

# Religious Identity & Millenarian Belief in Santo Daime

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## Introduction

This chapter reflects upon fieldwork undertaken in recent years in Brazil (see, Dawson 2007). It was during fieldwork with alternative and non-mainstream religions that I had chance to spend time with members of the Brazilian new religion of Santo Daime. During fieldwork it became clear through conversations in which talk of the “end times” cropped up that Santo Daime members (referred to as *daimistas*) were constructing their religious identities by, among other things, drawing upon a range of millenarian themes and images most closely associated with more traditional forms of Brazilian religiosity (see, for example, Levine 1992; Myscowski 1988; Queiroz 1965; Pessar 2004). Regarding millenarianism as a “particular type of salvationism”, Cohn argues that the millenarian paradigm can be identified through its characterisation of salvation as

(a) collective, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a collectivity; (b) terrestrial, in the sense that it is to be realized on this earth and not in some other-worldly heaven; (c) imminent, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly; (d) total, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself; (e) miraculous, in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies. (1970, 13)

On each of these counts, the relevant scenarios, themes and images articulated by members of the Santo Daime religion qualify as characteristically millenarian. Whilst variations exist from one *daimista* community to another, espousal of the millenarian paradigm usually reflects the ecological preoccupations of the movement as a whole. According to informants, the “time of trial” about to begin or already upon us involves some kind of impending environmental “catastrophe” brought on by an assortment of “rampant materialism”, “global warming”, “pollution”, “over-reliance upon technology”, and “alienation from nature”. Although details of post-catastrophic times often remain sketchy, the new earth scenario envisaged by *daimistas* involves the re-establishment of humankind’s relationship with nature which is to be most clearly expressed through the use of environmentally friendly means of economic and social reproduction. One *daimista* referred to this process as akin to being “thrown back to the stone age”. Given the end of technology as we know it, *daimistas* believe that those versed in the processes of natural production will be best placed both to survive the global catastrophe and to exploit the opportunities afforded by the new dispensation. Consequently, *daimista* communities are keen for members to develop a knowledge and skills base conducive to what one informant describes as “working with nature”. To this end, *daimista* communities are often located in rural settings or at the semi-rural peripheries of major conurbations. Referred to as “our refuge” or “our Noah’s ark”, these non-urban communities are viewed simultaneously as shelters from the impending catastrophe, training grounds for the righteous remnant and anticipations of the forthcoming earthly Jerusalem.

Although the origins of the Santo Daime religion lie among poorer sectors of the

population living in the semi-rural context of north-western Brazil, the *daimistas* with whom I was working are actually members of Brazil's urban middle-classes inhabiting the expanding conurbations of the central-southern states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The issue I wish to explore here concerns the fabrication of religious identity by urban middle-class *daimistas* through their appropriation of millenarian motifs traditionally associated with Brazil's rural poor. To do this, two lines of enquiry may be followed. The first explores the continuity between the traditional millenarianism most closely associated with Brazil's rural peasantry and the new era millenarianism articulated by urban middle-class *daimistas*. Comparisons are drawn between the practical-symbolic crises suffered by rural adherents of traditional millenarian forms and the existential crises endured by urban professionals espousing new era millenarianism. Like traditional millenarianism before it, new era millenarianism is held to express subjective experiences of alienation from and disenchantment with prevailing societal structures.

Unlike the first, the second line of enquiry is one of discontinuity. Instead of drawing parallels, the second line regards the use of millenarian imagery by contemporary *daimistas* as indicative of a range of dynamics typical of the late-modern context within which these urban professionals are situated. Whilst notions of alienation and disenchantment are not ignored, this second line of enquiry regards new era millenarianism as primarily expressive of a number of reflexive preoccupations typical of late-modern existence. Before exploring these two lines of enquiry, it may prove beneficial to say something of the organizational repertoire within which individual appropriations of millenarian motifs occur.

