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# Ritual Performance of the Santo Daime Church in Miami: Co-constructive Selves in the Midst of Impediments to Local Acculturation

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

RITUAL PERFORMANCE OF THE SANTO DAIME CHURCH IN MIAMI:  
CO-CONSTRUCTIVE SELVES IN THE MIDST OF IMPEDIMENTS TO LOCAL  
ACCULTURATION

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ART

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Alfonso Matas

2014

To: Interim Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Architecture and the Arts

This thesis, written by Alfonso Matas, and entitled Ritual Performance of the Santo Daimé Church in Miami: Co-Constructive Selves in the Midst of Impediments to Local Acculturation, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Andrea Mantell-Seidel

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Albert Kafui Wuaku

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Ana Maria Bidegain, Major Professor

Date of Defense: June 27, 2014

The thesis of Alfonso Matas is approved.

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Interim Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts and Sciences

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Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi  
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2014

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Michele. Without her patience, understanding, and support, the completion of this work would not have been possible.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the members of my committee for their support, patience, and good humor. Their gentle but firm direction has been most appreciated. Dr. Andrea Seidel was particularly helpful in guiding me and getting me on track when I lost direction. Dr. Albert Wuaku's dominion over theory and methodology was instrumental in order to produce a solid and grounded academic document. Finally, I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Ana Maria Bidegain. From the beginning, she had confidence in my abilities to not only complete this MA degree with distinction, but to pursue further PhD work in order to continuing my research into the fascinating world of new religious movements. I have found my coursework throughout the Curriculum and Instruction program to be stimulating and thoughtful, providing me with the tools with which to explore both past and present ideas and issues.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

RITUAL PERFORMANCE OF THE SANTO DAIME CHURCH IN MIAMI:  
CO-CONSTRUCTIVE SELVES IN THE MIDST OF IMPEDIMENTS TO LOCAL  
ACCULTURATION

by

Alfonso Matas

Florida International University, 2014

Miami, Florida

Professor Ana Maria Bidegain, Major Professor

A syncretic religion born in the 1930s in the Amazonian jungle, Santo Daime today is an international flag-bearer in the evolving New Religion Movement (NRM) landscape. Shamanic power, nature veneration, universal love and the quest for a transcendental divine experience thanks to the psychoactive indigenous plant medicine ayahuasca define the Santo Daime allure for a new middle class disenchanted with capitalism. Church acculturation issues in Miami are linked to a rigid and grueling ritual, pervasive Catholic ethos and a lack of internal bureaucracy leading to declining membership threatening the very survival of the church in Miami. Research methods include ethnographic work, literature review, personal interviews and the exegesis of sacred hymns or hinarios. Relaxing the ritual military ethos and improved marketing on the New-Age religiosity marketplace among others would help Santo Daime acculturate better in Miami, an ideal incubator city for evaluating the melting-pot of migrant, Latin American and Caribbean religions into this region.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Efforts by the Santo Daime church to extend its influence and reach all continents hark back to 1980. The Santo Daime religious movement in the U.S. today comprises thirty churches in twenty-one cities and twelve states.

The existent Santo Daime literature currently sings the praises of its growing penetration into Brazil's urban centers and most recently its global expansion (Labate and Pacheco, 2011). Generally speaking, it is assumed Santo Daime is gaining widespread acceptance within the ranks of a new modern urban middle-class, as per the recently published work "Santo Daime: A New World Religion" by Edward Dawson, a leading scholar on the subject. According to Dawson, the typical global Santo Daime member or *aficionado* hails from this modern post-industrial middle-class. Although Dawson tempers such a claim, his perspective also does not stress the fact that beyond Brazilian frontiers inducted church members or so-called *Daimistas* actually comprise an infinitesimal subset of this new middle class.

Though *Daimistas* are indeed getting excited about such claims of international expansion, this process has been saddled with an array of problems from its very inception. Difficulties in the spreading out of Santo Daime in the United States of America is evident in the case of *Ceu da Lua Cheia*, the Santo Daime church in Miami which I will focus on. The actual illegality of the *ayahuasca* brew--because of its dimethyltryptamine (DMT) content which is classified as a 'Schedule I' drug--in the vast majority of host communities remains the most prominent issue. To this day, the Santo

Daime religious ritual involving the consumption of *daime* (or *ayahuasca*) is legally protected only in a handful of countries, including Peru, Brazil, Chile and The Netherlands.

