

# **The World Ayahuasca Diaspora: Reinventions and Controversies**

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## *Abstract:*

This book investigates how certain alternative global religious groups, shamanic tourism industries, and recreational drug milieus grounded in the consumption of the traditionally Amazonian psychoactive drink ayahuasca embody various challenges associated with modern societies. During its expansion from the Amazon jungle to Western societies, ayahuasca use has encountered different legal and cultural responses in the destination countries. This encounter is discussed in the book in terms of how it discloses contemporary controversies regarding religious ambivalence in modern societies, and how disparate and competing ontological and epistemological discourse on ayahuasca use has emerged among ayahuasca drinkers and between them and the state. The role of science in the confrontations between ayahuasca drinkers and the law is also contemplated. The chapters include ethnographic investigations of ritual practice, transnational religious ideology, the politics of healing, and the invention of tradition. Authors explore symbolic effects of a “bureaucratization of enchantment” in religious practice, and the “sanitizing” of indigenous rituals for tourist markets. Larger questions on the global economics of ayahuasca in terms of notions of commodification and the categories of sacred and profane are also addressed. This unique book explores classic and contemporary issues in social science and the humanities, providing rich material on the burgeoning expansion of ayahuasca use around the globe.

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Glenn H. Shepard Jr.

### **Introduction: The Shifting Journey of Ayahuasca in Diaspora**

Beatriz Caiuby Labate, Clancy Cavnar, & Alex K. Gearin

### **1. If Tradition Did Not Exist, It Would Have To Be Invented: Retraditionalization and The World Ayahuasca Diaspora**

Andrew Dawson

The title of this chapter arises from a playful modification and subsequent fusion of Voltaire’s famous aphorism with Eric Hobsbawm’s seminal insights into the “invention” of tradition

within modern society. Phrased as it is, this title signals intent to engage the world ayahuasca diaspora as a form of retraditionalization involving the recapitulation of traditional beliefs and practices in a way that engenders not only their reconfiguration but also the invention of new traditions. Central to this chapter is the assertion that the retraditionalization of ayahuasca religiosity currently underway within the world diaspora is both framed by typically modern dynamics and impacted by a range of practical-symbolic concerns characteristic of its urban-professional constituency. Developing this assertion, the chapter opens by delineating the most relevant modern dynamics which frame the ongoing retraditionalization of ayahuasca religiosity underway in the world diaspora. Employing the concept of the “new middle-class,” the socio-cultural profile of the urban-professional constituency now preponderant within the world ayahuasca diaspora is then discussed. The analytical focus narrows still further as the discussion moves on to explicate various practical-symbolic concerns driving the retraditionalization of ayahuasca religiosity at the hands of its urban-professional practitioners. The chapter concludes by drawing these different threads together in a typology (borrowed from Hervieu-Léger) that situates the contemporary dynamics of retraditionalization within an organizational spectrum ranging from the most institutionalized of contexts to the thoroughly individualized.

## **2. Between Ecstasy and Reason: A Symbolic Interpretation of UDV Trance**

Rosa Virgínia Melo

This article provides a symbolic interpretation of the origin myth of the Brazilian ayahuasca religion União do Vegetal (UDV), the history of hoasca, and the group’s ritual. This myth, which tells the story of how ayahuasca appeared on Earth, is central to the group’s identity, along with the spiritual genealogy of its founding father, Mestre Gabriel (José Gabriel da Costa). Through analysis of metaphorical and metonymic elements expressed in the religious principles, the chapter reveals the constitution of magic and bureaucratic rationalities that characterize the UDV. It argues that the dualities of this hybrid cultural context are valuable to the expansion of the UDV from the Amazon to urban centers in the late 1970s, and later, on to countries such as Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom outside of Brazil. In sum, the chapter describes how the religion of the Amazonian rural “caboclo” (riverine people of mixed descent who do not speak an indigenous language) evolved into the religion of the “doutor” (educated urban middle class person); in other words, how the UDV is progressively transforming into a modern religion, centered on the individual and his abilities to live in the world. Further, it proposes an analysis of the principles that articulate tradition and modernity in this expanding religious field. The discussion of the UDV religious expansion aims to question the secularization process. The interface between religious and legal rationalization in this process will be taken into account.

