

Rethinking Protestantization: The *Vida Nova* of US Santo Daime

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Religion

Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts

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May 2015

Richard, a first-time participant at a Santo Daime ritual, had been vivaciously clapping and dancing for the past hour while the rest of the participants had either been calmly sitting or lying down. Around 1 a.m., we finished singing the last hymn, and Brian asked, “Would anyone like to offer a prayer?” Still standing, taking the opportunity to have the floor, Richard responded, “During my ayahuasca trip, I learned that there’s only one prayer, and I’d love to share it with you.” We all sat patiently as Richard paused as if to accentuate the profundity of his thought and tantalize his listeners. He slowly rocked side to side and brought his hands together. “Thank you,” he said—that was his prayer. He said it with a smile and what seemed to me a “there you go, you’re welcome” attitude. Everyone one responded politely to Richard’s prayer—making eye contact and voicing murmurs of “Thank you.” People brought their hands together in a prayerful position, and then returned to silence. We silently meditated as a group before standing to hold hands and close the ceremony with “Our Fathers” and “Hail Maries” in English and Portuguese.

At another work, as the Santo Daime rituals are called, led by Brian— this one with three US Santo Daime churches present—a similar interjection came just before the closing prayers. “Okay, my brothers and sisters,” Brian said with a tone of voice that hinted we were nearing the ceremony’s end, “let’s circle up and bring this beautiful evening to a close.”

“Wait one moment!” said Marsha, quickly but calmly. She was a small, grey-haired woman with glasses, the leader of another Santo Daime church. With a gentle

smile, she said, “We would like to do the *Oração de São Francisco* before we close. It is on page 30 in the smaller book. We always do it before closing; it’s such a beautiful prayer.”

The evening had already gone much longer than I expected, and I couldn’t believe someone suggested adding an additional prayer. It was 3 a.m., and I was feeling weak from the strong effects of the Daime and from fasting all day. We said the prayer—and not a moment too soon. During the closing prayers, my body gave out and I went down—I could not even stand. I found myself on my knees holding the hands the men next to me.

At the start of my fieldwork, before attending any of the works, I had a chance to meet with Brian. The aim was to cover basic information on the church I had just begun researching and Santo Daime as a whole. I asked, “Given Santo Daime’s Brazilian origin, are there a lot of Brazilians in your Santo Daime community?”

Brian replied, “There used to be in the beginning, but I don’t think they liked Americans’ Protestant tendencies.”

“What do you mean?” I inquired.

He paused for a moment, took a bite of his *aloo gobi* and then responded, “In the US, with our Protestant history and focus on individualism, our egos are a little bigger and make appearances at ceremonies. People might try to have their favorite hymn sung or make suggestions on how to better set up the room or run the ceremony.” Brian had nearly prophesied the two expressions of individual assertion I would come to witness in later weeks, and he named Protestantism as its cause.

Inspired by this insight, I focused my research on the Protestant influence in US Santo Daime. Many scholars employ the concept of Protestantization in discussions of

religion and globalization, especially in regard to new traditions migrating to the US. In their US development, scholars understand Protestantization to be a “common theme in the Americanization of immigrant religions.”¹ For example, writing on South Asian religions migrating to Britain, Canada, and the US, John Hinnells writes, “The widespread Western assumption that to be effective, prayers must be understood, the stress on congregational worship, all result, in the view of many scholars, in the protestantizing of non-European religions.”² In regard to Buddhism, the Buddhist Churches of America “strove to find an American voice via the English language and adaptation of Protestant hymns” as they “adapted their religion to fit their changing needs.”³ Their music today “is a syncretic blend of Japanese Buddhist and American Protestant elements.”⁴ The development along “denominational lines” of immigrant traditions as they navigate new cultural waters can be thought of as another example of Protestantization since denominationalism itself may be an American Protestant creation.⁵ Overall, the development of congregational worship can be seen as a ‘protestantizing’ process.⁶ Harold Coward describes the Protestantization of Hinduism, “Worship is congregational, Sundays 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m., with people arriving and leaving on time in Protestant fashion.”⁷ Evidently, most scholars employ

¹ Paul David Numrich, *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 141.

² John R. Hinnells, “South Asian Religions in Migration” in *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*, eds. Harold Coward, John R. Hinnells, and Raymond Brady Williams (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 7.

³ Barbie Wong, “Singing the Dharma in English: Protestantization and Americanization in the Hymns of the Buddhist Churches of America,” Masters Thesis, Smith College, 2001.

⁴ Wong, “Singing the Dharma,” 44.

⁵ Raymond Brady Williams, “South Asian Christians,” in *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*, 7.

⁶ Hinnells, “The Zoroastrian Diaspora,” in *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*, 49.

⁷ Harold Coward, “Hinduism in Canada,” in *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*, 155

Protestantization to describe the traditions taking on an American mold. With each subsequent generation, scholars note how the immigrant traditions become more Protestant. As a theoretical lens, concepts like Protestantization contribute to a monolithic understanding of traditions that act upon each other in a one to one type of way. The typical treatment of traditions that have gone global and have adopted local flavors is quite formulaic: x tradition exists, migrates and is influenced by y , and results in z .

The majority of academic work written in English on Santo Daime in Brazil focuses on spirit possession. Andrew Dawson, the most prominent scholar of Santo Daime who writes in English, beautifully traces the history of spirit-oriented activity in Brazilian Santo Daime. His historical development moves from Santo Daime's origins in indigenous and *mestiço* ayahuasca consumption interacting with Christianity, to the influence of European esotericism on the tradition, to the influence of Kardecism, and concludes with a discussion of what he calls the “*Umbandization*” of Santo Daime. What is missing from Dawson's trajectory is the continuation beyond Brazil. How do other influences in new countries influence spirit-oriented activities in Santo Daime? I intend to fill in that gap by exploring spirit possession in US Santo Daime through the influence of American Protestantism—a unique “societal force and dynamic”⁸ that frames religious belief and ritual practice in the US.

One would think that the Protestant influence on Santo Daime in the US would lead to the de-emphasis on spirit possession. The Protestantization normally discussed by scholars of immigrant religions presumes that there is only one type of Protestantism

⁸ Andrew Dawson, *Santo Daime: a new world religion* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 5.

upon which religions model themselves when arriving to the US. The Protestant reformation elevated belief over practice, thus making religion a matter of concepts. Protestantism, as generally discussed, “converges with the idea of disenchantment as definitive of secular modernity.”⁹ Disenchantment and secularization may characterize some of the most prominent qualities of Protestantization in modernity; however, this view of Protestantism limits our understanding of the American Protestant influence and its complexities. Historian of American Religion Leigh Eric Schmidt introduces a little-studied feature of American Protestantism. His argument is that American spirituality as it exists today—“excitedly eclectic, mystically yearning, perennially cosmopolitan”—is actually an artifact of religious liberalism grounded in 19th century liberal American Protestantism.¹⁰ I apply his argument to understand how this type of Protestantism impacts immigrant traditions, finding that Protestantization is much more complex than typical discourse would suggest. Following his lead and through looking at spirit possession in US Santo Daime, I argue that there is a multiplicity of Protestantisms influencing religions brought to the US. The typical understanding of Protestantism’s disenchanting influence is present in US Santo Daime, but another type of Protestantism characterized by enchantment also influences the tradition.