In the present study, I will argue that moved by a desire to maintain at all cost its Brazilian military-style ethos, the Santo Daime Church hence is resisting accommodation to secular modernity, offering instead new perceptions of an objective world order. Among other things, this pervasive martial attitude is impeding the natural acculturation process from smoothly unfolding; a situation, which is affecting the Miami church singularly. Santo Daime resistance to becoming “Americanized” poses the imminent danger this church may in fact become extinct on U.S. shores.

Santo Daime difficulties in acculturating overseas is reflected in a very small membership, in fact is no more than 350 inducted members in the U.S. (Santo Daime census 2004). As for the Miami church, its membership has declined by 15 percent in the last four years, reflecting an even dimmer reality than the rest of the country. This slow rate of growth is in stark contradiction with the hundreths who join the church every year in Brazil.<sup>1</sup> The Miami portion of Santo Daime’s extension to the USA, the focus of this study, demonstrates this trajectory and offers the opportunity for investigating its causes.

### **Research Purpose**

Using the Santo Daime church in Miami as a case study, the purpose of the present research is to investigate and explain the difficulties--cultural and otherwise--

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<sup>1</sup> Estimated figures as of 2002 put Santo Daime church membership in Brazil at some 5000 members. As the largest Santo Daime group, CEFLURIS represents some 4000 of the total.

stifling the expansion of Santo Daime in the USA. Miami's pluralistic religious ethos renders this city an ideal testing-ground for evaluating the receptivity of migrating Latin-American and Caribbean religions currently flowing into this region.

Another theme being explored in this research is the extent to which New-Age religiosity--a clustering of New Religion Movements (NRMs) and secularization forces, and a fitting religious classification for Santo Daime--is hindering Santo Daime acculturation in Miami. From a broader perspective, my research will attempt to identify the effects assimilation has on Santo Daime within the context of Miami's increasingly pluralized and secularized modern milieu.

### **Research Questions**

The research on which this thesis is based sought to explore the following questions. What are the factors contributing to Santo Daime challenges and difficulties in acculturating within the greater Miami community? How are church leaders responding as they are faced with this apparent lack of interest from the dominant majority? To what extent does the process of self-discovery born out of the *ayahuasca*-based Santo Daime ritual itself support or obstruct acculturation? To what extent does the illegality of *ayahuasca* hamper the process of acculturation? Is the advent of New-Age religiosity obstructing or enabling the expansion of Santo Daime in Miami? Is the powerful Santo Daime "work" (*trabalho* or ritual) hindering or, *au contraire*, fostering the growth of Santo Daime in Miami? From a broader institutional perspective, the critical question is: How can the future continuation of the institutional order, now established *ex nihilo*, be best assured?

## Hypothesis

My thesis is hereby shaped by various interrelated theories. One of these is that out of a desire to preserve its Brazilian military-style ethos the Santo Daime Church is refusing to accommodate itself to Miami's secular modernity. Concomitant to this is the theory that, since New-Age religiosity promotes the incessant quest for new experiences at the heart of a religious market-place, individuals are hence no longer motivated to commit to a single religion. This attitude in truth impedes the loyalty inherently needed for Santo Daime membership, further exacerbating assimilation issues. Additionally, I purport the inherent difficulties characterizing a Santo Daime ritual--namely its physically exhausting quality, how expensive it is to participate, how long it lasts and other burdensome pre-ritual requirements--can discourage a public increasingly giving in to the sirens of convenience and comfort insofar as religious matters are concerned. Last but not least, the enduring illegality of *ayahuasca*--as observed here in Miami--is clearly hindering Santo Daime assimilation in the U.S. at large.

Two theories, each dealing with conditions that either foster or impede religious institutional change from occurring provide intellectual frames to support my thesis. The first theory is linked to the ideas of the German Sociologist Max Weber. Other findings of the research lead directly to the contemporary debate developed around the forces of secularization and pluralism where Peter Berger figures prominently.

Max Weber's analysis of the transitioning from charismatic domination to bureaucratic authority in the context of religious institutions is an important frame for analyzing the Santo Daime church impediments to acculturation in Miami. Weber explores the death of the charismatic founder of a religion and the ensuing gradual

transformation that needs to take place if the religion is to survive (Pals 2006, p157). According to Weber, the brand of charismatic authority associated with the founder must be converted into a priestly or bureaucratic type of authority so as to ensure institutional continuity. He identifies this process as the “routinization of charisma.” This involves the creation of formal structures and a stable matrix of norms, roles and statuses that would enable the religious group to survive the death of its charismatic leader. Weber argues that, the following transformation must take place if the community is to survive and be spared divisive conflicts amongst followers. To begin with, one must garner the founder's oral teachings and translate them into sacred cannon or sacred writing. Furthermore, a systematized rule of creed must be elaborated so as to nurture favorable membership conditions and hence simplify teaching. Should the community itself become at odds with wider society, then apologetic writing defending said religion also becomes necessary. Worship and regulations must also be standardized. Finally, church members must mobilize under the helm of official lines of authority and function in a way that separates "clergy" from "laity." Ideally, this routinization of charisma should be embodied in a constitution as well (Livingston 2009, 132).