## The *Daimista* Repertoire

Santo Daime was founded among the mixed-race, semi-rural peasantry of the Amazonian state of Acre by Raimundo Irineu Serra (1892–1971). Known commonly as “Master Irineu”, Irineu Serra is held by many to be the reincarnation of the spirit of Jesus. Based at the community of *Alto Santo*, Santo Daime emerged as a recognisably distinct religious movement in the mid-twentieth century (Cemin 2004, 347–82). Subsequent to Irineu Serra's death a breakaway organization known as CEFLURIS (Eclectic Centre of the Universal Flowing Light Raimundo Irineu Serra) was founded by Sebastião Mota de Melo (1920–1990). Known as “Padrinho Sebastião”, Mota de Melo is believed to be the reincarnation of the spirit of John the Baptist. CEFLURIS is today headquartered at *Céu do Mapiá* in the state of Amazonas (Couto 2004, 385–411). As with *Alto Santo* before it, *Céu do Mapiá* is held to be the location at which the post-cataclysmic New Jerusalem will be founded. On the back of the organizational expansion of CEFLURIS, Santo Daime reached Brazil's major conurbations (for example, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) in the early 1980s before spreading to Europe, North America and Australasia.

Santo Daime is the largest of Brazil's ayahuasca religions and is also the most internationally widespread. The word “ayahuasca” derives from the Quechua language and means “soul vine” or “vine of the dead” (Labate, Goulart and Araújo 2004, 21). When applied to the ayahuasca religions of Brazil (Barquinha, Santo Daime and the Vegetable Union), the generic term ayahuasca denotes the combination of the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* and the leaves of the shrub *Psychotria viridis* (Dawson 2007, 67–98). Ayahuasca is a psychotropic substance traditionally consumed by indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon which passed to non-indigenous communities through its use among *mestiço* (mixed race) communities and rubber-tappers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Ayahuasca is regarded by *daimistas* as an “entheogen”, that is, an agent whose properties facilitate the interaction of humankind with supernatural

agents or forces. The ritual consumption of Daime also symbolises the union of base matter and supernatural force in which the latter makes itself felt through the transformation of the former.

The discursive and ritual repertoires of Santo Daime are an amalgam of popular Catholic, esoteric, indigenous, Spiritist, Afro-Brazilian, and new age beliefs and practices. The four most important rituals are the *feitio* (at which Daime is made), *bailado* (dance), *concentração* (concentration), and *missa* (mass). Both “dance” and “concentration” usually commence after sunset, with the former lasting anything up to twelve hours and the latter not normally exceeding three or four. During these rituals participants face inward towards a central table which is usually laid with a wooden *Cruzeiro* draped by a rosary, statuettes of Mary and Jesus, photographs of Master Irineu and Padrinho Sebastião, candles, flowers, water, and incense sticks. Some groups may include statuettes of some of the saints and a Bible, whilst others might also have crystals, representations of Afro-Brazilian spirits and deities, and oriental icons. Once tied to the lunar cycle, the *feitio*, which can last anything up to three days, is increasingly conducted whenever fresh supplies of “Daime” (the emic term for ayahuasca) are needed. The “mass” is celebrated relative to the anniversaries of the death of prominent members. The demanding, if not arduous, nature of *daimista* rituals is reflected in their designation as “trials” through which the spiritual worth of participants is tested relative to their physical perseverance. At the same time, ritual regimes prepare members for the trials and tribulations soon to be unleashed by forthcoming catastrophes.

Whereas the consumption of ayahuasca is held by *daimistas* to help generate the “power” that is essential to their rituals, the singing of hymns is the means by which this “astral force” is engaged, channelled, and manipulated to form a “spiritual current” which binds participants vertically with the spiritual plane and horizontally with each other. Consequently, the ritual repertoire of Santo Daime is organized around collections of hymns known as *hinários*. The first and most important of these *hinários* is that of Irineu Serra and is known as the *Cruzeiro*. As with all *daimista* hymns, those of the *Cruzeiro* are set to the rhythms of the march, mazurka, and waltz, and in form reflect Amazonian mixed-race, popular Catholic and Afro-Brazilian influences (Luna 1986, 174–80; Labate and Pacheco 2004, 317, 330). In addition to the *Cruzeiro* and assorted hymnals of organizational and local community leaders, the discourse and practice of CEFLURIS is orientated by Mota de Melo’s two *hinários*, *O Justicheiro* (The Just One) and *Nova Jerusalém* (New Jerusalem). The figures of the popular Catholic trinity (“Father”, “Jesus”, and “the Virgin Mother/Mary”) appear throughout these *hinários*, as do the “Divine Beings” who populate the “celestial court”. Astral phenomena are likewise well represented, as are natural elements and the flora and fauna of the forest. Irineu Serra and Mota de Melo appear in the guise of “Teacher” entrusted by the Virgin Mother (also referred to as “Queen of the Forest”) with “sacred doctrines” to be conveyed by way of the “hymns” being sung. Ayahuasca is likewise referred to as a “Teacher” and “Holy Light” whose consumption engenders “truth”, “love”, “wisdom”, “understanding”, “force”, “power”, “cure”, and “cleansing”. Members of Santo Daime are constituted as a community of “brothers and sisters” whose consumption of Daime sets them apart from the world of “sin” and “illusion”. Because of their allegiance to “Daime”, *daimistas* are to be much “misunderstood” by the world at large. They are, however, assuredly on the “way” towards “salvation” and “another incarnation”.