To best understand the historical development of Santo Daime in Brazil, and ultimately in the US, I will present Andrew Dawson’s historical trajectory of spirit possession in Brazilian Santo Daime and then extend his trajectory to the US through my ethnographic research. Dawson’s historical treatment of Santo Daime in Brazil largely follows the formulaic treatment of how traditions adapt to new settings and

⁹ Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (University of California Press), 111

¹⁰ Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The making of American Spirituality* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 6.

ideas. Understanding how spirit-possession in Santo Daime has changed even within Brazil highlights the eclectic nature of the tradition and can help us understand Protestantization in US Santo Daime. By extending Dawson's trajectory to the US, I not only fill in empirical gaps in Santo Daime scholarship, but I also show that the effects of a religio-cultural context on a different religious tradition—like that of American Protestantism on Santo Daime—are neither consistent nor predictable.

Amazonian Spirituality and Santo Daime

Ayahuasca is the principal sacrament in the Santo Daime ritual. The development of Santo Daime can be understood as the development of a ritual framework created by *daimistas* to effectively utilize and contain the potent psycho-somatic effects of ayahuasca in ways that align with their values and worldview. The principal components of ayahuasca are the Amazonian vine *Banisteriopsis caapi*, which is combined with leaves of the bush *Psychotria viridis*. The leaves contain dimethyltraptamine (DMT) and the vine contains an enzyme inhibitor that prevents the body from quickly breaking down the DMT, which allows its effects to last much longer.¹¹ Indigenous ayahuasca consumption has a long history that, as of late, recent scholarship problematizes. Scholars are challenging the myth of “full authenticity” and “the notion that the world of ayahuasca is a primordial phenomenon, born from the Amazonian soil like the very vine that nourishes it.”¹² Rather than emerging from the depths of the Amazon, “ayahuasca use expanded from the mestizo Amazon world, from major rivers populated with

¹¹ In the contemporary world, DMT is isolated and smoked, and its effects last anywhere from 5-15 minutes. When orally consumed, no effects present themselves due to the enzymes that break down the DMT. However, when combined with the enzyme inhibitor in *Banisteriopsis caapi*, it can be consumed orally and its effects can last up to several hours.

¹² Oscar Calavia Saez, “Foreword: Authentic Ayahuasca” in *Ayahuasca Shamanism: In the Amazon and Beyond*, eds. Beatriz Caiuby Labate and Clancy Canvar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xix.

Catholic missions toward the forest interior, and not vice versa.”¹³ In fact, ayahuasca often replaced other substances or was less important than it is now.

In the early decades of the 20th century, Raimundo Irineu Serra (1892-1971)—the seven-foot tall grandson of African slaves, now regarded universally by *daimistas* as the founder and Master of Santo Daime—came into contact with indigenous and mestizo ayahuasca consumption.¹⁴ Attracted by the national rubber boom,¹⁵ he moved from north-eastern Brazil to the north-west state of Acre. He worked as a rubber tapper, a frontiersman staking out the borders between Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia, and later became a member of the territorial guard.¹⁶ *Daimista* tradition relates that a Peruvian *ayahuasquero* initiated Serra in the use of ayahuasca consumption at a rubber plantation. Irineu Serra saw the indigenous use of ayahuasca as “Satanic” since they put their mouths to the ground to call “the demon.”¹⁷ However, for Serra, Christian crosses would appear, and eventually he had a series of visions of a heavenly being whom he identified as the Virgin Mary (*Virgem Maria*) and ‘Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception’ (*Nossa Senhora da Conceição*). She taught him a new religious doctrine and gave him instructions for healing.¹⁸ According to the tradition, the new religious framework and rituals endowed the ayahuasca with newfound spiritual power. To mark this newfound spiritual power, Irineu renamed the ayahuasca “Daime.”¹⁹ Thus,

¹³ Oscar Calavia Saez, “Foreword: Authentic Ayahuasca,” xx.

¹⁴ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 8.

¹⁵ National rubber boom occurred in Brazil c. 1890-1920

¹⁶ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 8.

¹⁷ “REPORT: LUIZ MENDES DO NASCIMENTO.” Mestre Irineu. Accessed April 15, 2015. <http://www.mestreirineu.org/luiz-eng.htm>.

¹⁸ Edward MacRae, “The ritual use of ayahuasca by three Brazilian religions,” in *Drug Use and Cultural Contexts Beyond the West*, eds. Coomber and South (London: Free Association Books, 2004), 4.

¹⁹ as one of the hymns of Santo Daime states, “dai-me luz, dai-me amor”: give me light, give me love

ayahuasca—a Quechua term meaning “vine of the soul”²⁰—was now renamed Daime, and Santo Daime literally translates to “Holy Give Me.”²¹ *Daimistas* see Mestre (as Irineu came to be called) as having Christianized ayahuasca consumption.²² However, ayahuasca’s etymological origins, “soul vine” or “vine of the dead,” and original rituals heavily influenced the early Santo Daime repertoire.

In his historical trajectory, Andrew Dawson emphasizes the centrality of spirit-oriented activity in the early religious repertoire of Santo Daime.²³ Overall, the centrality of communicating with spirits came from Amazonian spirituality’s influence on early *daimista* practice. Fluid relationships and interconnectedness between all the beings in the worlds characterize the Amazonian worldview. For example, in Amazonian mythology, it is understood that the spirits of humans, animals, and plants are the same; they just have different perspectives. “We must remember, above all, that if there is a virtually universal Amerindian notion, it is that of an original state of undifferentiation between humans and animals, described in mythology.”²⁴ The cosmos depends on the inter-communal alliance between humans, animals, and spirits.²⁵ Shamanism represents one mode of communication between the beings. Ayahuasca, or other substances and practices, further facilitates the fluid interaction between this world and the spirit world, for shamans and others who consume the beverage. *Vegetalismo*, the Amazonian *mestiço* practice of ayahuasca consumption, uses the beverage to facilitate

²⁰ Richard Schultes, A. Hofmann and C. Rätsch. *Plants of the Gods*, (Vermont, Healing Arts Press: 1992), 124.

²¹ Dawson, *New Era—New Religions: Religious Transformation in Contemporary Brazil* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing 2007), 72.

²² Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 10.

²³ Dawson, “Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context: The Umbandization of Santo Daime,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15 (2012): 64.

²⁴ Eduardo Viveiros De Castro, “Cosmological Diexis and Amerindian perspectivism.” *Journal Of The Royal Anthropological Institute* 4 (September 1998): 471.

