

4 Culling the spirits

An exploration of Santo Daime's adaptation in Canada

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This investigation explores the beliefs and practices of a Canadian branch of Santo Daime, a syncretic religion founded in Brazil and structured around the ritualistic consumption of Santo Daime, a psychoactive plant decoction – referred to outside the religion as “ayahuasca” – indigenous to the Amazonian Basin. In spite of legal and political obstacles to the growth of ayahuasca practices, the brew is rapidly becoming a global phenomenon as traditional and syncretic South American ayahuasca practices establish themselves throughout the world, and as ayahuasca tourism grows in South America (Harris & Gurel, 2012; Feeney & Labate, 2014; Fotiou, 2014; Peluso, 2014). In this chapter, I examine Santo Daime's adaptation to the Canadian context through a focus on alterity; that is to say, I look at the ways in which members of Santo Daime, at individual and collective levels, understand themselves and their practice as “other” vis-à-vis contemporary Canadian society. To elicit evidence of alterity, I use the concepts of ontology, the study of what there is, and epistemology, the study of ways of knowing, to shed light on the radically different worlds and worldviews of Santo Daime. The limitations of current positivistic epistemological conceptualizations of ayahuasca and its effects have been identified as one of the most significant challenges facing scientific research on ayahuasca (Tupper, 2011a; 2011b). By conducting participant observation and a series of in-depth, semistructured interviews with the members of the Ceu do Montréal church, a Canadian chapter of Santo Daime, this research aims to document an aspect of Santo Daime practice that is underrepresented both in the ayahuasca literature and in contemporary Canadian drug discourses. More than a discussion about the globalization of an Amazonian plant-medicine, the case of ayahuasca in Canada speaks to the dynamics of alterity in a pluralistic society and the navigation of co-existing – yet diverging – perspectives on health, identity, and spirituality.

Ayahuasca in Canada

The majority of scholarship on ayahuasca in Canada is authored by Kenneth Tupper, whose work on ayahuasca addresses its presence in Canadian culture and attendant policy issues (Tupper, 2011a; 2011b). Rather than repeat here the contents of Tupper's comprehensive assessment, I present relevant contextualizing

information and point interested readers to his chapter in the volume *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca* (Labate & Jungaberle, 2011). Ayahuasca began to gain visibility in Canada in the mid-1990s with the establishment of C eu do Montr eal, a chapter of the Santo Daime religion, and the publication, by Canadian authors, of accounts of ayahuasca from ethnobotanical and anthropological perspectives (Davis, 1996; Narby, 1999; Tupper, 2011b). In the absence of survey data documenting the diversity and number of ayahuasca users in Canada, various indications signal its growing availability and consumption: six additional Santo Daime chapters have been founded since the inauguration of the original church in 1996; various individuals and organizations throughout the country have begun to offer sessions in the style of South American indigenous and mixed-indigenous traditions (often labeled *vegetalismo* practices); and finally, *Banisteriopsis caapi*, *Psychotria viridis*, and other monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) and dimethyltryptamine (DMT)-containing plants are becoming increasingly available on the Internet and at specialist shops in major Canadian cities. The growth of interest in ayahuasca can be traced, in part, to the degree of networking and information made available by the Internet and social media websites. Illustrating this point, the social networking platform “Meetup” hosts a group called the Ayahuasca Association of Canada, created in 2012, and boasting more than 1700 members as of 2014. The group publicizes several ceremonies taking place in various Canadian cities each month. The diction employed in the ceremony descriptions evokes *vegetalismo* and neoshamanic traditions; the Brazilian syncretic Christian religions – Uni o do Vegetal (UDV) and Santo Daime – are notably absent from the Ayahuasca Association of Canada. Finally, an observational study gave evidence of a rural First Nations community in British Columbia that organized a series of ayahuasca healing sessions in alliance with a Shipibo *ayahuasquero* to address substance dependence and other habitual behavioral problems in the community (Thomas, Lucas, Capler, Tupper, & Martin, 2013). The extent of ayahuasca use in First Nations and Aboriginal communities in Canada has not been documented at this time; however, a recent publication from the First Nations Health Authority, the Province of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada recognizes the ceremonial use of ayahuasca as “beneficial” on a spectrum of substance use (Tripartite First Nations Health Plan, 2013, p. 20). While the existence of this document does not imply a broad adoption of ayahuasca practices among Canada’s First Nations and Aboriginal people, it does suggest their recognition of the potential for the therapeutic and spiritual use of ayahuasca in a ceremonial setting.

The availability of materials for the production of ayahuasca or ayahuasca-like substances turns on the ambiguous legal status of the brew in Canada. *Psychotria viridis*, one of ayahuasca’s two principal plant ingredients, contains N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), while *Banisteriopsis caapi*, its second principal plant component, contains harmaline and harmalol; all three substances are classified in the schedule III category of the Canadian Controlled Drug and Substances Act (CDSA)(S.C. 1996, c. 19). While DMT, harmaline, and harmalol are scheduled substances in the CDSA, plants containing these substances are neither explicitly exempt (e.g., mescaline-containing peyote) nor included (e.g., opioid-containing

Papaver somniferum) in the schedules. Although the distribution or possession of ayahuasca preparations may be interpreted as criminal activity, the distribution and possession of its plant constituents does not fall clearly into the same category (Tupper, 2011b). According to my personal observations, Montreal stores specializing in psychoactive substances and paraphernalia, as well as commercial websites that ship to Canada (Tupper, 2011b; see also Tupper's chapter in this volume), sell ayahuasca's plant constituents, with which customers can attempt to prepare ayahuasca at home, or else, popularly, extract DMT and consume it in vaporized form. This legal grey area effectively enables ayahuasca practices in which plants containing DMT and MAOIs are imported into Canada and brewed inside of the Canadian border, and hampers the practices of communities – like Santo Daime – that rely on imported ayahuasca prepared in ritualized contexts outside of Canada, which, if seized at the border, is more likely to be treated as a contravention of the CDSA.