In my study I argue that the mother Santo Daime church in Brazil had not completed this process of transitioning before the need to extend its influence globally. Santo Daime is still experiencing growing pains as it attempts to transition from a charismatic movement to a formal religious movement. For example, the oral teachings and practices of the church founder--a charismatic figure--have not been systematized into an official cannon, a situation that has created a significant degree of doctrinal confusion among those that may be potentially interested in this religion. Also, while the

Santo Daime church hails its sacred "hymns" as the official doctrine, these songs do not stand up to the test of standardization Weber required for conditions of membership. Likewise, instead of coming up with some form of explanation regarding the controversial use of *ayahuasca* that would enhance its universal acceptability, the church in Brazil has opted to remain silent. Given that this matter was settled in favor of the church in Brazil after a very serious inquiry by the Brazilian authorities, it would seem that leveraging off of this strong precedent should have been a *fait accompli*.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore the leadership in Brazil hardly had time to reflect on strategies that would enable the church's successful rooting in new cultural, socio-political and legal contexts.

In the chapters that follow I will argue that the difficulties faced by the portion of this group in Miami as it seeks to acculturate are linked to these unresolved questions by the mother church. In other words, the mother church's global agenda took off while still in the midst of its routinization process. *Ipsa facto*, its American extensions remain unprepared in the face of conditions they would need to overcome on U.S. soil so as to ensure operational success. I also intend to use an element of Peter Berger's theory of secularization to address the important question surrounding the Santo Daime prognosis for surviving in Miami. In his 1967 classic "The Sacred Canopy," Berger likens the activities associated with religiosity to those of the capitalistic market-place. While religions must contend with privatization, they must also deal with pluralism or a greater

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<sup>2</sup> In 1985 the Federal Narcotic Council (CONFEN) of Brazil completed an extensive study of the Santo Daime Church and Uniao do Vegetal (UDV) to determine whether the Brazilian government should permit use of the *ayahuasca* tea in the context of religious services. After traveling to many villages in the Amazon, visiting churches in various cities and observing Church services, members and their communities, the CONFEN found Church members should be permitted to use the sacramental tea for religious purposes.

diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society. According to Berger, this means religious traditions that previously could be authoritatively imposed now must be marketed. Just as it occurs with the real economy, the inherent pressure of competition moves organizations to downscale whatever differences exist between them. The net result, Berger claims, points to the pluralistic competition of many look-alike religions. Berger concludes by affirming the entire religious institutional field is hence undermined as the content of each religion is perceived rather as a kind of relative truth rather than objective fact. Given modern world conditions, Berger suggests two different options for religions: They can both accommodate themselves to the situation and play the pluralistic game subservient to consumer demand. Barring that, religions can refuse to accommodate themselves and consequently entrench behind whatever socio-structures they are able to maintain or construct. The time and space fluidity this model affords plays well with modern ideas of NRM membership. It has been theorized NRM membership is approached as a sort of religious market-place whereby consumers--empowered by the notion of free choice--consequently pick and choose from a smorgasbord of religious discourses, without necessarily committing themselves to a single one. *Ipso facto*, and in the same vein as their for-profit counterparts, religious institutions would need to advertise their services as well. Given how reluctant Santo Daime is to proselytizing, this theory could indeed be very telling for this study.

### **Methodology**

Prior to conducting interviews I first had to secure permission from the church leadership to be able to approach fellow members. Access to my subjects therefore took



on an overtly formal tone. This approach served me well because a much-needed rapport hence was already built-in. This approach required a healthy dose of negotiation on my part, as interviewees needed to perceive me not as who I actually am but as the one “playing” the role of an ethnographer. I have to admit that not all *fardados/as* made themselves available to speak to me.

I conducted formal interviews with 27 individuals classified in four groups: Present-day inducted members, recurrent guests, members who had decided to leave the church as well as the leadership. Group demographics generally speaking can be characterized as educated middle-class working in the health services, the fine and performative arts and the educational sectors of the economy. Most are college-educated and some have advanced degrees. Several cultures and countries intersect at *Ceu da Lua Cheia*. In keeping with Miami statistics, roughly half are of Spanish-speaking descent--with countries from the Southern Cone being disproportionally represented--while the rest are Caucasian Americans. The rest hail from European countries such as Russia, France, and Turkey. There are no Asian or African members at *Ceu da Lua Cheia*. Ethnically-speaking everyone is Caucasian whilst some exhibit traces of *mestizo* blood. Only two Brazilians belong to the church.