²⁵ Andrew Gray, *The Arakmbut--mythology, Spirituality, and History* (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn Books, 1996), 33.

the interaction with the spirits of plants, animals, and other supernatural forces.²⁶ The early spirit-oriented practice of Santo Daime included contact with the spirits of deceased human beings and nature spirits.²⁷

The ritual interaction with spirits centers on the ritual pursuit of healing. Spirit-oriented rituals involve the invocation of spirits to possess the body of the healer or use the shamanic motif of soul-flight to the spirit world to facilitate healing.²⁸ Both indigenous and *vegetalista* rituals have dietary restrictions, songs, and rhythmical instruments such as the maraca in their ayahuasca rituals to call the spirits and promote healing.²⁹ Santo Daime largely keeps the fluid intercommunal worldview of the Amerindians and the ritualized healing-centered structure of *mestiço vegetalismo* in its early years. The shamanic interactions between the beings played an important role in early Santo Daime healing. As we will see in the following sections, the spirit-oriented activity would later be downplayed and then resurrected.

European Influences on Santo Daime

By the 1940s, Irineu Serra's growing interest in European esotericism, in addition to persecution by Catholic authorities, resulted in the downplaying of spirit-oriented activities in Santo Daime.³⁰ Communion with the spirits in healing-centered rituals would have been accused of being black magic and superstition by the Catholic authorities. In time, new rituals inspired by esotericism replaced ritual contact with the spirit world. Irineu Serra's interest in and involvement with different types of European

²⁶ L.E. Luna. *Vegetalismo: Shamanism among the Mestizo Population of the Peruvian Amazon* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1986) 14-15.

²⁷ Dawson, "Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context," 64.

²⁸ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 9.

²⁹ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 9.

³⁰ Dawson. *Santo Daime*, 13 and 16.

esotericism, such as Anthroposophy³¹ and also Rosicrucianism,³² led to Santo Daime's focus on the self, rationalism, and moralism.³³ Therefore, the new rituals utilized the Daime to promote the rational moral development of human individuals.³⁴

Irineu Serra saw that esoteric teachings—which refer to a “worldview and to specific ideas that are very difficult to know without a special capacity such as clairvoyance or intuition”³⁵—could easily intertwine and supplement the Santo Daime repertoire. With the potent effects of the Daime, *daimistas* also operate with a worldview that is difficult to comprehend without the special capacity of their sacrament. With the connection between mysticism, clairvoyance, and the effects of the Daime, the teachings from these schools of thought helped *daimistas* form and frame their rituals.

Daimistas, with influence from these schools, shifted their focus from the spirit realm to their own inner realms. Anthroposophy's conceptualization of the body argues for the many-layered, hierarchal spiritual understanding of the human body with different knowledge being accessed in various aspects of the body. The hierarchal stratification of the body moves from the physical body up to the spirit body, each with many subdivisions and steps. The need for *daimistas* to work outside of the body, i.e. with spirits, diminished as their conception of the body expanded. The Rosicrucian

³¹A philosophy founded by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The spiritual philosophy postulates the existence of an objective, intellectually comprehensible spiritual world accessible to direct experience through inner development. For more information see Rudolf Steiner, *Anthroposophy (A Fragment)* (Great Barrington, MA: Steiner Books, 1996).

³² Mestre Irineu was also a member of the Rosicrucian Order. Rosicrucianism is a philosophical secret society said to have been founded in late medieval Germany by Christian Rosenkruz. Their philosophy claims to be built on esoteric truths of the ancient past. For more information see Christopher McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology, and Rituals of an Esoteric Order* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1998).

³³ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 16.

³⁴ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 18.

³⁵ Robert McDermott, *The New Essential Steiner: An Introduction to Rudolf Steiner for the 21st Century*, (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2009), Introduction.

Order maintains that the art of mysticism can be learned and that rational mystical knowledge attained through the techniques taught by the Rosicrucian order.³⁶ Most importantly, the purpose of the Rosicrucian teachings is to learn how to find inspiration, energy, and answers within oneself.³⁷ The adoption of these practices framed the Daime experience within the individual, the concept of the self greatly expanded, and offered a different way to utilize the sacrament.

With spirit-oriented activity set aside, the sacramental Daime now facilitated an exploration of the inner states of the human being. *Daimistas* began to explore and nurture their inner states of being through a range of techniques taught by the Esoteric Circle³⁸ such as meditation, introspection and regression. Utilizing esoteric techniques in combination with the Daime provided access to further truths located deep within the self, known in esoteric communities as the 'higher' or 'true' self.³⁹ Eradication of defective aspects of the self (understood as the 'ego' or 'lower-self') comprised the ultimate purpose the Santo Daime ritual when combined with esoteric techniques.⁴⁰ Santo Daime incorporated ritual elements and hymns that focused on the eradication of the lower-self, such as the ritual now known as the Concentration. Additionally, the healing process that had once revolved around spirit-oriented activity now could be achieved through individual endeavor.⁴¹ More so, with the influence of esoteric rhetoric and techniques, *daimistas* called upon specific spiritual agents less and less, replacing them with cosmic forces and universal moral principles such as harmony, love, truth,

³⁶ "The Journey into Self and the Mystical Path." The Rosicrucian Order, AMORC. Accessed April 15, 2015. <https://www.rosicrucian.org/mystical-path>.

³⁷ <https://www.rosicrucian.org/mystical-path>

³⁸ An esoteric organization that Serra was a member of. He also subscribed to their magazine for many years.

³⁹ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 16.

⁴⁰ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 18.

⁴¹ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 18.

and justice.⁴² In all, European esotericism resulted in the minimization of interaction with the spirit world, and relocated the locus of truth to within the individual.⁴³

Upon Irineu Serra's death in 1971, one of his disciples, Sebastião Mota de Melo, broke away from the mother community, taking a majority of the *daimistas* with him. With this constituency, Mota de Melo founded Cefluris,⁴⁴ the organization that would eventually spread Santo Daime beyond the Amazonian region to Brazil's coastal cities and eventually beyond Brazil as well. Before coming to Santo Daime hoping to be cured of a chronic liver condition, Mota de Melo practiced as a trained and profound medium in the Spiritist tradition known as Kardecism.

Kardecism became yet another European influence on Santo Daime. Kardecism descends from 19th century French Spiritualism and is characterized by belief in reincarnation, karma, the universal spiritual evolution of humankind, and—most importantly—the value of communication with more evolved spirits (such as Jesus Christ, doctors, lawyers, intellectuals).⁴⁵ Kardecism arrived in Brazil via the educated elite's affinity for French culture in the 1850s.⁴⁶ Popular classes soon adopted Kardecism, referring to it as Spiritism, and began engaging the spirits for therapeutic ends.⁴⁷ In France, Kardecism is more intellectual and less therapeutic, therefore, the engaging of the spirits for therapeutic ends uniquely reflects its popular Brazilian

⁴² Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 19.

⁴³ Dawson, "Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context," 65.

⁴⁴ Cefluris stands for the "Raimundo Irineu Serra Eclectic Centre fo the Univeral Flowling Light" (*Centro Ectelico da Fluente Luz Univeral Raimundo Irineu Serra*). Cefluris headquarters are located at *Ceu do Mapia* in a national park in the Brazilian north-west state of Amazona. See Dawson's Notes on Chapter 1 in *Santo Daime*, 200.

⁴⁵ Steven Engler, "Ritual Theory and Attitudes to Agency in Brazilian Spirit Possession," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21 (2009): 462.

⁴⁶ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 22.