As a consequence of ayahuasca's shared category membership with myriad other illicit substances, broader discourses surrounding prohibited psychoactive substances play a large role in constructing policy on ayahuasca. The history of drug policy in Canada mirrors the trajectories taken by other major developed countries (e.g., United States, Australia, etc.), where concern about the demographics associated with particular substances (typically ethnic and cultural minorities) has steered drug-related decision-making processes more than consideration for the health risk and benefits inherent to the substances themselves (Manderson, 1999). To this effect, critics have variously argued that the War on Drugs is more accurately understood as a war on racial and cultural minorities (Small, 2001; Bobo & Thompson, 2006). Since Canadian drug policy continues to reflect discourses rooted in implicit and explicit logics of moral and social control in lieu of evidence-based reasoning, ayahuasca users face significant drug-related stigmatization (Tupper, 2011a). This stigma hampers opportunities to study ayahuasca scientifically – to date, no clinical trials of the safety or efficacy of ayahuasca have been approved or conducted in Canada – and, coming full circle, this lack of academic knowledge precludes the creation of the types of evidence (on safety and efficacy) that are privileged in policy making.

The present research

I undertook this research in the wider context of prohibitionist Canadian drug policy. Anthropological methods of studying ayahuasca are amenable to conservative research ethics boards that steer clear of implicating educational institutions in the acquisition and distribution of ayahuasca, even for scientific reasons. As participant observation and interviews interface with ayahuasca users without explicitly facilitating or disabling their practices, they were presumably approved on account of their relative neutrality. My research was conducted in cooperation with Ceu do Montréal, a congregation established in 1996 as a subsidiary of the Centro Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra (CEFLURIS) line of Santo Daime. Through Brazilian contacts at CEFLURIS, Ceu do Montréal

began importing Santo Daime² (also known as “Daime”). The practice of Céu do Montréal proceeded uninterrupted until the year 2000, when the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency detained a shipment of Daime en route to Céu do Montréal and forwarded it to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP; Canada’s federal police force) for chemical analysis (Tupper, 2011a). In correspondence with the RCMP, Céu do Montréal explained their sole use of Daime as a religious sacrament, and were informed that an exemption would be required for further importation of the sacrament (Rochester, 2014). Subsequently, Céu do Montréal initiated a request with Health Canada’s Office of Controlled Substances for a Section 56 exemption from the CDSA (Tupper, 2011a). In 2006, after a protracted investigation, Céu do Montréal received a letter from Health Canada granting them approval “in principal” of the request for exemption, pending export permission from the government of Brazil (Tupper, 2011a).

For several years, bureaucratic delays stalled the issuance of export permission from Brazil until 2012, when the Canadian Minister of Health – upon whose discretion a Section 56 exemption ultimately turns – issued a letter to the president of Céu do Montréal that annulled the approval “in principle” (Aglukkaq, 2012). In addition, in 2010, Céu do Montréal dissolved ties with CEFLURIS over concerns about the latter’s conformance to regulations and the administration of its international growth (Tupper, 2011a). Without an established source for daime, Céu do Montréal officially stopped holding their regular spiritual services and serving Santo Daime in 2010. Since the official hiatus of Santo Daime works – an umbrella term used to denote the range of ceremonies where daime is ingested – Céu do Montréal has been organizing visitor’s information evenings to receive newcomers and introduce them to the Santo Daime community, the tenets of the faith, and some of the hymns sung at works. In addition, Céu do Montréal holds hymn practices for members as an occasion to get together as a community and sing *hinários*, the sets of hymns performed at Santo Daime works.

Over the period of one and a half years beginning in April 2013, I attended Céu do Montréal’s visitor’s information evenings and hymn practices. Furthermore, from July 2014 through September 2014, I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with seven “star-wearing” members of Céu do Montréal. A “star-wearing” member refers to an individual who has participated in a compulsory number of works and who has appealed to the church elders with an official request to join Santo Daime. Pending approval of the individual’s request, the individual makes a commitment to Santo Daime, and the community recognizes the individual’s commitment in return. These seven members make up approximately one-third of Céu do Montréal’s core membership, which consists of 20 members, in addition to roughly 20 regular visitors who attend hymn practices and meetings, and more than 60 people who were affiliated with the center and are awaiting legalization to resume practicing. Céu do Montréal’s membership is comprised principally of English- and French-speaking individuals of white, middle-class background, in addition to a minority of people who identify as non-white. Many members of Céu do Montréal have a Christian background; however, people of Indigenous, Muslim, Jewish, and New Age backgrounds are represented among the membership.

In terms of age, members range from 26 to 80 years. Until the official hiatus of C eu do Montr eal’s ritual works, ceremonies were conducted in various facilities rented throughout Montreal and the surrounding area. I designed my interview questions as a series of flexible conversation prompts.

