitted by Congressman Paes de Lira that would have prohibited ayahuasca use in Brazil (Labate 2010). And it will be important to continue observing whether the increasing estrangement of CEFLURIS from the Acre context will cause it to lose strength in the national scenario and whether this situation will lead CEFLURIS to seek out alliances with some of the less orthodox Alto Santo groups and other urban neo-ayahuasca groups.

This overview of the ongoing process of establishing ayahuasca as cultural heritage of Acre and Brazil has emphasized the political dimensions of debates and negotiations that have resulted in strategic alliances and active historical reinterpretations by ayahuasca religions. This article is relevant to more general considerations of the negotiations between society and the state in the cultural realm. Thus, the recognition of cultural heritage is not simply a title conferred upon a preexisting entity but rather the product of social and historical constructions that involve dispute between different voices, versions, and actors, in which some groups win and others lose. None of this diminishes the historical, cultural, and spiritual values expressed by these groups. However, I have pointed out how religious identity needs to be considered from both a contextual and a relational perspective. The attribution of formal status through cultural heritage recognition involves complex and multiple relationships that go beyond the simplistic associations postulated by discourses that pivot around the idea of “tradition.”



POSTSCRIPT

After this text was finished, I came across a publication from Julia Otero dos Santos (2010). According to her, on November 26, 2008, the Board on Immaterial Heritage denied the registration of ayahuasca as cultural heritage in Brazil, arguing that the request was not clear enough. According to their report, “food and drink, as well as beliefs, philosophies, and technologies in and of themselves do not constitute ‘cultural goods’ capable of Heritage Registry; rather, these serve as references for the production and reproduction of processes, representations, and cultural practices” (Santos 2010:3; my translation). The document suggests that the presenters of the request perform an “investigation into the ritual uses of Ayahuasca and its role in the constitution of cultural references for the social groups involved,” (Santos 2010:3–4; my translation) and present this inventory to IPHAN for further consideration. Meanwhile, indigenous groups that have previously not participated in the national debates on ayahuasca have come out publicly contesting the use of ayahuasca by “whites” as a legitimate Brazilian cultural heritage (Espíndola 2010). Instead, they claim that they are the traditional heirs and holders of ayahuasca knowledge. Some have even suggested that their ancestors actually taught the founders of these religions about ayahuasca in the first place (Bressane 2010). Shamans and young “apprentice shamans” from these indigenous groups have recently begun offering ayahuasca ceremonies to middle-class people in urban centers, as well as inviting nonindigenous Brazilians and foreigners to their cultural festivals in the Amazon (Schneider 2009a, 2009b; Monteiro 2010; Ortiz 2010). These recent developments and manifestations not only complicate the political context but also enrich the cultural and historical significance of the pending cultural heritage petitions involving ayahuasca. Until 2011, the ayahuasca religious groups did not publicly comment on, or even mention, the denial of their petition by the IPHAN board.

From May 25 to 26 in 2011, the municipal IPHAN in Rio Branco held a meeting with the local representatives of the religious groups to explain the first phase of the process it decided to pursue: to perform an “Inventário Nacional de Referências Culturais” (INCR—National Inventory on Cultural References) to gather preliminary information that would enable it to decide whether to recommend that the state register one or more cultural references related to this topic as immaterial cultural heritage of Brazil. This meeting included more branches than the ones that originally participated in the process (Bomfim 2011; Neves 2011b). Later that year, from October 7 to 9, the “I Encontro Cultural da Diversidade Ayahuasqueira” (I Cultural Meeting of Ayahuasca Diversity) took place in Rio de Janeiro, in the southeast of Brazil. The Brazilian Ministry of Culture and the national IPHAN organized this

event in cooperation with some representatives of ayahuasca-drinking groups, including those of different indigenous ethnic groups from Acre, a branch of Santo Daime from Acre, and representatives from CEFLURIS/ICEFLU and from neo-ayahuasquero groups in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The Barquinha and Alto Santo “lines,” as well as the UDV, were invited, but chose not to join the meeting. In November 2011, the IPHAN office in Acre announced a formal public process to hire a group of anthropologists to perform the inventory. The bureaucratic requirements for joining this enterprise were extravagantly plethoric, excluding regular anthropologists, such as this author, from the process.



NOTES

1. This English translation has been revised and updated from a Portuguese text first published online: “As religiões ayahuasqueiras, patrimônio cultural, Acre e fronteiras geográficas.” In *Ponto Urbe* 7(4):December 2010. Available at: <http://www.pontourbe.net/edicao7-artigos/124-as-religoes-ayahuasqueiras-patrimonio-cultural-acre-e-fronteiras-geograficas>
2. For the concept of ayahuasca religions, see: Labate and Araújo (2004), Labate, Rose, and Santos (2009), and Labate and MacRae (2010).
3. The official name of this religion is “Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal,” or CEBUDV (Union of the Vegetal Beneficent Spiritist Center), although the abbreviations União do Vegetal or simply UDV are more commonly used.
4. The UDV is more organized and developed in Rondônia than in Acre. Currently, it has 25 centers in Rondônia and 11 in Acre (Bernardino-Costa and Silva 2011). In any case, one shall remember that Rondônia has a little over double of the population of Acre.
5. ICEFLU stands for “Igreja do Culto Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal Patrono Sebastião Mota de Melo” (Church of Eclectic Worship of the Flowing Universal Light—Sebastião Mota de Melo, Patron). This branch of Santo Daime was formerly known, and still widely known in the literature, as CEFLURIS, “Centro Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra,” (Raimundo Irineu Serra Universal Flowing Light Eclectic Center). For an explanation on why the name changed, see Labate, Rose, and Santos (2009).
6. Belonging to the political party PC do B, “Communist Party of Brazil.”
7. Belonging to the political party PT, “Workers Party.”
8. “Centro Espírita e Culto de Oração Casa de Jesus-Fonte de Luz” (Spiritist Center and Praying House of Jesus, Source of Light), a Barquinha branch led by Francisco Hipólito de Araújo Neto.
9. Under the perspective of some Alto Santo members, Padrinho Sebastião was a late disciple of Mestre Irineu, who had only around six years of contact with him alive. It is pointed out that he did not found his own religion but rather was a follower of a tradition inaugurated by Mestre Irineu and that he further introduced changes to the Santo Daime doctrine.
10. This expansion generated the appearance of “neo-ayahuasquero” groups in large cities of Brazil from the 1990s on that combine elements of the Santo Daime and the UDV cosmology and rituals with urban forms of religiosity, therapy, and arts. The arrival of these religions in the southeast generated therefore an incredible and unexpected expansion and diversification (Labate 2004).
11. In July 2011, the UDV celebrated its 50th anniversary with a public tribute event at the national congress in Brasília, the federal capital. In the following months there were similar events happening in regional municipalities throughout Brazil. This represents the unprecedented ability of political articulation and influence by an ayahuasca group in Brazil, perhaps a definitive turning point. The impact and significance of this is still to be measured and understood.

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