⁴⁷ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 23.

mestiço practice. Mota de Melo, an accomplished medium, not only communicated with spirits, but could incorporate them into his body.

When he came to Santo Daime, Mota de Melo reduced his mediumistic practices in line with the European esoteric influence, but with Irineu Serra's death and branching away from the mother community, the spirit oriented practices resumed in full force.⁴⁸ Quickly, in fact by the mid-1970s, Padrinho Sebastião's community had reestablished Kardecist-informed mediumistic activity as a formal component of the Santo Daime ritual repertoire.⁴⁹ However, *daimistas* did not replace the recently established esoteric framework, but rather they integrated esoteric and spirit-oriented activities "within a single, and self-consciously eclectic, worldview."⁵⁰ Thus, the practice of communicating with deceased human beings regained ritual legitimacy in the *daimista* repertoire as a result of Kardecism's influence. The resurrection of spirit-oriented activity prepared Santo Daime for its intersection with yet another Brazilian syncretic tradition known for its pantheon of spirits and ritual possession practices.

Umbanda and Santo Daime

In Brazil, Kardecism took on more racial and socio-economic elements than in France. Traditionally, the "evolved" spirits that Kardecist mediums received were white middle-class professionals such as doctors, lawyers and intellectuals. However, in the 1920s, Kardecist mediums began to receive the spirits of Brazilian Indians (*caboclos*) and African slaves (*pretos-velhos*), which Kardecist mediums labeled as less-evolved.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Alex Polari de Alverga, *Forest of visions: Ayahuasca, Amazonian spirituality, and the Santo Daime tradition*, trans. Rosana Workman. Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press, 1999), 69.

⁴⁹ Dawson, "Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context," 65.

⁵⁰ Dawson, "Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context," 65.

⁵¹ Engler, "Ritual Theory and Attitudes to Agency in Brazilian Spirit Possession," 464.

In all, Brazilian Kardecism influenced Santo Daime to resurrect mediumship and spirit possession within *daimista* rituals, but *daimista* spirit-oriented activity remained subordinate to the esoteric practices. Spirit-oriented practice continued to be subordinate—perhaps due to the racial-value judgments within Brazilian Kardecism—until the intentional incorporation of Umbanda-inspired rituals.

Umbanda, another Brazilian syncretic tradition originating the early 20th century, focuses specifically on incorporating *caboclos* and *pretos-velhos*. Umbanda's engagement with *caboclos* and *pretos velhos* strongly resonated with Santo Daime's Amazonian origins and its founder being a grandson of African slaves. Additionally, Santo Daime's esoteric values (love, truth, harmony, and justice) perhaps influenced the possession rituals to take on more Umbanda elements than Kardecist ones. In Umbanda, trained mediums work with these spirits and then offer healing, insight, and advice for healing to humans and the spirits.⁵² Practitioners understand this work “as an act of charity performed to ascend (*evoluir*) the spiritual hierarchy.”⁵³ In Santo Daime's incorporation of this “charity work,” *daimistas* maintain that “suffering spirits” are attracted to the light and teaching of the Daime that is *within* the individual during the ritual.

The Umbanda rituals became increasingly important as Santo Daime transitioned from the rainforest to Brazilian city centers. Counter-culture backpackers from Brazil's urban centers during the late 1960s and 1970s made their way through the rainforest seeking the psychotropic beverage, ayahuasca. The contact between the Cefluris *daimistas* and the travelers brought the practice of Santo Daime to urban

⁵² Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 27.

⁵³ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 27.

centers in Brazil where many people were practicing Umbanda. Rural, agricultural, and mixed-races had characterized the early, rainforest Santo Daime communities; however, now a “white, urban, middle class constituency...has come to dominate the movement subsequent to its spread to the urban-industrial heartlands of Brazil.”⁵⁴ Consequently, these urban-professional *daimistas* incorporated Umbanda-inspired rituals in Santo Daime, and it became central to the Santo Daime ritual repertoire.

In the late 1970s, Daime was being consumed in Umbanda rituals within the Cefluris community, and in the 1980s Padrinho Sebastião (as *daimistas* call Mota de Melo) made regular visits to the center-south of Brazil to participate in rituals explicitly designed to unite Umbanda belief and practice within the now expanding Santo Daime movement.⁵⁵ During this time, the term *umbandaime* was coined to promote the fusion.⁵⁶ Likewise, but in a more academic vein, Dawson terms it the *Umbandization of Santo Daime*.⁵⁷ Under the dual leadership of Padrinho Alfredo (Sebastião’s son) and Alex Polari subsequent to Padrinho Sebastião’s death in 1990, “beliefs and practices appropriated from Umbanda gradually made their way from the margins to the core of Santo Daime rituals.”⁵⁸ By the late 1990s, Santo Daime’s mother community, Céu do Mapiá, officially included Umbanda-inspired rituals in their formal ritual calendar. Not only are the Umbanda-inspired rituals in the official calendar, but the majority of *daimistas* maintain that the spirits and practices appropriated from Umbanda as integral to their practice of Santo Daime.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Dawson, “Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context,” 61.

⁵⁵ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 28.

⁵⁶ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 29.

⁵⁷ See Dawson, “Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context: The Umbandization of Santo Daime.”

⁵⁸ Dawson, “Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context,” 67.

⁵⁹ Dawson, “Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context,” 75

The combination of Santo Daime and Umbanda laid the foundation for expressive, theatrical spirit possession—not only by trained mediums but by many lay practitioners, too. Ultimately, expressive possession is the most recent form of spirit-oriented activity to manifest in Santo Daime and is rapidly on the way to becoming its most popular practice.⁶⁰ Expressive possession involves only the incorporation of higher spirits appropriated from Umbanda, so the spirits being incorporated tend to be the *caboclos* and *preto velhos*. However, a growing number of churches today practice the incorporation of supernatural agents venerated by the traditional Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé, in which the supernatural agents are referred to as “gods” (*orixas*).⁶¹ In addition to the *orixas*, incorporation of other spirits such as children, cowboys, aristocrats, and extraterrestrials is on the rise.⁶²

Specific hymns call the spirits to catalyze an “expressive possession” experience. Dawson lists some common responses offered by *daimistas* when asked to explain the purpose of expressive possession: “the spirit serving to protect against the unwarranted appearance of inferior spirits; the spirit’s desire to enjoy the trappings of physical sensation (e.g. singing, dancing, and *Daime*); the edifying benefits which the spirits presence brings to its host and the externalization of particular aspects of the higher self.”⁶³ Overall, Brazilian Santo Daime’s enthusiastic appropriation of Umbanda spirits, rituals, and expressive possession demonstrates how Santo Daime changes as a result of moving to a new place, the urban centers. From the urban centers, Santo Daime spread globally to many places where it continues to evolve and adapt. Dawson stops his trajectory of spirit possession in Santo Daime before moving beyond Brazil, the next

⁶⁰ Dawson, “Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context,” 67.

⁶¹ Dawson, “Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context,” 67.

⁶² Dawson, “Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context,” 73.

⁶³ Dawson, “Spirit Possession in a New Religious Context,” 73.

section will begin to elaborate on the internationalization of Santo Daime and then focus on spirit possession in the US setting.