My aim was to steer conversation toward the following topics: (a) beliefs about the practices and tenets of Santo Daime; (b) the perceived relationship between Santo Daime and Canadian discourse and policy on drugs; (c) the impact of Santo Daime practices on aspects of health; (d) the connection between C eu do Montr eal and the First Nations and Aboriginal people of Canada; and (e) efforts made to adapt Santo Daime to the Canadian context. The interviews took place in private locations chosen at the discretion of the interviewees; for the most part, they took place in participants’ homes. After obtaining consent from the interviewees, I created audio recordings of the interviews using a digital audio device and subsequently converted the recordings into written transcripts.

By way of discussing the aforementioned topics, I examined Canadian Santo Daime beliefs and practices using the concepts of ontology and epistemology to frame the differences between C eu do Montr eal and the Canadian context in which they are embedded. I provide the following working definitions of ontology and epistemology, which remain close to their roots in philosophy. Ontology refers to “the study of, or reflection on, the question of what there is – what are the fundamental entities or kinds of stuff that exist,” while epistemology refers to ways of knowing what there is (Pedersen, 2012). The majority of attention to anthropology’s “ontological turn” centers on the recursive vein of ontological work, most prominently associated with the University of Cambridge and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Figures of the ontological turn emphasize the study of alterity, or ethnographic difference, and aim to elicit the multiplicity of forms of existence; “making the otherwise visible by experimenting with the conceptual affordances (Holbraad, forthcoming) present in a given body of ethnographic materials” (Holbraad, Pedersen, & Viveiros de Castro, 2014, para. 5). Further, the turn affirms the political nature and potential of work that presents alternative understandings of what “is,” and it maintains that “the anthropology of ontology is anthropology *as* ontology; not the comparison of ontologies, but comparison as ontology” (Holbraad, Pedersen, & Viveiros de Castro, 2014, para. 4). To this effect, the present project deviates from the injunction of “not comparing ontologies,” since in the material at hand, meaningful power dynamics will be brought to light by comparing the divergent manifestations of what there “is” enacted by C eu do Montr eal and the various actors in dialogue with them. I begin the foray into psychedelic ontologies with an exploration of Santo Daime and intersubjectivity.

Ontological and epistemological alterity in C eu do Montr eal

Among the members of C eu do Montr eal, interaction with nonhuman beings emerges as a distinctively salient dimension of alterity. By using the term nonhuman, I do not imply that these beings are less than human, but rather, I use the

term to invoke an intentionally ambiguous category that is not limited to the human. The relationship between my interlocutors and the presence that animates or accompanies Daime is central to many aspects of life for Santo Daime members, and thus serves as a good point of departure for an analysis of my interview. Before delving into specific examples of my interlocutors' encounters with nonhuman entities, it is important to note that the degree to which my interviews indicate Céu do Montréal members' ontological commitment to the existence of nonhuman entities varies. While the tenets of the Santo Daime faith establish a commitment on the part of Santo Daime, as an organization, to the reality of the sentient force – called *Juramidam* – residing within the Daime sacrament, Céu do Montréal's mission statement permits space for interpretive ambiguity: “we affirm beliefs without rejecting those who doubt” (Rochester, 2012, p. 16). To explore this aspect of intersubjectivity – experiences implicitly or explicitly characterized as being shared between conscious beings – I distinguish between ritually bound intersubjective experiences and reflexive thoughts about them. It should be noted that my interlocutors used a variety of terms to describe their intersubjective encounters with non human beings; for instance, they described incorporating, communicating, connecting, getting in touch, or feeling guided, assisted, or directed by/with entities, celestial beings, spirits, plant voices, the astral, and a range of proper nouns referring to specific entities. These intersubjective experiences presented across a range of sensory modalities: through visually manifest beings, or heard voices, or through the felt presence of an entity. The epistemological frameworks adopted by my interlocutors mediate the ontological weight attributed to the beings encountered in these experiences. In other words, reflecting on intersubjective encounters with a being, *daimistas* – members of Santo Daime (also known as *fardados*, or uniform wearers) – deliberate on whether the being is “real” or imagined, whether it is external or internally generated, whether there is a direct encounter with an otherwise invisible being, or whether it is a pharmacologically induced experience with an imagined subject.

Elements of my interviews with Céu do Montreal illustrate the negotiation of ontology in the experience of the nonhuman encountered in the Daime. One of my interlocutors described himself as committed to the scientific method, but with a spiritual or an existential conviction, and specified that he didn't believe in God, heaven, souls, or “the ability to perceive supernatural things.” Discussing experiences in the Daime, he reported hearing “the plants talking to me” and, in this regard, felt like he was “transgressing the line of science” and was being “antiscientific.” Of the experience of hearing the plants, he asserted that “you feel like it's an entity,” and that he felt its awareness. He maintained a critical lens on whether the Daime has consciousness and an intelligence – whether it is “an entity in itself that you experience when it talks to you,” and hypothesized that the encounter may hinge on metaphor and frame of reference. He reported that he struggled with “the language that we use to talk about the plants talking to us, and the plants being teachers,” and that, ultimately, the question of whether the voices were internally generated or coming from the Daime does not really

matter, as the experience and the knowledge it conveys is “sort of undeniable once you’ve had it for yourself.” Our conversation revealed a process that arose several times over the course of my interviews: meaning emerges out of a person’s relation with the Daime, and the truth of this meaning is of an immanent and personal nature – overshadowing concerns for the scientific validity of the emergent meaning, or the ontological status of the being invoked in the meaning-producing relationship.