The first member group encompassed ten *fardados/as* ranging in age between thirty-two and sixty-two years old. Recurrent guests added to eight people with an age range of twenty-eight to fifty-five. The four people who left the church were between twenty-six and forty years old. With regards to the leadership, I included everyone who ever sat at the Star Table. Out of this group of six, though, I was only able to interview three people aged thirty-five to forty-two. Finally, I had the opportunity to interview one

Church elder or *Padrinho*<sup>3</sup> as well as the personal secretary of a second one. Some of these interviews were scripted and sent via email. Others were more informal while many were not part and parcel of a structured interview as conversations often developed spontaneously, say after a ceremony. The meetings took place in public spaces such as Starbucks and Barnes & Noble bookstores or at my home in some cases. Some interviews were conducted over the phone. Most responses were provided verbally during the interview process while a few sent emails.

The interviewing process lasted almost a year beginning in February 2013. It ended on March 8, 2014 with my conversation with fifty-year-old *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto, considered one of the highest-profile Brazilian church leaders. Generally speaking, my interviews covered delineated research issues with questions arising as the process unfolded. I viewed my study subjects as imbued with a certain degree of consciousness and agency. I therefore endeavored to be as discerning as possible in the treatment of their personal accounts. My challenge was to convert personal experiences as told to a social product that could eventually relate the socio-cultural process that generate them.

In addition to interviews, I informed myself a great deal and participated in many meetings where topics of interest to the ethnographer often arise. Furthermore, I developed a very good rapport with the leaders of our church Alberto and Alejandra who also act as gatekeepers with great access to information. I also proved myself to be an

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<sup>3</sup> The appellation *Padrinho* and *Madrinha*, godfather and godmother respectively, is the term used to refer to church elders who have gained recognition as spiritual leaders. This is however not a title that is allocated but rather a colloquial way to refer to individuals who have established themselves as authority figures thanks to an ongoing production of *hinos* (hymns) or sacred texts.

active member willing to volunteer when necessary. My attitude served me well as I was invited to participate in the 2013 Santo Daime Church Annual Plenary Meetings, an event which propelled me before the entire Santo Daime organization in the U.S.

### **Ethnographic Grounding**

My analysis explores Santo Daime religiosity from the viewpoint of different church practitioners, present and former members as well as from the perspective of my own liminal status as an “outsider/insider” initiate. This is a term I will use to describe the predicament of an ethnographer trained in the academy but who concomitantly is an inducted member of a tradition. I understand that my outsider/insider positionality *vis-a-vis* the present study may influence various aspects of the study, for example the type of data collected or the way in which it is interpreted. It is clear that despite the privileges this positionality affords, it also comes with its own set of problems precisely because it is associated with such privileged status.

The first and foremost hurdle I experienced as a researcher was nothing less than the leadership’s unequivocal rejection of my project. The initial knee-jerk reaction of the Miami church leadership was that such investigation and associated writing would indeed compromise the church’s quintessential need for total secrecy. This was only a natural response to the fear of the exposure my ethnographic work could result in. Suffice it to say I was eventually able to address and diffuse such concerns and that I pursued my research with the full blessing of church leaders. Within the context of this research project, I was able to create and maintain a spirit of dialogue and collaboration with most other church members as well. I had to promise however to use maximum discretion

when it came to names, locations, or any other information revealing the identity of said church members or their ritual partaking. I have consequently changed the names of my informants as well as the name of all U.S. Santo Daime institutions, including the Miami church. I have also concealed the location where the ceremonies take place.

My positionality in the current study requires I place myself as another subject under observation. Hence, I not only am the author's voice but given how I am also part of the story, I have a subjective voice; I write from a first person perspective. As exemplified here, I have been privileged with opportunities afforded to me as a researcher trying to unravel this fascinating religion.

Although my research principally rests on interviews with both present-day and former members of the Miami Santo Daime church *Ceu da Lua Cheia* ("Heaven of the Full Moon"), my experience as an active church member has also facilitated my access to places, events and processes an outsider researcher would have been denied. I have visited and participated in ceremonies in at least three other U.S. churches in the states of New York, Texas and Maryland. As a consequence of this exposure, I have developed valuable connections amongst the Santo Daime followers who describe themselves as brethren. I have been privileged to interview *Padrinhos*, during their annual tours to the United States. I am generally described as a committed and helpful *fardado*, which has also opened doors for me insofar as access to additional social capital. This has positively contributed to the amount of resources available to me and therefore, to the depth and breadth of my work. The invitation to attend the seminal Annual Plenary Meetings that garner Santo Daime churches in the U.S. is an example of this privilege. These are unique

opportunities for exploring the many areas of interest and issues of contention confronted by churches in the U.S. as a whole, be they in the religious, political or legal spheres.