Internationalization and Glocalization:

Santo Daime's global spread began in the 1980s. It had entered the non-mainstream religious scene in Brazil, spread throughout Brazil via alternative and countercultural middle class networks, and continued to spread globally via existing ayahuasca and alternative networks. Its global spread can also be in part attributed to the migration of Cefluris members to other parts of the world and visitations by groups of Brazilian *daimistas*.⁶⁴ Once global connections were established, Cefluris representatives were invited abroad to conduct formal *daimista* rituals and therapeutic ayahuasca workshops.⁶⁵ Alberto Groisman, for example, elaborates on Santo Daime's international trajectory and its development in the Netherlands.⁶⁶ In the US, the Brazilian *daimista*-led rituals were practiced as early as 1987, with Umbanda-style possession rituals already quite integrated into the tradition. Through the personal relationships established and the visits to and from Brazil, Santo Daime churches sprang up in North America.⁶⁷ By the late 1990s, both "full-blown" churches and smaller "points"⁶⁸ were present in the US and European capitals. However, unlike in Brazil with

⁶⁴ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 34.

⁶⁵ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 34.

⁶⁶ Alberto Groisman, "Trajectories, Frontiers, and Reparations in the Expansion of Santo Daime to Europe" in *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*, ed. Thomas J. Csordas, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 185-204.

⁶⁷ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 34.

⁶⁸ The diaspora of Santo Daime churches are individually referred to as points.

its political and legal tolerance of ritual ayahuasca consumption, most Santo Daime churches outside of Brazil must maintain a low and clandestine profile.⁶⁹

While continuously evolving in its Brazilian setting, Santo Daime continues to change in its new settings as well, as its new practitioners “search for ‘orthodoxy.’”⁷⁰ The theoretical concept of glocalization is helpful in understanding how traditions change transnationally. Sociologist Roland Robertson argues for replacing the concept of globalization with “glocalization.” He states, “Much of the talk about globalization has tended to assume that it is a process which overrides locality, including large-scale locality...Even in cases where there is apparently no concrete recipe at work...there is still, or so I would claim, a translocal factor at work.”⁷¹ As a tradition moves transnationally, it will inevitably experience the tension between its practice in its place of origin and its new local setting. Robertson understands that both translocal and/or super-local factors can impact a tradition.

The limiting factor of glocalization is that it largely assumes the homogeneity of a tradition in its native nation-state. Glocalization may presume that traditions arrive in their new setting in pristine and authentic expressions that never in fact existed; the many pressures on a tradition and its historicity within the native nation’s borders may be ignored. As Dawson demonstrated, though without using the term, Santo Daime underwent many “glocalizations” as it intersected with other cultural and religious contexts within Brazil itself. From the interaction between Christianity, Afro-Brazilian culture, and indigenous ayahuasca use that sparked the genesis of Santo Daime, to its

⁶⁹ Dawson, *Santo Daime*, 34-35.

⁷⁰ Groisman, “Trajectories,” 193.

⁷¹ Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,” in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 26.

further influence by the rationally and morally oriented European esotericism, to the resurrection of spirit-possession via the influence of Kardecism and eventually Umbanda, Santo Daime reflects how drastically a tradition can evolve in the modern global world without ever crossing a border.

Despite its limitations, glocalization proves to be effective in conceptualizing the transnational movement of Santo Daime. Though he does not directly employ the concept of glocalization, Alberto Groisman demonstrates effectively how Santo Daime glocally changes by tracing its development in the Netherlands. “Each Santo Daime church in the Netherlands has developed its own way to obtain *daime*, to organize and perform rituals, and to establish relationships with Brazilian Santo Daime leaders and ritual experts—in sum to institutionalize its activities.”⁷² While developing their own local flavors due to super-local factors within their communities in Netherlands, the search for “orthodoxy” greatly influenced the groups. For example, “[e]ach local church has organized itself from idiosyncratic experiences of interpretation and adaptation of the religion’s ideas and practices.”⁷³ However, Cefluris—the centralized organization that can question innovative features that differ from the institutionalized repertoire—still exerted pressure on the groups. The groups in the Netherlands, with their own association with different branches of Santo Daime in Brazil and their own creative agency, created glocalized versions of Santo Daime that meet the needs of the communities that inherited the tradition. The Dutch Santo Daime churches “religious project”⁷⁴ involves negotiating between the global and the local, the traditional and the innovative, and the conservative and the counter-cultural. However, each Santo Daime

⁷² Groisman, “Trajectories,” 193.

⁷³ Groisman, “Trajectories,” 194.

⁷⁴ Groisman, “Trajectories,” 194.

group in the Netherlands united in seeing Santo Daime as emphasizing alternative therapy and reparation. The “Dutch *daimistas* personally assume responsibility for denouncing colonialism and mobilization people who want to be engaged in a project of reparation through adherence to Santo Daime.”⁷⁵ The relative lack of legal constraints⁷⁶ and the emphasis on alternative therapy and reparation could describe translocal Dutch influences on Santo Daime. Groisman’s work represents just one of few pieces of academic literature on the internationalization of Santo Daime. My work in the US continues Groisman’s theme of studying the internationalization and glocalization of Santo Daime, but can be understood better as an extension of Dawson’s work in that I focus on spirit possession, which Groisman does not address.

Into The US: An Ethnographic Exploration of the US Trajectory

Having traced the historical development of Santo Daime up to this point in the paper, I turn now to its contemporary expressions in the United States. Due to the scarcity of research on US Santo Daime, this turn requires an accompanying turn in source material. Whereas bibliographic sources adequately supported tracing the history, ethnographic research was necessary to understand the role of spirit possession in US Santo Daime. I focused my own ethnographic studies on one particularly community in the Western United States—Céu das Alturas. Through a myriad of connections and synchronicities, I reached out to Brian Wesley, the protector⁷⁷ of this Santo Daime “point.” Over the course of three months, I attended three works, interviewed members of the community, and immersed myself in the lifestyle of the Céu

⁷⁵ Groisman, “Trajectories,” 196.

⁷⁶ Groisman, “Trajectories,” 197.

⁷⁷ As the leaders of the churches are called

das Alturas.

The idea of the religious project is put forth by Alberto Groisman to understand the glocalization of Santo Daime in the Netherlands. I argue that his idea of the religious project translates to US Santo Daime. The project of US Santo Daime could be understood as navigating the tension between the desire to maintain Brazilian origins of the tradition—with its plural religiosity and Catholic roots—while in its newfound American Protestant setting—with its disenchantment and secularization. Tours of Brazilian Padrinhos and Madrinhas throughout the US, Brazilian retreats for US *daimistas*, and the allegiance to the Cefluis organization demonstrate the continual consolidation of the practice internationally. US Santo Daime churches try to keep up to date with Brazilian practice. Typically, and understandably, US Santo Daime churches adopt and adapt to the changes as they are made in Brazil (typically by the hegemonic urban middle class); most US Santo Daime churches do not, at least dramatically, alter the tradition. However, changes do occur within the process of migration and glocalization. American *daimistas* navigate the tensions between local and global, the US and Brazil, and Protestantization and Santo Daime in the ritual arena of spirit possession.