Through discursive and practical means, the ritual repertoire of Santo Daime situates the *daimista* community and its members within a millenarian worldview framed by the cosmic battle between good and evil. Irineu Serra is the “Imperial Chief” of the army of “Juramidam” and Mota de Melo his “General”. Reflected in the use of ritual space, the

“soldiers” of “Juramidam” are led by “commandants” and organized into “battalions” regimented according to sex, age, and marital status. As if to further underline the martial paradigm, members of Santo Daime who have consumed ayahuasca a set number of times receive a uniform to wear at official rituals. The origins of Santo Daime among the semi-rural Amazonian poor go some way to explaining the presence of millenarian motifs within established discursive and liturgical repertoires. The millenarian paradigm has long been “a fundamental part” of the symbolic reservoir drawn upon by Brazil’s rural poor (Da Matta 1996, 5). Acknowledgement of humble beginnings does not, though, readily account for the continued articulation of millenarian preoccupations by contemporary *daimistas* whose urban middle-class status puts them poles apart from those first responsible for Santo Daime’s appropriation of millenarian themes. Why, then, do middle-class *daimistas* adhere to a millenarian worldview whose origins are historically, geographically and demographically remote from their everyday existence in the urban-industrial heartlands of Brazil? As indicated above, two possible lines of enquiry might be followed in response to this question. The first line of enquiry is one of continuity in that both traditional and *daimista* millenarian narratives are said to reflect similar structural conditions and equivalent subjective states. It is to this line of enquiry that we now turn.

## Line of Continuity

In a chapter of this length it is impossible to do justice to every factor responsible for the historical emergence of millenarian narratives in Brazil. Three contributory factors are, though, worthy of note. First, millenarian repertoires have tended to emerge on the back of an intense longing after change for the better. Usually provoked by rapid and far-reaching disruptions of established patterns of social-cultural and political-economic reproduction, the articulation of millenarian motifs reflects a range of practical and symbolic crises, the answer to which is held to lie in a thoroughgoing corrective transformation of existing societal structures. Consequently, the millenarian paradigm makes change for the better conditional upon widespread social transformation. Second, millenarian outbreaks in Brazil have traditionally embodied an inability or refusal to envisage change for the better arising internally through the reform of prevailing social systems. Indicative of an entrenched marginalization from overarching social-economic and political-legal structures the millenarian paradigm encapsulates the belief that any longed-for improvement can only come from means external to the system. Third, millenarian aspirations have historically reflected an inability or refusal to employ transformative strategies by which the prevailing system might be changed for the better. Undoubtedly fed by the aforementioned systemic marginalization experienced by groups peripheral to prevailing structures, the lack of transformational strategizing has traditionally reflected both the paucity of formal channels of collective representation and a deep-seated lack of confidence in any one group’s abilities to bring about change through its own agency. Grounded in the daily experience of strategic impotence, the millenarian paradigm looks for change by means other than collective agitation or political representation.

Driven by practical-symbolic crisis and the resulting longing for change, systemic marginalization and strategic impotence combine to produce a worldview which holds that prevailing structures must end before things can change for the better and that this end will come by means both external to the system and other than collective agitation. Although not the only possible response, the *deus ex machina* model furnished by the rich tradition of Brazilian millenarianism has proven to be a valuable mode of signification for successive groups, communities and movements. In effect, the millenarian paradigm squares the significatory circle in that it provides a much-desired

social transformation when both systemic marginalization and strategic impotence would normally dictate such a state of affairs to be an otherwise practical and symbolic impossibility.