A similar privileging of personal meaning over concerns for validity of a positivistic nature recurred in my interviews. One of my interlocutors, a *fardado* from Brazil, related that he used to be an atheist, and he used to try to “find scientific explanations for everything.” Since his involvement with Santo Daime, he discovered a different mode of being that he elucidated in contrast to scientific skepticism: “divine experience.” He described undergoing a change in which he began to feel something that he had no desire to explain, volunteering, “If a scientist made me a lot of questions, to prove to him that I am right about my beliefs – I don’t wish to answer those questions. Because I just feel, and that’s enough. This was the change. I didn’t find a meaning, I just felt something.” In shifting away from identifying as an atheist, he adopted an approach to spirituality where reason and logic are not the arbiters of the validity of an experience and, rather, feeling was the criterion to gauge the validity of an experience; to feel was to know. Expanding further on the subject of feeling, he reiterated that while *daimistas* may see or hear entities, he felt them instead. Acknowledging the absence of visually or sonically tangible encounters with entities, he speculated that other *daimistas* may experience entities as mediators of the power of God and likened his own experience to an unmediated encounter with the same force. For lack of a visual encounter with an entity, he stressed that he could not describe what it was he was encountering, saying, “the only thing I can say is what I feel, and I feel a power . . . maybe it’s a person, I don’t know.” Among my interviewees, this individual’s descriptions evoked the notion of an encounter with an “other” that was the most “other.” His experience with Santo Daime eluded explanation in conventional scientific terms; in fact, he resisted being made scientifically commensurable altogether. Another interviewee corroborated the notion of a shift that opened space for ontological alterity. Asked how his experiences with entities fit into his web of beliefs, one of my interlocutors, who is Cree, told me that “it’s not always that helpful to think about these things too much.” This person – who was raised Anglican and made contact with his Indigenous heritage later in life – appealed to what he described as traditional native knowledge to address my questioning. He explained it as such: “Our purpose is not to understand this creation, not to analyze this creation, but to develop a relationship with the mystery, so it must remain a mystery.” He emphasized a “symbiotic,” as opposed to analytic, approach to relationships with the Daime and embraced a path “from the heart,” not “from the head.” Though my interlocutors had access to a rational epistemology to address the question of how we can know about the other encountered in the Daime, knowledge per se was not at stake, but rather the maintenance of an enriching relationship with the unknown.

Negotiating alterity collectively

Ethnographic engagement with Santo Daime leads me to recognize intersubjective encounters with felt, seen, or heard entities as indispensable sources of meaning for Cému do Montréal. Conversations about collective decision-making within the Cému do Montréal church substantiated the importance of meaning produced from intersubjective encounters in the Daime. When I would ask about the particulars of different rituals, or the reason that the Cému do Montréal community adopted a certain stance, the causal chain could often be traced back to an instruction that a *daimista* had received in a vision. Significantly, the word “received” recurred frequently in reference to a *daimista*’s process of acquiring meaning or insight. This diction corroborates the relational dynamic in Santo Daime, wherein insights result from relational experiences that have an intersubjective, rather than solipsistic, quality to them. Turning to the broader cultural context of Santo Daime within Canada, the core of Cému do Montréal’s practices and actions at an institutional level are thus grounded in an ontological framework that differs substantially from the frameworks espoused by most Canadians, or by the actors in the Canadian government – Health Canada and the Office of Controlled Substances – with whom the Cému do Montréal congregation are working to legitimate their practices. First, not only are entities “believed-in” by *daimistas* to the extent that they represent important components of their idiosyncratic cosmologies, but they are also experienced as tangible, nonhuman others in the ritual setting. Thus, I argue, non-human intersubjective encounters are more than just a worldview for Cému do Montréal, they are part of the world, as lived. Second, concerning epistemology, my interviews suggest that meaning is a personal, immanent quality of experiences in the Daime. This stands in contrast to a positivistic epistemological construal of meaning, where validity turns on an objectivity-oriented ethic of verificationism.

The Santo Daime sacrament itself stands at the fulcrum of the ontological and epistemological disparity between Cému do Montréal and Government of Canada. Discourse produced by actors in the Canadian Government ranks Daime squarely within the category of controlled drugs. In concert with Health Canada’s moral agenda, this categorization imposes ontological limits on the kinds of things that Daime can be; the semantic scope of the word “drug,” in the sense that it is deployed by Health Canada, is far from neutral and conveys more than just the notion of a psychoactive substance. Instead, dominant legal and political opinions are reified in the term “drug”, and reflect the Canadian government’s stance on the historical trajectory of the War on Drugs. The aforementioned letter annulling the Section 56 exemption request exemplifies this logic. In the Minister of Health’s 2012 letter to the leader of Cému do Montréal, Daime is never referred to as such, and instead, is called a “preparation containing N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), harmalol and harmaline” (p. 1). The document cites the Food and Drug Regulations to indicate that these three substances have “no recognized medical use” (p. 2), and frames their use as a threat to the CDSA’s imperative to protect public health and maintain public safety. Further, the document addresses the psychological effects of “preparations containing N,N-dimethyltryptamine

(DMT), harmalol and harmaline” in exclusively pathological terms, and its physical effects along dimensions of risk and physiological harm. The letter does not address potential benefits arising from the use of Daime or ayahuasca, and it does not make reference to the 100 odd years of anthropological and ethnobotanical literature documenting the myriad uses of ayahuasca in Amazonian contexts. In turn, the terms by which the Minister of Health invokes Daime leaves no space for the role it plays for C eu do Montr eal. Ontologically, the categorization of Daime as a drug construes it as an inherently threatening and harmful substance and precludes consideration of the positive range of its social, physical, psychological, and spiritual effects in traditional contexts (Tupper, 2011a). For a related analysis of the discourses surrounding the regulation of ayahuasca, see Labate’s (2012) paper on the UDV and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency.