One important element regarding this particular post-modern way of carrying out ethnographic work is that the researcher must disclose his or her subjectivities and personal biases. Positionality in my case forces me to acknowledge my own power, privileges and biases. This is also understood as reflexivity; a turning back on ourselves. When this is done, we are accountable for our own research and who ultimately will benefit from it.

As I said, my positionality is to be personally involved and to tell the story as I see it. In addition to that, however, I would hope my work and findings would actually contribute to the evolution of this church in America and beyond. In this sense my positionality is rather activist.

There is no objective or subjective research. To be sure, postmodernists contend that truth and knowledge are plural, contextual, and historically produced via discourses. Put differently, I intend to direct my focus beyond subjective selves. The important thing is that my subjectivity will inform me as I am dialoguing with others. Subjectivity naturally occurs in the course of relationships with others.

### **What brought me to the Santo Daime church?**

A friend who had returned from Peru after spending a few days with a shaman and was engaged in intensive *ayahuasca* rituals introduced Santo Daime to me. This person was a member of the Santo Daime church in Miami, a city where she had lived all her life. She told me, in glowing terms, of how worshippers sang the most beautiful songs

in this church and how deeply worshippers could be moved by the simplest songs. This narrative drew my attention to the church. To use a common American expression, I was “hooked.” I had been trying to understand religion for some time, and was disillusioned about my lack of progress in this direction. Before this time I wore “two hats” when it came to religion. One was a religious non-faith oriented approach typical of religious study programs. This approach highlights phenomenology or the study of subjective structures of consciousness as experienced from a first-person viewpoint. The other one was more scientific, primarily centered on sociology and anthropology. My problem was really not with the latter but with the former. Even after my exposure to a repertoire of religious practices through Zen Buddhism, Yoga, A Course in Miracles (ACIM), *Vipassana* meditation--and having been brought up in the Catholic tradition--I still felt I was getting nowhere as far as the subjective “experience” of spirituality was concerned.

Obtaining permission to attend my first Santo Daime ritual required a long wait. As a consequence of the illegal nature of *ayahuasca* in the United States of America, the church is very reserved about inviting new people, a process that must be initiated by a church member. The waiting period includes a new-member orientation meeting, which I completed with three other individuals who were seeking to experience Santo Daime as well. Because of the lengthy waiting period and my eagerness to experiencing the effects of *ayahuasca*, I decided to participate in a different genre of *ayahuasca* ceremony conducted at a spiritual healing center in Miami. At this ceremony, which was conducted by a Peruvian shaman, I had an extraordinary and satisfying religious experience. Through this introduction I had the taste of the Santo Daime religious experience. Eventually, two months after my initial application to participate in a Santo Daime ritual,

I was contacted and invited to a “concentration” ritual. Just like my friend had described it, during this ritual I found myself surrounded by the effect of a Brazilian music sung in Portuguese from so-called *hinarios* (hymnals). The Santo Daime experience bolstered my conviction that the tradition had the answers I was seeking and culminated in my change of status as a regular participant in January 2011. After a year and a half of attending ceremonies as a “guest,” I decided to formally join the church and become a *fardado* or officially inducted church member.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review Of The Literature

Santo Daime literature focuses primarily on five areas of interest: Historical origins, syncretism, religion and shamanism (including vegetalism, curing and trance), psychiatry and psychology and finally international legal developments. Studies pertaining to expansion and cross-border movements have also been conducted of late. However, with the exception of Groisman and Dawson, little or nothing in the literature deals with the important theme of Santo Daime assimilation *vis-a-vis* other cultures. My own thesis questions the very viability of Santo Daime in Miami as an ongoing concern. Meanwhile, the aforementioned publications are more optimistic with regards to Santo Daime expansion overseas. I will provide below a brief review of the principal authors many of whom have delved into more than one of the just-cited areas of interest. I will hence identify the major scholars who have contributed to the repertoire of Santo Daime publications.

Collectively their work is posited within the larger framework aptly called the "Brazilian myth of the three races." This can be considered as a kind of original myth deciphering the many layers of Brazilian society. Authors from different historical time periods all echo a recurring narrative pertaining to the multi-ethnic roots of the Brazilian population. Such narrative has evolved over the past five centuries largely on the coattails of the cultural and biological "miscegenation" of indigenous natives, European colonizers, and slaves brought over from Africa.