In contrast to those groups in which millenarian perspectives have traditionally emerged, *daimista* urban professionals espousing millenarian views cannot be said to be suffering under the same conditions of systemic marginalization and strategic impotence. Whence, then, their attachment to millenarian motifs? Again allowing for complexities beyond the scope of this chapter, and pursuing the investigative line of continuity noted above, a number of comparisons might be drawn between the context of rural poverty which has historically given rise to traditional millenarianism in Brazil and the middle-class, urban-industrial context within which *daimista* articulations of millenarian motifs occur.

### **Systemic Insecurity**

First, whereas it cannot be said that the majority of *daimistas* suffer under the same conditions of systemic marginalization as those among whom millenarianism has traditionally thrived, it might be argued that their status as urban professionals in contemporary Brazil nevertheless engenders a kind of systemic insecurity engendered, among other things, by a decreasing standard of living and a steady decline in both physical and occupational security. Much has been written upon the manner in and extent to which contemporary urban-industrial society generates both material and psychological insecurity for its members. Giddens, for example, identifies “anxiety”, “disorientation” and “insecurity” as integral components of subjective experience in late-modern society (1990, 153; 1991, 181; 1994, 89); just as Bourdieu highlights the “generalized subjective insecurity” experienced by those subject to “neo-liberal policies” of “casualization” and “flexploitation” (1998, 82–6). In the same vein, Beck identifies “endemic insecurity” and “biographical uncertainties” as now perennial features of contemporary existence (2002, 3–4); whilst Bauman talks of the “awesome” and “distressing” “insecurity” and “*précarité*” engendered by late-modern capitalism (2001, 41–8, 113–48; 2005, 31–3). Of course, the average life of the average urban professional is by no means as difficult or precarious as those of the poor majority in Brazil. Subjective experience, though, is very rarely a relative state of affairs. Nevertheless, consecutive decades of stagflation (1980s), neo-liberal reform (1990s) and fiscal redistribution (2000s) have eroded once secure professional comfort-zones at a time when enhanced global awareness and late-capitalist ideologies have actually increased urban middle-class expectations (O’Dougherty 2002; Quadros 2003, 109–35; Pochmann *et al* 2007). Combined with the erosion of social-economic conditions, the shortfall between expectation and reality serves only to exacerbate the conditions of uncertainty, disorientation, anxiety, and distress identified by the likes of Bauman, Beck, Bourdieu, and Giddens. As with the systemic marginalization suffered by the rural poor, the systemic insecurity experienced by growing sections of Brazil’s urban middle-classes discourages change for the better being expected of current social structures. As such, change for the better will come from beyond the prevailing system.

### **Strategic Indifference**

Second, whilst it cannot be said that the majority of *daimistas* experience the same strategic impotence as those for whom millenarianism has traditionally been a response, it may be argued that, for some at least, there exists a kind of strategic indifference to established representative structures and processes of collective agitation. The cause (or admixture of causes) of such indifference will clearly differ from person to person. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, for example, maintain that urban-industrial processes of individualization are responsible for the progressive “subpoliticization” of civil society

and a subjectivity of “political privatism” which manifest themselves in a growing disregard for political processes of representation and collective mechanisms of agitation (2002, 27, 38). Along the same lines, Castells blames the contemporary indifference to collective processes of representation and action upon modernity’s “dissolution of shared identities” and the resultant loss “of society as a meaningful social system” (Castells 1997, 355). Arguing that “ours are times of disengagement”, Bauman holds the “indeterminacy” of late-modern life to have engendered a kind of “indifference” resulting in “an incapacity to make plans and act on them” (2001, 127). In less general terms, strategic indifference may also be rooted for some Brazilians in a lack of habit born of the paucity of proper mechanisms for political representation and civil agitation which lasted from the military coup of 1964 until re-democratization in the early 1980s. Whatever the particular cocktail of causation, however, the contemporary context of urban-industrial Brazil is seen to be characterised by “democratic deficit” and “associative alienation” embodying both a “distrust of” and “disenchantment with” existing structures of representation and mechanisms of collective expression (Baquero 2001, 98–104 and 2003, 83–108; Ferreira 1999). Reflecting a lack of subjective investment in prevailing societal institutions, the implications of strategic indifference are that those desirous of social change must look for it through means other than established processes of political representation and civil agitation.