For C eu do Montr eal, the ontological reality of Daime exceeds the category of the drug and warrants a more careful classification, residing in a space between a substance and a person; for Santo Daime, the other encountered in the Daime is part and parcel with the substance itself (Vasquez, 1998, as quoted in Tupper, 2011a). From the domain of epistemology – concerning ways of knowing – the practice of C eu do Montr eal signals a nuanced approach to how knowledge is construed; my interviews suggest that knowledge qua positivistic truth claims does not map onto Santo Daime practice. Instead, my interlocutors evoked a knowing, or a feeling, where meaning was produced through personal, immanent experience. Denoted in this way, Daime is perhaps better understood as a medium for knowledge rather than as an instigator or exacerbator of pathological experience. Considering the current political climate, it comes as no surprise that Health Canada does not even pay lip service to more radical aspects of ontological and epistemological alterity in its treatment of Daime, as this would require a significant revision of positions on what a “drug” can do and be.

While the ontological and epistemological disparity between C eu do Montr eal and the Government of Canada prevents the latter from producing policy that reflects a nuanced understanding of the former, the discrepancy is not altogether incommensurable since C eu do Montr eal is aware of differences of perspective and power. Thus, the members of C eu do Montr eal employ a kind of double logic, where their decisions are informed first and foremost through recourse to knowledge received from the Daime, and then are ontologically and epistemologically translated into terms that are legible in the broader Canadian context. In practice, this manifests as a de-emphasis on the esoteric aspects and logics of Santo Daime (for instance, the agency ascribed to the Santo Daime sacrament and entities encountered in works) such that spirituality is invoked instrumentally to give proof of the authenticity and sincerity of C eu do Montr eal. This strategic positioning of spirituality allows C eu do Montr eal to appeal to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms’ protection of religious freedom. Manifesting a familiarity with the importance of scientific evidence in government discourse, C eu do Montr eal has assembled a medical and scientific advisory committee composed of experts in the field of ayahuasca research, who ground claims about the social, psychological, and biological safety of the Santo Daime practice in evidence from

the academic literature on ayahuasca. In accordance with the government agenda to reduce harm associated with drug use, Céu do Montréal foregrounds the measures put in place to ensure the safe and responsible distribution of Daime within the organization, including a thorough screening process for new members and a code of ethics that establishes participants' rights and articulates policy against harassment and discrimination.

Navigating difference and adapting practice to the Canadian context

Intersections between Santo Daime churches and their broader Canadian context occur at more than just the institutional level. Members of Céu do Montréal navigate the alterity of their experiences, beliefs, and practices on a daily basis. Whereas in Brazil, the infrastructure exists for *daimistas* to live in full-blown communities anchored around the Santo Daime religion, this is not the case in Canada. With a much smaller membership than their Brazilian counterparts, Canadian *daimistas* are just as embedded into the fabric of their communities as any other Canadian. This means that each Canadian *daimista* maintains his or her religious practice within the context of work, friendship, family, immediate and extended community, etc. Throughout the interviews, my interlocutors discussed their understandings of Céu do Montréal's place within the contemporary Canadian context and described adaptations made to their attitudes and relations in light of their involvement with Santo Daime. At risk of under-representing the diversity of fardados in Céu do Montréal, I will address key themes that arose around these conversations.

Throughout my interviews, *daimistas* often pointed to the bare fact of having a spiritual predilection as an identifiable source of tension with their relations outside of Céu do Montréal. This speaks as much about Canadian culture as it does about Santo Daime's place within it; on the whole, much of Canadian culture operates under a rubric of secularism. As one of my interlocutors put it, "you have to deal with this sort of stigma of being religious as being traditional and backwards." In this respect, many aspects of Santo Daime practice, even if only glazed over at a superficial level, appear to run contrary to scientific rationality – not least of all, the instrumental role of a "drug" in the catalysis of profound personal insights. Discussed earlier in the context of the Minister of Health's letter to the leader of Céu do Montréal, the model of pathology monopolizes a great deal of the scientific and cultural availability of explanatory models for the psychedelic experience and, more broadly, problematizes experiences that are healthy or normative in other cultural contexts. Consequently, the use of a psychoactive agent to facilitate transactions of meaning, or the postulation of ontologically incommensurable sources of insight, precludes the validity of said meaning or insight in the eyes of many individuals outside of Santo Daime.

The members of Céu do Montréal are hyperaware of the rhetoric of pathology, and stress that the proficiency of elders and guides, in unison with structural features inside and outside of the ritual setting, mediates the safety of Santo

Daime works. On multiple occasions, my interlocutors alluded to the existence of North American communities or individuals working with ayahuasca where psychological, physical, and spiritual safety were imperiled by a lack of training and organizational structure. Relatedly, members of Céu do Montréal frequently express a wariness of the promotion of ayahuasca, within certain New Age circles, as a panacea for any number of physical or psychological issues. In contrast, Céu do Montréal actively dispels the notion that Santo Daime will heal you, and explicitly locates the responsibility for improvement within the individual and not the Daime sacrament itself. Based on my interviews, two main points arose in connection to this issue. First, historically, Céu do Montréal's efforts to gain legal recognition have centered on the possibility of an exemption to import Daime on the grounds of religious freedom. Céu do Montréal acknowledges that they are not politically positioned to secure a medical exemption to administer ayahuasca, and that such an exemption would likely impose problematic restrictions on their practice. Accordingly, they recognize the strategic importance of distinguishing themselves from people or groups that make health-related claims about ayahuasca. Second, and for reasons intrinsic to the religion, my interlocutors often stressed the notion that the Daime sacrament can identify personal problems and potential solutions, but that it will not solve them. *Daimistas* place a great deal of importance on the notion of integration; it is not uncommon to hear people joke that the real work takes place outside of the Santo Daime works.