The first major anthropological study of Santo Daime was a conference paper back in 1981 and later published by anthropologist Clodomir Monteiro da Silva (1985). The author believes Santo Daime is noteworthy for its “traces of medium-based religions of African acculturation” while the predominant influence is “Amerindian.” In another slightly more recent work, Monteiro (1983) defines Santo Daime as a religion that clearly mirrors the context of shamanic practices. Individual and collective shamanic trances by definition define this religion. The *Padrinhos*, in his view, are shamans and the *daime* is linked--as shamanism is--with the actual act of curing illnesses.

Monteiro da Silva (2004) pays more attention to the Afro-Brazilian influences present in Santo Daime, which he labels an “Afro-Amazonian” religion.

As contained in the work of Vera Froes Fernandes (1986), the preface written by Acre state Senator Mario Maia affirms that Santo Daime is “the result of a complex syncretism, where shades of exuberant ritual richness are mixed, combining fragments of Afro-Amerindian belief and culture that are interlaced with the practices and habits of popular Catholicism.”

Fernando de La Rocque Couto (1989) follows previous authors in noting the combination of elements from “native culture, represented by indigenous societies in the region” and the “colonizer’s culture, represented by poor northeasterners fleeing the droughts.” It is La Rocque Couto (1989) who develops the argument of so-called collective shamanism. According to this author, anyone partaking in the Santo Daime religious movement can go on shamanic flights. We are thus in the presence of a form of collective shamanism whereby everyone is a shaman’s apprentice or is a potential shaman in his or her own right.

Alberto Groisman (1991) produced a very good ethnography of the Santo Daime community in Ceu do Mapia. He claims the *daime* helps unlock the door to an “evolutionary eclecticism” in effect enabling coexistence “among diverse cosmological systems: Umbanda, Candomble, Kardecist spiritism and others, picked by adepts as they integrate themselves, and connected with other spiritual traditions.” This author has also researched Santo Daime’s expansion to other countries. Groisman produced a dense ethnography of Santo Daime groups in Holland where the first nucleus was established in 1993. He analyzed various dimensions of this expansion including what careers the leaders had, member profile and the specific nature of rituals in that country. Groisman also took a closer look at the state of relations between Dutch *Daimistas* and the leadership in Brazil and so on. His main concern was to study how Santo Daime is morphing into an international religion.

Edward MacRae (1992) remains to this day the most significant contribution to the arena of Santo Daime studies. MacRae affirms the *daime* was used from the beginning by urban populations during the urbanization process in Brazil. He recognizes remnants of “Amerindian traditions” and “rural northeastern culture.”

Sandra Goulart (1996) carries out a sophisticated analysis of the historical origins of Santo Daime. Akin to Monteiro da Silva (1983), Goulart positions Santo Daime at the very heart of the cultural and social reorganization that occurred after the end of the Rubber Boom. She also notes the eclectic nature of the *daime*’s cultural and religious borrowings and re-elaborations. She assigns however a more predominant role to age-old popular Catholicism in the structuring of Santo Daime social and institutional forms.

Arneide Cemin (1998) carried out pioneering research on the Alto Santo lineage, focusing especially on the “Esoteric Center of Currents of the Universal Light” (CECLU) in Porto Velho. Cemin claims one should not look for the roots of Santo Daime in the social changes affecting Amazonian society after the 1930s. Cemin explains they are rather found at the crossroads of “the religious culture of northeastern Brazil” and the “culture of the forest” in the last few decades of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century. She maintains the *Daimista* system is part and parcel of an *ayahuasca* shamanic tradition she calls the “culture of the Amazon forest.” She categorizes Santo Daime as a shamanic system.

Anaruez Morais (2001) proposes an original approach to Santo Daime focusing not on the religion and its symbolic system *per se* but rather on the group and its political dimension. Her project centers on the area of environmental psychology. Her hypothesis is that the Santo Daime community of the Ceu do Mapia located in the National Forest of Mapia/Inauini in Amazonia demonstrates a well-articulated humanist and autochthonous consciousness. In her opinion, this particular cultural manifestation is an essential part of the anti-systematic and resistant forces linked to neo-liberal imposition and hegemonic groups.

Per Luis Eduardo Luna (1986), there is another form of vine consumption besides the one associated with shamanism. Luna is referring to *vegetalismo*, a genre of popular medicine that uses plant hallucinogens, songs and diets. The *vegetalistas* are *curanderos* (healers) stemming from rural populations of Peru and Colombia who retain elements of ancient indigenous knowledge about plants. European esotericism and the urban milieu

have also influenced such *curanderos*. In addition, Luna published “Ayahuasca Visions,” a book of paintings by noted Peruvian healer and Artist Pablo Cesar Amarango (1991).