### **Practical-Symbolic Crisis**

Although expressed in a variety of ways and to a greater or lesser extent, both systemic insecurity and strategic indifference were evidenced in conversation with members of the *daimista* community. Alongside received descriptions of the world as “sinful” and “illusory”, society at large is dismissed as, among other things, “corrupt”, “materialistic”, “degraded”, and “immoral”. In the same vein, *daimistas* are clearly distrustful of established mechanisms of political and civil representation. Whilst the historical persecution of groups such as Santo Daime has undoubtedly contributed to a well-developed (but not extreme) sectarian ethos, the low levels of *daimista* expectation of what contemporary Brazilian society can do for them goes beyond that of expressing a simple religious dualism. Together, systemic insecurity and strategic indifference have engendered among *daimistas* a practical-symbolic crisis which, at one and the same time, longs for resolution through a change for the better whilst accepting that such positive transformation will come from neither internal reform of the system nor strategic engagement with it. Of course, by no stretch of the imagination are the signficatory resources made available by the millenarian paradigm the only means of anxious and disaffected urban-professionals such as these resolving this practical-symbolic crisis. Nevertheless, the eschatological scenario articulated by millenarian motifs does offer resolution in that it furnishes the much-desired change for the better whilst leaving systemic insecurity and strategic indifference untouched. Albeit in paradoxical fashion, it is because the millenarian paradigm resolves the practical-symbolic crisis whilst leaving its causes untouched that it continues to be drawn upon by middle-class *daimistas* living in the urban-industrial heartlands of Brazil.

### **Line of Discontinuity**

As indicated above, there is a second line of enquiry in respect of the attachment of urban middle-class *daimistas* to the millenarian paradigm. Although the implications of systemic insecurity and strategic indifference are not rejected by this second line of enquiry, it does place much more emphasis upon dynamics which reflect a greater degree of discontinuity between traditional and *daimista* millenarian discourses. The

second line of enquiry commences by regarding *daimista* espousals of millenarian themes as embodying a self-conscious strategic articulation indicative of the heightened degree of reflexivity enjoyed by the urban middle-classes of late-modern industrial society. In effect, the “reflexivity thesis” argues that the historically recent transmutation of typically “modern” dynamics constitutive of urban-industrial society (for example, individualization, detraditionalization, globalization, and pluralization) have resulted in an unprecedented degree of self-awareness being enjoyed by increasing numbers in contemporary, late-modern society. Using the term “reflexivity” to designate this new-found degree of self-conscious appreciation, theorists of late-modernity argue that contemporary urban-industrial existence is, for many, marked by a strategically driven and instrumentally orientated subjectivity (e.g. Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Lash 1990). Perhaps exemplified by the professional classes of urban-industrial society, the reflexivity afforded by late-modernity permits individuals a degree of self-critical awareness, positional understanding and strategic savvy hitherto unavailable to human consciousness (e.g. Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994). As *bona fide* members of Brazil’s urban-industrial middle-classes, it should be of no surprise, then, to find the dynamics of late-modern reflexivity at play among contemporary *daimistas* and the organizational repertoires articulated by them.

### Reflexive Strategies

Following this line of enquiry, the appearance of traditional millenarian motifs within *daimista* narratives might, for example, be regarded as a reflexive strategy employed to underwrite the utility value of organizational repertoires. By employing millenarian discourse to situate the world in the midst of a truly momentous transitional phase, it could be argued, *daimista* discourse reinforces its pragmatic worth by offering itself as a form of practical knowledge well-placed to aid individuals in meeting the very particular demands provoked by the calamitous times through which we are passing. The knowledge furnished by Santo Daime, it is claimed, allows individuals to understand the significance of current calamities and disasters by placing them in their appropriate cosmological context. At the same time, the practical repertoire afforded by Santo Daime is said to equip practitioners with a range of techniques which will enable members to endure successfully the trials and tribulations associated with the birth of the new era.