The distinction between spiritual emergency and mental illness emerged as an important corollary to discussions about healing and ayahuasca; it is also a source of tension between Céu do Montréal and its affiliates in Brazil. One of my interlocutors described a failure to effectively distinguish between spiritual emergency and mental illness, resulting in the medical establishment's over-attribution of pathological labels and treatments to issues of a fundamentally spiritual or existential tenor and, conversely, the spiritualization of pathological experiences within religious communities. As evidence of the former, she referred to the medicalization of quintessential human experiences that were traditionally navigated through recourse to spiritual frameworks. For instance, she cited gung-ho interventions to the grieving process through diagnoses of depression and the prescription of antidepressants. In a similar vein, she pointed to the reconceptualization of processes like menopause and other major personal changes as falsely-framed problems with pharmaceutical solutions.

Concerning the latter, she raised concerns about the adaptability of Brazilian practices surrounding the spiritualization of potentially pathological behavior to the Canadian context. Without pointing fingers, she suggested that there were Santo Daime centers where potentially inappropriate, disordered behavior was tolerated through recourse to spiritual frameworks that reinterpreted conduct in less threatening ways. In these cases, she explained, tolerance was over-extended to avoid seeking help outside of Santo Daime, or vice versa, to avoid drawing outside attention to issues within Santo Daime.

My interlocutor indicated that this sort of practice would not mesh with the Canadian cultural context and, taking this into consideration, called attention to

the creation of “a resource list of people, therapists, and other allied professionals to be able to refer people to, who might need some assistance outside of works. Not to assume that just drinking Daime will heal and cure everything.” All things considered, a balanced approach to mental health and spirituality does not foreclose the possibility that Santo Daime can have a positive impact on mental wellness. For instance, one of my interlocutors described how, prior to her introduction to Santo Daime, she encountered entities that were invisible to others. Eventually, these encounters occurred frequently and indiscriminately enough that they became very distressing, to the point where she “thought [she] was crazy.” She explained that, through her practice with Santo Daime, she had reined in her encounters with these entities such that she no longer experienced them in her daily life and only experienced them within the circumscribed context of Santo Daime works, where she was able to deal with them constructively.

Over the course of my interviews, I did not encounter evidence of negative mental health outcomes from participation in Santo Daime; however, my interviews were not designed to elicit this type of information and did not include any formal diagnostic criteria. Still, many of the members of C  u do Montr  al who I spoke with recounted experiences that they described as very difficult or psychologically and emotionally taxing. Unanimously, my interlocutors discussed these difficult experiences as important and often inevitable stages in the process of self-improvement. Despite C  u do Montr  al’s reconfiguration of the difficult occurrence as an obstacle to be overcome – rather than as an inherently negative or harmful experience – members reported apprehension leading up to works. In fact, I was told that *Padrinhos* (lit. godfathers; Santo Daime elders) occasionally approach works with trepidation, and that the sense of nervousness that precedes Santo Daime rituals is even referenced in the hymns. Proper training and ritual preparation play mitigating roles in the management of difficult experiences at C  u do Montr  al. One of my interlocutors described how lapses in personal preparedness could make the Santo Daime work a “sacred hell,” and that if a person’s intention is “just” to have fun, they will not get what they are expecting. Approaching this topic from another perspective, an interlocutor explained how she was occasionally approached to participate in or lead a ceremony outside of the context of Santo Daime, and that she vehemently refused these requests, asserting that with Daime, “anything can come, good and bad, and you have to be strong enough to hold the space for the people.” Corroborating this notion, another interlocutor described the misguidedness of people with a New Age orientation who enter the Daime with a panglossian attitude, and who are critically unprepared for the experiences they may encounter. Congregants of C  u do Montr  al thus distinguish themselves from other users of ayahuasca, particularly those they identify as New Age, by virtue of their recognition of the ontological reality of dark beings. This ontological recognition underscores my interlocutors’ oft-referenced responsibility for the spiritual – in addition to physical and psychological – welfare of attendees at Santo Daime works.

The ontological navigation of Santo Daime doctrine plays a large role in the adaptation of the religion to its Canadian context. As mentioned earlier, *daimistas*

place emphasis on the notion that hymns and instructions are received rather than personally authored. In turn, the divine provenance of hymns and instructions performs the function of legitimating them, but it also provides grounds for traditional *daimistas* to insist on an unquestioned adherence to their contents (Dawson, 2013). While committed ontologically to the notion that hymns and instructions are received from entities in the Daime, Céu do Montréal contends that some practices have substantial cultural components, in addition to spiritual legitimacy. Part of Céu do Montréal's task, as one of my interlocutors articulated, is the ongoing process of disentangling cultural from spiritual elements of practices inherited from Brazilian Santo Daime. The place of women in Santo Daime occupies a significant portion of Céu do Montréal's concern vis-à-vis cultural-spiritual disentanglement. As a church headed by a woman, Céu do Montréal has argued for the equal rights of women in Santo Daime but came up against resistance with former institutional affiliates in Brazil. According to the leader of Céu do Montréal, while seeking equal responsibility for women and the right for women to serve Daime – and raising related questions concerning the role of women in Santo Daime – with Céu do Montréal's former affiliates in Brazil, she was accused of transgressing doctrinal direction and met repeatedly with hostility. In turn, Céu do Montréal's members maintain that deep study of the doctrine and contemplation have anchored their conviction that hierarchical relations between men and women in Santo Daime are a culturohistorical product and not purely the intent of divine will, and they have revised their practices accordingly.