Spirit Possession De-Emphasized: A Predictable Protestantization

We had just concluded the King's Day work with two other US Santo Daime churches. The ceremony lasted about eight hours—the entire time singing in Portuguese and dancing simple steps in unison—imbibing the Daime periodically throughout. As we drove home at 4:30 a.m., Adam, an experienced *daimista* who regularly attends many ayahuasca-oriented events, shared with Brian, “Sometimes during the works, I feel this

dark energy come into me, and it's frightening, and I do not know what to do." Brian offered his advice, "You have to anchor yourself in Love and Light, try to connect with your higher self, really visualize it." Knowing that Brian had "been with the Daime" for 17 years, I sat in the back of the car, listening intently to his advice on how to navigate the Daime experience. "There should only be enough room in you for you...If you start attracting other entities and start working in that manner, it can be distracting." Brian made sure to say that this was his opinion, and it's not one that's necessarily shared by the international Santo Daime community. Brian is not against mediumship in general, but rather he explained, "It is not taught at Céu das Alturas."

While helping Diane—Brian's wife and co-leader of Céu das Alturas—chop carrots for dinner, she explained to me, "The mediumship feels like a distraction, like fiddling around in the muck. But I cannot deny that it happens to me, though!"

"Does it happen during the Daime works?" I inquired.

"In works, it hasn't happened since we restarted our church. Before, at works led by the Brazilian Padrinhos, I would get my ass so fucking kicked. I would be puking for days and I just could not deal. I feel like I am too open and beings would just come in, and my physical body couldn't stay grounded and deal with the energy."

She continued chopping and explaining, "For me, it feels like a huge distraction. The whole time I am suffering and feel like I'm getting my ass kicked for no reason, or it feels like there's no reason, and I don't understand it."

Pointing to her body and circling her hands, she said with excitement, "This is my space for me to do my work."

She briefly went to the stove to sprinkle powdered garlic on the broccoli. Then, Diane paused from her cooking preparation, and turned quickly to me with a big smile,

“Recently, though, I have felt like I am channeling my higher self. I feel like when I sing I am in an altered state that is bigger than me, and it makes me shake and it feels really good. That’s really new.” This surprised me—Diane understood mediumship to be distracting but was excited about channeling her higher self.

Michael echoed this sentiment about channeling his higher self when we met for health drinks one afternoon. We met at a juice bar, where I found him sipping a bright green drink called ‘Ancient amazon illuminare,’ which he described as “powerful.” Michael—a father of two young children, husband, workshop leader for educators, and PhD student—has been attending Céu das Alturas for about a year. When we talked about the previous work that we both attended, he shared, “This is going to sound strange, but I felt like I was kind of tapped by....” He paused, “I can’t explain it. It was like inhabiting me, saying ‘You need to do this. You need to stay at the table and hold the space, and this is good medicine for you.’”

He reflected on the experience more: “I got a whole new picture of what it means to be the ‘I AM’ presence, the notion that we are divine. I felt my higher divine being. I felt it really strongly and inhabiting every cell of my body, and there was a point when I was standing at the table and I don’t know if I saw my body, but I saw something else, like something else had stepped into my body, something really strong and powerful and Godly. And then I was merged with That and there was no separation between me and That. And that was the juice that I was just like, ‘Fuck...wow!’ That’s what drove me through the whole work. I was just like, ‘This is amazing!’”

“Was it something else that stepped into you?” I asked.

“No. It wasn’t anything else. It was my higher self,” Michael replied matter-of-factly.

Later that night, we sat at the table—the same table used for the works and where Diane and Brian had channeled their higher selves—and ate the yummy carrot-ginger soup Diane prepared during our conversation. At all the works I attended around that table, the de-emphasis on spirit possession was apparent. There were no rituals specifically intended to catalyze possession and I never observed anyone having a possession experience. With the hymn-choice, singing, dancing, silent meditation, and time lying down, there was simply no time to work with spirits or have a full-on expressive possession experience at Céu das Alturas.

Evident from the works I attended at Céu das Alturas and in the remarks of Diane, Brian, and Michael is a de-emphasis on spirit possession. The lack of spirit-oriented activity at their church and in their remarks reflects the Protestant-inflected influences on the modern West. Weber's notion of disenchantment and Charles Taylor's understanding of modern selves as buffered help us understand why the de-emphasis on spirit-possession may occur in the US. The disenchantment of the modern world, according to Weber, means rationalization and secularization. This rationalization and secularization resulted in the conception of the human being as "disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity."⁷⁸ In being disenchanted of our mystical nature, Weber states that we "need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed."⁷⁹ In regard to religion, disenchantment led to the rejection of the sacramental mediate for salvation. Weber, influenced by Calvin, maintains that humans

⁷⁸ Weber, Max. "Science as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and eds H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 129-156.

⁷⁹ Weber, Max. "Science as a Vocation," 129-156.

cannot mediate salvation since it implies that humans can influence the will of God.⁸⁰ Since disenchantment meant that the road to salvation no longer included sacramental mediations, “the believer could be reassured of their salvation through either being a vessel of the Holy Spirit (Luther) or as a tool of the divine will (Calvin).”⁸¹ In light of this disenchanted modernity, one that has been thoroughly intertwined with Protestantism, we would expect Santo Daime to either not take root in the US because of its emphasis on sacramental mediation and possession rituals—which is clearly not the case—or we would expect practitioners to de-emphasize spirit possession in the US, much like the de-emphasis that occurred with its contact with esoteric teachings such as Anthroposophy and Rosicrucianism—which is the case as Céu das Alturas suggests.

Additionally, Charles Taylor associates the modern, disenchanted self as buffered and the pre-modern self as porous. He defines a buffered self as “essentially the self which is aware of the possibility of disengagement. And disengagement is frequently carried out in relation to one’s whole surroundings, natural and social.”⁸² Brian reflected an understanding of the modern buffered self when he said, “There should only be enough room in you for you.” The porous self, Taylor states, characterized a pre-modern “earlier enchanted world.”⁸³ This porous self of the earlier enchanted world is “vulnerable, to spirits, demons, cosmic forces. And along with this go certain fears which grip it in certain circumstances.”⁸⁴ In Santo Daime rituals that encouraged a more porous conception of the self, Diane experienced a vulnerability in which she got her “ass so fucking kicked.” Even more, she simply did not understand the purpose of

⁸⁰ Anthony J. Carroll, S.J., “Disenchantment, Rationality, and the Modernity of Max Weber.” *Forum Philosophicum* 16 (2011): 119.

⁸¹ Another J. Carroll, S.J., “Disenchantment,” 119.

⁸² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 42.