In the same vein, the reflexive character of *daimista* appropriations of traditional millenarian themes might further be underlined by regarding the espousal of millenarian motifs as part of a broader strategy to differentiate the Santo Daime religion from other occupants of the increasingly crowded religious landscape of urban-industrial Brazil. In view of the fierce competition for what remains a relatively small constituency of sympathetic urban professionals, religious production undergoes a degree of “standardization” as organizational repertoires are progressively tailored to the same, narrow band of potential members (Berger 1967, 147). In order to stand out from the crowd, and thereby mitigate the effects of repertorial standardization, religions such as Santo Daime must find ways of differentiating themselves from others in their field. Berger calls this process “marginal differentiation” as any group employing it must be careful not to differentiate themselves so much as to place themselves outside of the most profitable (and thereby standardized) band of organizational repertoires (1967, 147). Certainly, the *daimista* community is no stranger to the dynamics of standardization and marginal differentiation and has self-consciously employed its environmental and indigenous credentials to best exploit these dynamics. Along the same lines, then, the appearance of traditional millenarian themes within the narrative repertoires of urban middle-class *daimista* communities might be viewed as another strategic attempt to marginally differentiate the Santo Daime religion from its nearest

competitors.

### Self-Valorisation

In keeping with late-modernity's facilitation of the "reflexive project" (Giddens 1991, 186), the attraction of the millenarian paradigm to urban professional *daimistas* might also involve the strategic exploitation of its eschatological scenario in the cause of self-valorisation. In one sense, the new earth scenario portrayed by the millenarian paradigm provides *daimistas* with both a vindication of and reward for their perseverance and faithfulness in the face of scepticism and persecution. The arrival of a new dispensation will involve not only the transformation of the world but also the transposition of group values and those who espouse them from their currently marginal status to a central position in keeping with the character of the new world order. In another sense, the appropriation of millenarian motifs is even more self-affirming because it reminds practising *daimistas* that the values and beliefs they adhere to are the very same values and beliefs by which the world will be transformed and upon which the new era will be founded. Furthermore, because *daimistas* live by these values and beliefs they will be among the righteous remnant which is to form the vanguard of the renewed world and its new civilization. The strategic linkage of contemporary *daimista* practice with impending global renewal endows both the Santo Daime repertoire and its individual practitioners with a significance of truly cosmic proportions.

The *daimista* preoccupation with what I have elsewhere called "cosmic self-aggrandizement" is further reinforced through use of the millenarian paradigm's decimation of the prevailing structures and dominant institutions of contemporary society (Dawson 2007, 162). As with other occupants of Brazil's new era religious landscape, the *raison d'être* of Santo Daime ritual repertoires is held to be their nurture of the "higher self" (known also as the "inner", "cosmic", "true" or "Christic" self). The "higher self" is the interior aspect of the individual most attuned to the universal whole of which we are all a part. Only when the higher self is developed are the latent powers residing deep within each of us able to be tapped, harnessed and manipulated to the end of obtaining absolute self-realization. Evidenced through spiritual enlightenment, universal understanding and physical well-being, the self's absolute realization is, however, conditional upon the eradication of the "ego" (known also as the "lower self"). Originating through embodied interaction with the world at large, the ego is the part of the individual most affected by and attached to the external, material world. In so being, the ego suppresses the higher self and thereby restricts the individual pursuit of absolute self-realization.

Functioning, in effect, as the social self, the ego serves as a cipher for the plethora of forces and dynamics which stand over and against the individual. That is, the ego signifies society at large, just as its dissolution signifies the liberation of the individual from external forces and dynamics otherwise beyond its control. By annihilating the ego, the *daimista* repertoire eradicates societal determination. In so doing, *daimista* discourse and practice frees the individual from unwarranted external interference and thereby allows the unfettered pursuit of absolute self-realization. In narrative terms, then, the annihilation of the ego and the emergence of the higher self correlates directly with the dissolution of societal determination and the achievement of absolute self-realization. This is where millenarianism comes in. For, in the hands of urban middle-class *daimistas* preoccupied with the reflexive project of the self, millenarianism's decimation of the world at large reinforces this correlation. By completely reconfiguring the societal dynamics responsible for the birth of the ego, millenarianism's new earth scenario removes all forms of external determination which might otherwise hinder the absolute realization of the higher self. The renewed earth of the millenarian paradigm thereby furnishes the individual with a blank canvas upon which she is unqualifiedly



free to express herself and pursue her destiny. In effect, the millenarian paradigm's removal of unwarranted societal determination underwrites the absolute sovereignty of the late-modern self.