## **3. The Religion of the Forest: Reflections on the International Expansion of a Brazilian Ayahuasca Religion**

Beatriz Caiuby Labate & Glauber Loures de Assis

This chapter analyzes the expansion and internationalization of the Santo Daime religion from the Amazon to the world. The growth and internationalization of this religious movement is explained in terms of its structural characteristics: its psychoactivity and miscibility. Such expansion is placed within the diaspora movement of the religions from the global South towards the North, and reflects the increasingly relevant role of Brazil and Latin America in the global religious scenario. However, the spread of Santo Daime has generated conflicts and tensions in the different locations to which it has migrated. The expansion has also produced several consequences and backlashes in the original Amazonian traditional communities from which it came. We argue that the internationalization of Santo Daime illustrates the religious ambivalences and controversies of our times, and thereby stimulates discussion of key issues regarding the global religious context and modernity itself.

#### **4. Culling the Spirits: An Exploration of Santo Daime's Adaptation in Canada**

Eli Oda Sheiner

This chapter focuses on a Canadian branch of Santo Daime, a Brazilian syncretic religion organized around the ritualistic consumption of the psychoactive plant decoction called Santo Daime, commonly known outside the religion as ayahuasca. Using participant observation and in-depth interviewing, I look at the ways in which members of Santo Daime contextualize their identities, beliefs, practices, and politics within contemporary Canadian society. Examining the presence of alterity at various levels of analysis, I use the concepts of ontology and epistemology to shed light on Santo Daime worlds and worldviews—construed as radically different in relation to their largely secular cultural and political surroundings. Findings will explore the conflicts and confluences between Santo Daime as it is represented by the Canadian government and by the Canadians who employ it as a sacrament, and will chart the adaptations and ritual innovations that members of Santo Daime have employed to anchor their practice in the Canadian context.

#### **5. A Religious Battle: Musical Dimensions of the Santo Daime Diaspora**

Beatriz Caiuby Labate, Clancy Cavnar, & Glauber Loures de Assis

This chapter focuses on Santo Daime's diaspora through its musical dimension. The expansion of Santo Daime is situated within the wider Brazilian religious diaspora, comparing it with phenomena such as the international expansion of capoeira, of Brazilian Afro-religions, and of neo-Pentacostalism. The authors present a reflection on the religious hymns, which are considered to be "received" from the "astral" and represent an important foundation of the rituals. The chapter then provides a short description of how the Brazilian hymns are sung and played outside Brazil: They are either sung in Portuguese, or sung in translated versions; new hymns are "received" directly into various languages. Local groups, especially in the USA, divide into two schools, named here as "traditionalist" and

“comprehensivist.” While one advocates singing only in Portuguese, the other wants to sing translated hymns. The chapter remarks upon the “conceptual” disputes about how to properly sing and translate the hymns, such as the contrasts between lyrics and music, “understanding” and “feeling.” These divisions invite a debate about notions of tradition, authenticity, and sacredness. The chapter further addresses the role of musicians in rituals, and how their disputes involve similarly revealing issues. The authors examine the positioning of key experts around the musical performance and analyze how the Santo Daime diaspora reflects new power maps, where religious expertise is mixed with language knowledge, musical skills, ethnicity, and the ability to perform cultural translations. It is hoped that this reflection on music in Santo Daime inspires more research on the relationship between psychedelics, religion, language, music, subjectivity, and cognition.

## **6. Good Mother Nature: Ayahuasca Neoshamanism as Cultural Critique in Australia**

Alex K. Gearin

This chapter investigates the practice of ayahuasca neoshamanism in Australia and ways in which forms of “cultural critique” mounted against urbanization, materialism, environmental destruction, and consumer capitalism are inscribed in narrative accounts of ecstatic healing. The practice is shown to involve a critical cultural sensibility that permeates the realms of mythology and phenomenology and the various narrative genres of trance-experience. Forms of cultural critique may be read in mythological narratives that include moral teaching on how participants *should* “navigate” the ayahuasca trance-experience itself. Ayahuasca practice as a form of cultural critique can be observed in how drinkers approach, experience, and articulate the basic phenomenology of their trances. The chapter demonstrates how conceptions of nature, plant-spirits, and an indigenous Other represent objects by which drinkers reflexively and critically assess various aspects of everyday ethics and the broader cultural institutions of which they are constituted.