⁸³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

⁸⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

working with those spirits. Also, the buffered self of modernity, continues Taylor, can “see the boundary as a buffer, such that the things beyond don’t need to ‘get to me.’”⁸⁵ When Brian advised Adam to ground himself in “Love and Light, and really visualize it,” he was literally describing how to create a buffer of love and light so that entities and influences like the “darkness” did not “get to him.” This buffer would help him focus on his inner work. As Taylor points out, however, the buffered self has the ability to let its buffer become more porous at its choosing. For *daimistas*, allowing their “higher self” to merge with their bodily self may be a time to be less buffered and more porous. However, they do not recognize their “higher self” as something other than their self, as they would spirit or entity, so they do not find this type of channeling distracting. Focusing on the “higher self” and buffering oneself with light and love demonstrates the typically discussed Protestantization of disenchantment and secularization.

Finally, the majority of US *daimistas* grew up in another tradition in the Protestant atmosphere of the US and became involved with Santo Daime later in life. Their cultural background may have a limited or negative view of spirit possession. Thus, Céu das Alturas’ leadership, despite being deeply devoted to Santo Daime for nearly two decades, have found spirit possession to be “distracting.” In fact, in the US, a fear of demonic possession persists in contemporary culture. For example, the ABC network aired a program of an exorcism of a 16-year old believed to be demonically possessed in 1991, clearly demonstrating “the very currency of belief in demonic possession in American society, and the search for its alleviation through the ancient ritual of exorcism.”⁸⁶ Also, popular entertainment often includes “possession by demons

⁸⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

⁸⁶ Erik Bourguignon, *Possession* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1991), 3.

or unclean spirits” or “spirits of the dead prolonging their existence in other bodies.”⁸⁷ The possession beliefs of the Christian churches find their justification in the New Testament, where “Jesus drove out devils and healed possessed persons.”⁸⁸ For modern individuals, possession does not constitute the fabric of daily life, but represents something predominantly only found in popular entertainment. In cases where spirit possession does work its way into the fabric of daily life, the examples all point to a negative or fearful understanding of spirit possession in the US. Not only does the de-emphasis on spirit possession stem from disenchantment present in American Protestantism, but to the extent that spirit possession persists in popular culture, it is frightening and negative, and not something people seek. One would think that, on the whole, most Americans lack the cultural background of spirit possession to be willing to invest the time to learn how to work with the spirits, or even see the point or possibility of learning—especially when channeling one’s “higher self” feels so good for participants and aligns with the disenchanted nature of Protestant America.

Spirit Possession Emphasized: An Alternative Protestantization

In a yoga studio, we had been singing hymns and dancing for hours—all the while navigating the potent effects of the Daime—and it finally came time for a break from the rigid dancing and singing. The *diversões* were a time to lay or sit down, and other *daimistas* shared hymns they had “received.” I sat against a wall in the yoga-studio with my eyes closed, enjoying the melodic guitar and harmonious singing. All of a sudden, the loud sounds of coughing and vomiting melded with the music. Marsha—the small,

⁸⁷ Bourguignon, *Possession*, 4.

⁸⁸ Bourguignon, *Possession*, 4.

grey-haired woman who led one of the Santo Daime churches—was in the corner vomiting into a bucket, facing the altar. She was clad in the traditional white dress overlapped with a green skirt, the rainbow-colored tassels, and silver tiara. It surprised me that the musicians did not miss a beat with Marsha’s loud purging echoing throughout the room. Everyone reacted—or rather did not react—as though this was a typical occurrence. She smiled the entire time, and wiped mouth clean with a tissue before returning to her seat at the altar table to continue singing.

After the ceremony, I learned that just before she “purged,” she had made a “compact” with a suffering spirit. When I interviewed Michael, who has been attending Céu do Las Alturas monthly ceremonies for over a year, he noted to me, “Right before she was in the corner purging, [she] was brining on this person’s suffering and pain.” This type of work—bringing in and working with the suffering spirits to help them move on from their pain—characterizes Santo Daime under Amazonian and Umbanda influences, as noted in the historical trajectory above.

During my dinner with Brian and Diane, I learned that in regard to spirit possession, “the Brazilian Padrinhos—they are into it!” Diane elaborated, “This one Padrinho would open a work, and then a work within the work, just for working with entities...There are a lot of people who feel like they work with the *orixas* directly.” Brian added that the “work within work” mentioned above attracted around 200 enthusiastic American *daimistas*. Another *daimista* from my fieldwork excitedly told me a story about a Padrinho coming to the US and leading a work that included both drinking *daimé* and peyote, and working strictly with Native American spirits.

Brian and Diane further informed me that spirit possession is taking off so quickly and rampantly in the US that in places like Oregon, where Santo Daime enjoys a

fully recognized legal status and an independent source of Daime, they are creating new rituals—called Illumination works—specifically tailored to the expressive incorporation of the *orixas* and other entities. In fact, during my own time in Oregon,⁸⁹ I was unable to meet with any *daimistas* because most were at a mediumship workshop occurring the same weekend.

As evident in Brian and Diane’s comments, Marsha’s compact and purging, and the space given to the Brazilian Umbanda influenced Padrinhos and Madrinhas, it seems that not only are the Brazilian Padrinhos “into it,” but so are Americans. From their attending spirit possession works, developing their own, and hosting workshops, it seems that “Americans are thirty for spirit possession,” as I was informed by Bill Barnard, the most prominent US scholar of Santo Daime.

The emphasis on spirit possession in many of US Santo Daime churches demonstrates that Protestantism characterized by buffered selves and disenchantment does not influence the tradition in a predictable, uniform manner. In fact, Santo Daime’s US manifestations have resulted in re-enchantment and an emphasis on spirit possession. On the whole, US Santo Daime encourages interaction with the spirit world, and it is only on the rise—with new rituals being made and *daimistas* inviting Brazilian Padrinhos to the US who are “into it.” Additionally, some young people in US Santo Daime church may even think of themselves as “up and coming mediums.” While the existing scholarship on immigrant traditions would suggest a de-emphasis on spirit possession due to Protestantism’s disenchanting influence, what I learned about US

⁸⁹ I was in Portland, OR for reasons unrelated to the study of Santo Daime. I was interviewing for medical school. However, while I was there I attempted to meet up with some contacts to supplement my understanding of US Santo Daime.

Santo Daime suggests that American Protestantism can *also* exert an enchanting influence. In the US, American *daimistas* emphasize spirit possession and interaction with the spirit world, and the influence of this enchanting emphasis can be linked to Protestantism.

While it may be argued that this emphasis on spirit possession points to the limits of Protestantization, it may as well simply point to a more expansive understanding of what Protestantization entails. This emphasis on spirit possession that has occurred in US Santo Daime may support lesser discussed forms of Protestantism that actually promote enchantment, rather than the opposite. Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Restless Souls* may help us understand this type of "Protestantization" that encourages enchantment.

Schmidt argues that the enchanted world of American "spirituality"—characterized by eclectic devotions, creedal crossings, consumer sampling and individualistic expression—stems from historical roots in 19th century liberal Protestantism rather than the persistence of occultism or the revival of Gnosticism.⁹⁰ In the US, liberalism came together as a radical form of Protestant Christianity.⁹¹ Horatio Dresser, Harvard-educated metaphysician saw religious liberalism as a "momentous movement that affected one denomination after another."⁹² The effects of religious liberalism emerging out of Protestant groups "decidedly opened up the spiritual life to Emersonian self-reliance and therapeutic well-being."⁹³ The characteristics of religious liberalism—the individual aspiration after mystical experience, valuing of silence and solitude, the immanence of the transcendent in each person and nature, and the

⁹⁰ Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 6 and 10.