Local innovations: Santo Daime and the First Nations people of Canada

The integration of First Nations traditions represents the largest syncretized aspect of Céu do Montréal and, according to many of my interlocutors, plays a significant role in grounding Santo Daime's cultural and spiritual presence in Canada. Members often allude to the importance of indigenous Amazonian traditions in the founding of Santo Daime in Brazil, and many see the integration of First Nations traditions into Céu do Montréal as a further manifestation of this indigenous connection. Several of my interlocutors identified the integration of First Nations traditions as the definitive syncretization of Céu do Montréal – the innovation that sets the Montreal branch apart from other Santo Daime lines. Céu do Montréal traces the origins of the alliance between First Nations peoples and Santo Daime to the prophetic vision of a Cree elder and validation of this connection through an indigenous member's vision of the meeting of spiritual beings from the North and the South. This connection has manifested in several additions to the Santo Daime ritual repertoire, such as the consecration of ritual space and participants with a blend of sacred indigenous herbs by a First Nations member of Santo Daime. In addition, Céu do Montréal members report that they have begun to receive hymns from First Nations spiritual beings and integrate them into regular use. Idioms and symbolism from First Nations traditions, such as the figure of the Creator, have also been implemented throughout the practices of Céu do Montréal. The following

hymn, entitled “Sacred Wampum” and offered to C eu do Montr eal, speaks to the connection between First Nations peoples and Santo Daime:

Minha Senhora Jurema [My Lady Jurema]
Meu Senhor Juramidam [My Lord Juramidam]
You have addressed a prayer of access
To the Spirits of this land

You extend the hand of friendship
To the Chiefs who guard this line
This is the place of meeting
This is the appointed time

They awaited your arrival
Now at your entry brave and grand
The Peacemaker Deganawida
And His Virgin Mother stand

They declare the door is open
For the healing that you bring
Please represent this Sacred Wampum
Among the hymns you now shall sing

They request that all good people
Who shall drink this Sacred Tea
Will recall All Our Relations
Who now struggle to be free

They send blessings to this Circle
That the Lie may never mar
Through the eyes of Grandfather Eagle
They are watching from afar

They address you in your languages
They respect you in your Song
For the Red Road of the Heart still loves
All those who thought it wrong

Soyez sages et soyez unifi es [Be wise and be united]
Beneath your Sacred Star
And call the peoples of the Earth
To remember who they are.
Cree Elder Frederick Bevan Skerratt

Further solidifying the connection, a Cree elder and member of C eu do Montr eal received the instruction to give Mestre Irineu – the founder of Santo Daime – the honorary posthumous title of Black Eagle. Finally, the most significant syncretization of First Nations practices into C eu do Montr eal has taken the form of a

unique healing ritual called the Black Eagle *Cura* (*cura* means heal or healing in Portuguese). While most Céu do Montréal works take place in the urban setting of Montreal, the Black Eagle Cura is conducted in a rural location outside of Montreal. The night before the cura, the Cree elder in the church leads a sweat lodge ceremony. According to my interlocutor, the Black Eagle Cura is held four times a year to honor the four seasons and, weather permitting, is held partly outside; being in nature is an important aspect of Santo Daime, and a number of works are traditionally held outside. Instead of the traditional uniform, participants in the Black Eagle Cura wear white clothing. If the cura is inside, people sit in a circle on the floor with the central altar on a low table; or, if they are outside, on a white cloth on the ground. The cura, according to my interlocutors, is similar to the *Mesa Branca* (White Table) work of the Santo Daime tradition in that it has sections dedicated to different spiritual beings, permits the incorporation of spiritual forces, and honors indigenous traditions and Eastern spiritual lines.

Despite Santo Daime's adoption of aspects of First Nations culture, the adoption of Santo Daime by First Nations peoples has been relatively limited. At this point in time, one indigenous person, a Cree elder, sits on the board of Céu do Montréal, and four members of the Native American Church, among a number of formerly affiliated indigenous people, have remained connected with Céu do Montréal since they stopped importing the Daime sacrament in 2010. According to one of my interlocutors, many aboriginal people are not at ease with the significant amount of Christian ritual and symbolism present in Santo Daime. I was also told that some aboriginal people were not comfortable with the uniform of the Santo Daime – which was modeled after a school uniform (Groisman, 2000, cited in Blainey, 2013) – because it bears an uncomfortable likeness to the uniform indigenous children were forced to wear in residential schools.³ Aboriginal people, my Cree interlocutor told me, preferred Black Eagle Curas over other Santo Daime works, attended them in greater numbers, and were comfortable with the culturally adapted form that the ritual assumed. It is important to note that the Black Eagle Cura and other ritual innovations resulting from the integration of First Nations traditions are legitimated within Céu do Montréal through the active participation of indigenous people in Santo Daime. An analysis of the political implications of the encounter between Canadian aboriginal peoples and Santo Daime, a Christian syncretic religion from Brazil, exceeds the scope of this chapter. First Nations and Aboriginal people are rightly alert to the consequences of culturally appropriative practices, and it is my hope that elements owed to their traditions are employed by Céu do Montréal at the discretion of indigenous people, and in a continuing dialogue with them. However, while it is important to consider the adoption of indigenous traditions in Santo Daime through the lens of cultural appropriation, a second – and not inherently mutually exclusive – possibility should be considered: figuring indigenous agency centrally, the integration of First Nations traditions in the Santo Daime church can be read as a shaping of Santo Daime's syncretic form by indigenous people, for indigenous people. If this is the case, then the numbers of First Nations people attending Santo Daime rituals could be expected to increase along with the integration of