Andrew Dawson (2013) is a newcomer to the field focusing on new forms of religion in Brazil as well as imported and exported spiritual movements and New-Age organizations. His work situates the rise of new-era religiosity within the broader context of late-modern society and its ongoing transformation. In his latest book “Santo Daime: A New World Religion,” he explores many of its themes including the late-modern aspect of Santo Daime migration overseas.

Beatriz Labate (2011) is one of the most prolific modern researchers on the theme of Brazilian Religiosity. In her book “The Internationalization of Ayahuasca,” various authors ponder the spread of *ayahuasca* to the USA and Europe. The book argues that *ayahuasca* has now left the jungle and is here to stay despite legal challenges, namely the prohibition of DMT. The book also reviews the plethora of medical, psychological and pharmacological issues currently swirling around *ayahuasca*.

## CHAPTER 3

### Background and History of Santo Daime

My joining the ranks of Santo Daime in many ways paved the way for my growing interest in the historical backdrop of this most intriguing religion. History shows that Santo Daime drew its first breath in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century at a time when taming the Amazon jungle was a most difficult undertaking. Santo Daime founder Raimundo Irineu Serra and after him *Padrinho* Sebastiao, endured many hardships during those early years in the inhospitable Amazon. Not the least of which being the fact they often had to move their tent further into the jungle so as to escape actual persecution from the Brazilian government. The facts presented in the first part of this chapter will underscore how these arduous jungle living conditions per se were a breeding ground for the development of a pseudo-siege mentality for the Santo Daime community at large. This is especially the case for the Miami Santo Daime Church *Ceu da Lua Cheia* where this idea of needing to stand firm like a regimented battalion is firmly ingrained. These early conditions in Brazil also fed the millenarian outlook that tends to define Santo Daime. The second part of the chapter will reveal how this doctrine in actuality is a carefully-weaved rich tapestry of other independent religious rituals from the Tukano Indians in Brazil to African Umbanda and assorted popular Catholic motifs. A study of the early Santo Daime years also points to it being a new religion developed from the coalescence of Brazilian traditional cultural themes. The combination of the movement's historical siege mentality combined with its millenarian outlook contribute a great deal toward the general attitude of *Ceu da Lua Cheia* as it tries to adapt to the Miami social and religious landscape.

## Historical Origins of Santo Daime

Santo Daime followers consider 1930 the year their doctrine was founded. That was when Raimundo Irineu Serra, a corporal in the Territorial Guard, opened his *ayahuasca trabalho* (work) to the public in Rio Branco, capital of the state of Acre in northwestern Brazil. He had previously undergone a long initiation period involving many years learning alongside indigenous users of *ayahuasca* in the frontier region between Brazil, Peru and Bolivia. (McRae, 1992). Described as a very tall black man, he was born December 15, 1892 in São Vicente do Ferré, Maranhão, Brazil. He migrated to the Western Amazon in 1912 at the age of 19, along with others lured by the dream of amassing an easy fortune as rubber tappers. He settled down at first in Xapuri for two years and then on to Brasiléia where he worked for three years on rubber plantations. He then proceeded to Sena Madureira where he lived for another three years. During this period he also worked as a civil servant for the Border Commission, a federal government agency tasked with mapping out the Acre frontier with Bolivia and Peru (McRae, 1992). During those years spent working in the Amazon forest, he acquired a deep understanding of the local *caboclo* (local mixed-race Indians) population and its culture.

At one point in time, he befriended two brothers Antonio and André Costa, black men who also originated from his hometown. One of several narratives regarding Irineu Serra's first encounter with the *ayahuasca* brew (the other one being alongside the Tukano Indians) depicts how he learned about this drink through his interaction with these two brothers. Before I fully engage in the narrative at hand, an explanation of the *ayahuasca* medicine is in order.