### **Instrumental Religiosity**

The reflexive character of *daimista* appropriations of millenarian themes might further be underlined with reference to the typically instrumental and expressionistic nature of new era religiosity in Brazil. Collectively, late-modern transformations of established urban-industrial dynamics have radically modified received relationships between religious communities and their respective participants. With emphasis shifting from collective to individual expectation, growing numbers of individuals increasingly interact with religious movements and organizations relative to subjective criteria guided by immediate experience and orientated to personal fulfilment. Evaluated relative to subjective needs and aspirations, religious participation is thereby instrumentalized as it comes to be viewed as a means to self-realization rather than an end in itself or the meeting of pre-existing social obligations. Perhaps two of the clearest expressions of the instrumentalization of religious belonging in Brazil are the dynamics of religious transit and bricolage. Religious transit is characterized by the concurrent participation in and consecutive switching between different religious groups, whilst religious bricolage embodies an eclectic, pick and mix approach in which otherwise disparate beliefs, rituals and values are individually appropriated relative to subjective tastes and preoccupations. Evidence of the instrumentalization of religious belonging, along with the dynamics of transit and bricolage, are commonplace across the *daimista* community. One informant, for example, was open enough to admit that a key reason he likes the *daimista* community of which he is currently a member is that the absence of sermons and talks gives him space to “get on and think what I want”. In the same vein, and typical of many conversations, a community leader told me that prior to “finding” Daime he had participated in Catholic, Umbanda, Spiritist, Theosophical, Rosicrucian, new age, and assorted neo-esoteric groups. Like so many of his contemporaries, whilst he regards himself as having moved beyond these beliefs and practices, it was clear that he continues, however unwittingly, to use them to inform his current engagement with (and modification of) the contemporary *daimista* repertoire.

Practised by urban middle-class *daimistas*, transit and bricolage express an experimental and expressionistic religiosity which at times borders on the playful. Facilitated by increasingly pluralized urban environments, transit and bricolage combine to produce a “subjective polysemy of religious experience” in which an assortment of beliefs and rituals are picked up and played with before being discarded or appropriated along idiosyncratic lines (Brandão 1994, 30). Set against the backdrop of instrumentalized religiosity *daimista* espousals of millenarian themes might best be understood, then, not as embodying deep-seated insecurity and ambivalence but rather as reflecting expressionistic and experimental dynamics which are intrinsically playful in nature. This is not to question the seriousness and commitment with which millenarian views are expressed by Santo Daime members. It is, though, to recognise the espousal of millenarianism as part of a transient and hybrid religious identity the provisionality of which is reflexively orchestrated. In so being, the millenarian views expressed by urban middle-class *daimistas* can only properly be understood when viewed as representing just one component of an otherwise variegated biographical trajectory comprising a highly diverse and constantly changing set of beliefs.

### **Conclusion**

Inevitably, the espousal of millenarian themes by urban middle-class *daimistas* is a far

more nuanced process than a chapter such as this can suggest. Nevertheless, each of the lines of enquiry pursued above provides valuable insight into a range of dynamics which combine to set the conditions of possibility within which *daimista* appropriations of the millenarian paradigm occur. The argument from continuity has some merit in that Santo Daime adepts frequently express themselves as disaffected with prevailing societal institutions whilst, at the same time, remaining disinterested in utilising existing means of social engagement. The appropriation of millenarianism as a way of resolving the crisis generated by the confluence of systemic insecurity and strategic indifference certainly has parallels with the traditional context which has contributed to the espousal of millenarianism by Brazil's hard-pressed rural poor. There is, then, something to be said in favour of the argument from continuity. At the same time, the late-modern context within which the Santo Daime religion exists plays a massive part in influencing both the organizational repertoires by which *daimista* millenarianism is framed and the subjective dynamics of individual agency by which millenarian motifs are brought to life. Both the heightened reflexivity enjoyed by the urban middle-classes and the implications of religious instrumentalization afford *daimista* appropriations of the millenarian paradigm an ineluctably strategic quality. So, whilst not ruling out the dynamics of practical-symbolic crisis explored by the first line of enquiry, the argument from discontinuity underlines the intentional, self-aware qualities of *daimista* espousals of millenarian themes. Strangely familiar by virtue of its recapitulation of established themes, yet strikingly novel on account of its late-modern characteristics, the *daimista* appropriation of traditional millenarianism underscores the Janus-faced nature of new era religiosity exemplified here by the Santo Daime religion of Brazil.

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