⁹¹ Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 11.

⁹² Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 12.

⁹³ Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 12.

emphasis on creative self-expression and adventure seeking—inspired people in liberal Protestant communities.⁹⁴ These values with roots in liberal Protestant traditions inspired liberal pilgrims, such as Emerson and Thoreau, to traverse “an increasingly disenchanted and divided terrain that they sought to reanimate and make whole through a universalized religion of the spirit.”⁹⁵ Through the lives and legacies of influential people such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, W.E.B. De Bois, William James, and all whom they inspired, “disaffected Unitarians and their liberal kin did have a sweeping effect on American religious life and the spiritual aspiration of vast numbers of Americans.”⁹⁶ Far from all Protestantisms becoming disenchanted, a surprising number of enchanted Protestants actually saw the immanence of the transcendent, in both people and nature.

Emerging from Protestantism, this type of religious liberalism that gave way to contemporary American “spirituality” could be argued to be another Protestantizing force in immigrant traditions—this one characterized not by disenchantment but by precisely its opposite. Especially as new traditions arrive in the US, people who hold the values of religious liberalism will “Protestantize” the traditions in quite different direction than typical notions of Protestantism might suggest. US Santo Daime is perhaps the best case study to uncover this type of enchanting Protestant influence in the US. Because of the psychoactive nature of its sacrament, Santo Daime attracts many people whom identify with Schmidt’s depiction of American “spirituality” and exhibit Horatio Dresser’s characteristics of religious liberalism. These people can be thought of as heirs of 19th century liberal Protestantism, which is why I have given them the term

⁹⁴ Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 12.

⁹⁵ Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 13.

⁹⁶ Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 14.

“Emersonian” Protestants. For the most part, there have not been organized traditions that attract “Emersonian” Protestants. Thus, they have wandered as individuals, carrying this historical legacy of Protestantism with them inadvertently. They have been wandering pilgrims seeking to “reanimate” the disenchanting terrain. For those who have made it to Santo Daime, they have found a home in a tradition that combines their religiously liberal values with a ritual framework, community, and worldview. The American spirituality crafted by seekers, as a culture and within individuals, brings an enchanted American constituency to Santo Daime. Therefore, upon their arrival to Santo Daime, they are “thirsty for spirit possession.” They are not only open to the spirit possession rituals, but are excited to give it a whirl, push its limits, and further enchant US Santo Daime.

While some of those imbued with this sense of American spirituality—“Emersonian” Protestants—have found a home in US Santo Daime, many continue to wander individually, and try out new traditions or practices. If they stick around long enough in a tradition, then they may just happen to enchant the tradition through their unique type of Protestantization. As society marches further into modernity, perhaps more of these “Emersonian” Protestants will reengage with organized traditions and re-enchant them—or at least not disenchant them. For example, even in the case of Céu das Alturas where Protestant disenchantment does de-emphasize the role of spirit possession, the community does not completely disenchant Santo Daime to the point of negating the spirit world. The enchanted world of spirits still exists, but the community chooses to promote buffering oneself from it. Perhaps, this type of enchanting “Emersonian” Protestantism has been influencing traditions since the mid-19th century, but we lacked the theoretical means to understand it, or even look for it, due to our

limited view of the Protestant influence. In all, the many views on spirit possession within US Santo Daime churches demonstrate that the Protestant influence on new traditions is neither consistent nor predictable as previously thought.

Conclusion

Brazil, in general, was traditionally a country that received inflows of migrants; however, the flow has been reversed since the mid-1980s—the same time Santo Daime began to move out of the rainforest, to the urban centers, and then around the world.⁹⁷ The Brazilian diaspora has much to teach the rest of the world. Overall, the diversity of Brazil highlights what is true of the globalized world: “Widespread flows of people, capital, goods, and ideas make it increasingly invalid to map the world according to the tidy logic of one nation, one culture, one religion, one history, and one self-contained social transformation.”⁹⁸ In reality, a country’s ethos cannot be narrowed to one concept. Typically, scholars conceptualize the US as a nation saturated in Protestantism. While the evidence does reveal that a generalized translocal Protestant ethos permeates, it also suggests other forms of Protestantism and, therefore, other ways to conceptualize the Protestantization of global phenomena such as Santo Daime. Originating in 20th century Brazil—the country that highlights the invalidity of “one nation, one culture, one religion” in the global world—Santo Daime and its translocation to the US can help scholars see the invalidity of one Protestantization.

In this essay, I have attempted to place US Santo Daime into larger conversations about globalization and religion. Utilizing Andrew Dawson’s work, I traced the historical

⁹⁷ Manuel A. Vasquez and Cristina Rocha, "Introduction: Brazil in the New Global Cartography of Religion," in *The Diaspora of Brazilian Religions*, eds Cristina Rocha and Manuel A. Vasquez (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 8.

⁹⁸ Vasquez, "Introduction," 3.

trajectory of spirit possession in Brazil, and extended that trajectory into the US through my own ethnographic research. Andrew Dawson's history presented a relatively monolithic understanding of how other traditions influenced spirit possession in Santo Daime. Before my ethnographic research, I thought I would find a similar pattern in the US with our translocal Protestant influence, which has been discussed by many scholars as affecting immigrant traditions in a relatively predictable manner. I thought I would find spirit possession to be de-emphasized in US Santo Daime since typical "Protestantization" entails disenchantment and secularization. The secular individuals and Protestants in the US, at least their majorities, do not have the rich history of spirit possession that present in Brazil. Therefore, I thought spirit possession would be less emphasized in the US setting. I found instead a complicated web of varying views, some of which de-emphasized possession, and some of which emphasized its role. I traced these various views to different types of Protestantization, including what Leigh Schmidt calls "American spirituality," which he argues to be an outgrowth of 19th century Protestant liberalism. I give the name "Emersonian" Protestants to the Americans who exhibit American "spirituality," and I see their flavor of Protestantization continually enchanting US Santo Daime. Protestantization, therefore, plays out in unpredictable and varying ways.

In conclusion, I argue that we need to re-conceptualize how we study immigrant traditions, both those adopted by Americans and those brought by immigrants. In the global world, we can no longer rely on a formula to understand how traditions change intra- or internationally. Through my brief immersion in US Santo Daime—utilizing ethnographic methods—I came to a different understanding of Protestantism and Protestantization in the US than I would have simply relying on bibliographic research

alone. Engaging with other communities may highlight various types of Protestantism and the multitude of ways those Protestantisms can Protestantize a tradition. Moreover, engaging with communities could even uncover that Protestantism no longer acts as the main translocal factor in the US. In light of this study of US Santo Daime, I would suggest for scholars to include the effects of “Emersonian” Protestantization in their repertoire of understanding the American Protestant influence, or perhaps not use the concept of Protestantization at all. It appears that in the glocalized world, with its airplanes and the Internet, using a monolithic approach to study how people and traditions respond to novel phenomena may simply be inadequate—and it may have been all along.

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