## **7. Aussiewaska: A Cultural History of Changa and Ayahuasca Analogues in Australia**

Graham St John

Since the synergistic mechanism integral to ayahuasca became known, “ayahuasca analogues”—botanical fusions said to simulate an “ayahuasca effect,” also called “anahuasca” and “acaciahuasca”—have been developed in regional contexts beyond the Amazon. Through attention to changa, an Australian “smokeable ayahuasca,” sometimes referred to as “aussiewaska,” and also promoted as an “intelligent DMT” blend, this chapter investigates one contested arena in ayahuasca’s scendent reach. *Changa* is a synergetic smoking blend typically involving DMT alkaloids extracted from species of *Acacia*, infused with *B. caapi*, along with a variety of other herbs. The chapter charts the roots and emergence of changa, the development of which is consequent to the emergence of DMT as a uniquely enigmatical phenomenon. While pioneers and users of changa venerate its native Australian botanical characteristics—especially given that “golden wattle,” a common name for *Acacia*, is Australia’s national floral emblem—its ostensible role as a “smokeable ayahuasca” is also

championed. A tension characterizing the status of DMT vis-à-vis ayahuasca frames the story of changa, whose role as an effective analogue to ayahuasca has been a cause for celebration and concern. A confluence of “effects” inherited from both the ayahuasca drink and smoked DMT, changa is regarded as a hybrid pharmagnostic phenomenon, with its emergence posing a challenge to advocates of both ayahuasca and DMT. While a relative of both ayahuasca and DMT, with the help of a networked entheogenic community, changa has forged a “tradition” of its own.

## **8. Disentangling the Ayahuasca Boom: Local Impacts in Western Peruvian Amazonia**

Joshua Homan

Over the past 60 years, “traditional” shamanic practices in the western Amazon have undergone radical changes, primarily due the rise of shamanic tourism focused on the consumption of ayahuasca, as well as the diaspora of ayahuasca shamanism out of Amazonia, which I term the “ayahuasca boom.” With this entanglement of the local with global flows of capital, knowledge, and individuals, a number of critical issues arise. Indeed, the emergence of the ayahuasca boom has created numerous problems linked to themes such as authenticity, commodification, safety, interpersonal conflict, and the appropriation of “traditional” practices by outsiders. I draw from ethnographic data collected between 2007 and 2013 to examine local understandings of the ayahuasca boom's impacts in mestizo and indigenous communities throughout the western Peruvian Amazon. Through an in-depth analysis of shamanic tourism and the ayahuasca diaspora in the region, I argue that, although ayahuasca shamanism still holds great importance for many local peoples—and in some cases has been strengthened through the integration of tourism—it also faces many challenges which place it at risk, especially in rural areas, as ayahuasqueros are drawn into the global market through its ineluctable forces. Following this overview of the impacts of the ayahuasca boom, I attempt to disentangle ayahuasca shamanism’s uncertain future in the western Peruvian Amazon for both mestizo and indigenous peoples.

## **9. The Economics of Ayahuasca: Money, Markets, and the Value of the Vine**

Kenneth W. Tupper

This article considers the emerging status of ayahuasca as a commodity in international trade networks and the global economic system of the early twenty-first century. It explores how the brew and its constituent plants are variously represented as a medicine, sacrament, or plant teacher by people who drink it, and how drinkers (and suppliers) negotiate these representations with the competing status of ayahuasca as a consumer item in the global marketplace. Is ayahuasca drinking becoming a bourgeois luxury for the affluent of the global North? Does the commodification of the brew somehow profane it? How does ayahuasca consumerism fit within the politics of international drug control? Is ayahuasca, as the International Narcotics Control Board suggested in its 2010 Annual Report, simply an example of the “increased trade, use and abuse of . . . plant material” containing psychoactive

substances? These and other questions lead to reflections on what the economics of ayahuasca might reveal about the nature of money, value, economy, and ecology at a critical moment in human history.