additional First Nations traditions. Should Céu do Montréal establish the legal right to pursue their religion, the syncretization of First Nations practices into Santo Daime doctrine will be an exciting, and possibly controversial, site of intercultural encounter and ritual innovation.

Conclusion

This chapter rendered a portrait of Céu do Montréal and its place within Canada through an exploration of ontological and epistemological alterity, and an unpacking of its manifestations at several levels of analysis. Recognizing the rhetorical importance of *received* meaning in the Santo Daime, I looked to the site of meaning transaction as a locus of ontological divergence from mainstream Canadian culture. Interview data gathered from seven members of Céu do Montréal supported the doctrinal view that the Santo Daime sacrament mediates experiences of spiritual agency, as evidenced by my interlocutors' descriptions of meaningful intersubjective encounters either felt, seen, or heard during Santo Daime works. Beginning with the navigation of alterity at an individual level, I attended to the language that people used to describe intersubjective encounters and the way these figured into their understandings of the world. I explored the notion that Santo Daime rituals catalyze meaningful relations with Daime, where an immanent, personal understanding of meaning is privileged over a positivistic notion of meaning – allowing, among other experiences, for the ontological recognition of a nonhuman “other.” While the Santo Daime reify their commitment to the ontological “other” through doctrinal beliefs, my interviews suggest that this commitment is renegotiated on an individual basis. Although conversations with my interviewees phenomenologically corroborate the prevalence of forms of intersubjective encounters it appears that, while some *daimistas* are committed to the existence of entities both inside and outside of ritual works, others espouse epistemologies that open less ontological leeway for the recognition of entities outside of ritual space.

Given the centrality of ontological alterity – vis-à-vis secular, ostensibly rational, North Americans – in key aspects of Santo Daime doctrine, Céu do Montréal engages in processes of translation to make their beliefs and practices commensurable to interlocutors outside the church. I proceeded to unpack translational processes enacted at a collective level by focusing on the disparities between the ontologies and epistemologies of the government of Canada (in particular, its Health Canada division) and those of Céu do Montréal. Specifically, I looked at Health Canada's rhetorical construal of Daime as a “preparation containing N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), harmalol and harmaline” and their analysis of this “preparation” along metrics of harm and risk. Health Canada's understanding of Daime as a drug of abuse precludes the possibility that Santo Daime could be understood as beneficial rather than harmful and forecloses the opportunity for an ontological recognition of intersubjective relations with Daime and the beings it mediates. Thus, I highlighted the discourses performed by Céu do Montréal in order to make their goals strategically commensurable to the state. Shifting attention back to intra-community

discourses, I examined the cultural translations that C eu do Montr eal members undertake to bridge perceived differences – along dimensions of identity, spirituality, and health – between themselves and Canadians at large. At once aware of the alterity of their beliefs and practices, and the fact that they are embedded in a largely secular society, the members of C eu do Montr eal emphasize the cultivation of a mutually reinforcing dynamic between ritual works and day-to-day life. I explored members’ beliefs about healing and illness as components of a process of locating spiritual experiences within the context of a secular, highly medicalized culture. Finally, I described some of the principal innovations that C eu do Montr eal has added to the Santo Daime ritual repertoire, and framed these innovations as efforts to ground C eu do Montr eal’s practice in the spiritual and cultural context of Canada. By deploying the concepts of ontology and epistemology, this chapter assessed Santo Daime’s expansion and subsequent adaptation to a Canadian setting by calling attention to evidence of alterity, and the techniques that C eu do Montr eal has employed – at individual and collective levels – to navigate these differences and establish their practice in Canada.

Notes

- 1 Graduate Student, Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry, McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Email: eli.sheiner@mail.mcgill.ca. The research presented in this chapter forms part of a project undertaken for the fulfillment of a master’s degree.
- 2 It is worth noting that practitioners of Santo Daime in Canada make a distinction between the terms “ayahuasca” and “Santo Daime.” The term “ayahuasca” casts a large semantic net and may refer to anything from the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine to decoctions containing the vine in addition to the *Psychotria viridis* leaf and any number of admixtures. On the other hand, “Santo Daime” refers specifically to preparations brewed in the context of a *feitio* – the highly sanctified ritual for the production of Daime – and is composed exclusively of *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine, *Psychotria viridis* leaf, and water (Meyer, 2010; Labate, 2012). Thus, for my interlocutors at C eu do Montr eal, while all Santo Daime is considered ayahuasca, not all ayahuasca is Santo Daime.
- 3 Residential schools were institutions created by the Canadian government where indigenous children were sent to be forcefully assimilated into Canadian culture. Children attending these boarding schools were not allowed to speak their mother tongues and were subjected to a range of physical, sexual, and psychological violence. In contemporary Canada, residential schools are now acknowledged to be a part of a colonial effort to wipe out Aboriginal culture (Milloy, 1999).

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