## **10. Global Ayahuasca: An Entrepreneurial Ecosystem**

Daniela M. Peluso

This chapter addresses the business of ayahuasca. By approaching ayahuasca as a new and burgeoning industry linked to the ayahuasca diaspora—the spreading of its use beyond Amazonia—I will provide a general overview of the emergence and range of entrepreneurship amid more traditional and local contexts and participants. My analysis of how the ayahuasca industry has developed in only a few decades from an obscure practice into a cosmopolitan capitalist endeavor is examined through a case study in the Tambopata Province, Peru. It also suggests that small-scale entrepreneurship has contributed toward shaping ayahuasca's international popularity. This paper further contemplates the actual and potential impact that ayahuasca businesses have on South American indigenous and local peoples whose expertise and practices have long been the hallmark of ayahuasca practices, and raises questions of South American postcolonialism and its legacy of imperialism. As such, this analysis provides an anthropological approach toward understanding the emergence and development of entrepreneurship and makes contributions to literatures on postcolonialism, globalization, Amazonia, and ayahuasca.

## **11. A Climate for Change: ICEERS and the Challenges of the Globalization of Ayahuasca**

Benjamin K. De Loenen, Òscar Parés Franquero, Constanza Sánchez Áviles

While cannabis is currently spearheading a new course in addressing drug policy worldwide, other psychoactive plants, such as ayahuasca, have fallen prey to the intolerance and repression promoted by the United Nations' International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). An alarming increase in legal prosecution related to its use and importation has been observed in several countries. In Spain, especially, the scope of legal incidents shows that a true law fare was initiated around 2010. While scientific research and anthropological studies have contributed to a better understanding of ayahuasca's context of use and its psychological and physiological effects, including its risks and therapeutic potentials, unethical practices, romanticization, and commercial opportunism have led too often to adverse situations and harm. Dealing sensitively and efficiently with the serious challenges related to public policy, law, safety, and ethics—all of which interrelated—is essential to safeguard a constructive future for this ethnobotanical brew in modern society. This chapter shares the vision and experience of the International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research, & Service (ICEERS), a charitable NGO founded in 2009 in the Netherlands, with offices in Barcelona and Uruguay, that works to address the obstacles that prevent ayahuasca

from finding its place as a psychotherapeutic accelerant and personal development tool in modern times. The activities of our multidisciplinary team will be outlined, such as: support in legal defense (in Chile, Europe, and with the INCB), public education and scientific debate (e.g., a report of the state of art of the biomedical literature on ayahuasca, and the Ibiza 2014 World Ayahuasca Conference), risk reduction (e.g., dissemination of practical information for those seeking an experience, and personalized educational services), and psychological support in cases of adverse events.

## **12. Ayahuasca in the English Courts: Legal Entanglements with the Jungle Vine**

Charlotte Walsh

This chapter considers the hazy status of ayahuasca in the English legal system, through a consideration of relevant international provisions, domestic legislation, and case law, focusing, in particular, on the prosecution of shamanic practitioner Peter Aziz. A central claim of this chapter is that the confusion generated through unclear law renders prosecution for activities involving ayahuasca an abuse of process, conflicting with the requirement for legal certainty, enshrined within Article 7 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This chapter goes on to explore whether ayahuasca prosecutions could be considered to breach further human rights, most notably the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; ostensibly protected by Article 9 of the ECHR. While this provision might feasibly be engaged in such cases, it is not absolute: manifestation of this right—such as through sacramental use of ayahuasca—is subject to qualification, such that it can be curtailed in the interests of public protection. The second key contention of this chapter is that these qualifiers are viewed as too easily engaged by the courts in cases involving ayahuasca and other psychoactive substances, in the absence of either solid evidence of harms or, importantly, any acknowledgement of benefits.