## Ayahuasca: the Vine of the Soul

The etymological origin of the word *ayahuasca* actually tells it all, as in “Vine of the Dead” or “Vine of the Souls.” Other names for *ayahuasca* include *hoasca*, *caapi*, *yaje* and *daime*, as Santo Daime practitioners routinely call it. More specifically, the term “Aya” refers to a dead person or a soul, whereas “huasca” means a chord or a vine. According to Stephen Mizrach, the name *ayahuasca* takes root in the belief held by the Tukano Indians in particular that whomever ingested the vine would hence be able to climb the ethereal Milky Way, the galaxy encompassing our Solar System--also called “The White Road” or “Road of the Dead”--so as to join and commune with their ancestors (Mizrach, 2014). Ingesting the plant medicine *ayahuasca* was also believed to help creek open the doors to the Underworld so as to locate the sources of illness for ultimate healing of body, mind and soul.<sup>4</sup>

The vine (official name *Banisteriopsis caapi*) which is considered “male” can be found growing throughout South America’s Amazon jungle spanning Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador. Its pharmacological profile points to two main active ingredients harmine and harmaline, isolated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century from Syrian Rue, *Peganum harmala*. The Tukanos themselves reportedly also used the "cousin" species to *caapi*, *B. rusbyana* and *B. inoxians* (Mizrach, 2014). More importantly though, the Amazon Indians ingeniously figured out that the mild hallucinogenic properties of such vine

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<sup>4</sup> *Ayahuasca* is incidentally being researched as a treatment ranging from alcoholism and many forms of drug addiction such as cocaine (Naranjo, Claudio, 1974) all the way to grave illnesses such as cancer. Psychotherapy applications namely in the treatment of depression have also gained momentum in the past several years with many scientific studies underway. Positive outcomes of *ayahuasca* use in psychotherapy settings have included increased relaxation, heightened emotional wellbeing and increased self-knowledge (Villaescusa, 2002). Slithering throughout the body, the brew is said to undo emotional blockages and break down long-held resentments.

would be greatly enhanced by another plant additive. Hence the preparation of *daime* for a ceremony consists of brewing together such “male” vine with a “female” leaf, shrub or *chacrana* (official name *Psychotria viridis*). The vine is macerated and boiled and then further reduced many times, this time with the leaf. While the “male” vine is considered “grounding,” the “female” leaf in the end is the one that will confer the user with the potent psychedelic *miracaos* or divine visions so famously associated with *ayahuasca* ritualistic ingestion. Pharmacologically-speaking, the leaf contains the powerful hallucinogen N-N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT). When orally ingested, however, DMT alone will provide very little psychoactive effect, if any. Harmala alkaloids from the vine happen to be Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOs), a class of chemicals that bypass certain human gastric enzymes. When used in conjunction with MAO inhibitors, DMT thus is rendered orally active and potently so (Mizrach, 2014).

As far as its direct action on the brain--seeing that it crosses the blood-brain barrier-- DMT is closely associated with the all-important pineal gland. Hindus revere the pineal gland as the site of the Seventh or Crown Chakra, itself considered the gateway to the development of one’s spiritual nature. The French “Father of Modern Philosophy,” Rene Descartes in fact labeled the pineal gland the “Seat of the Soul” (Strassman, 2000). First, the physical effects on the body can be very potent with intense vomiting, diarrhea and the like, perceived as the body’s innately intelligent way of expelling toxins and pollutants (or *purgatorio*) so as to become more spiritual and connected with the divine. This is often a time of deep anxiety and discomfort for some people as the *daime* in fact “doctors” them. Santo Daime participants have reported everything from an onslaught of kaleidoscopic images to encounters with “entities,” angels and spirits. Some people attest



to journeying the astral flight. Most will feel overwhelmed by an all-encompassing feeling of universal love and compassion, while others will even report interactions with extra-terrestrial beings. Some brew drinkers also report visions of Christ or the Virgin Mary, the “Queen of the Forest.” The Tukano Indians originally reported visions of jaguars and snakes (Mizrach, 2014).

### **Santo Daime’s Initial Schism**

Santo Daime encompasses several largely independent religious groups. All of them claim to follow Mestre Irineu’s teachings while two of them stand out as the most significant. The first one is “Alto Santo” which is geographically restricted to the State of Acre. The main current of Alto Santo, or the “Alto Santo lineage,” is the *Centro de Iluminacao Crista Luz Universal* (The Universal Light Center of Christian Illumination). *Madrinha* Peregrina Gomes Serra, Irineu’s widow, leads this particular group located in Rio Branco, Acre (Labate & Pacheco, 2011). Two other well-known church elders *Padrinho* Luis Mendes and his son *Padrinho* Saturnino also form an integral part of this group as its most active members.

The most important Santo Daime faction, however, is *Centro Eclectico da Fluente Luz Universal Reimundo Irineu Serra* (The Reimundo Irineu Serra Eclectic Center of the Flowing Universal Light), or CEFLURIS.<sup>5</sup> This group claims allegiance to Sebastiao Mota de Melo or *Padrinho* Sebastiao, himself a former disciple of Irineu Serra, who

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<sup>5</sup> CEFLURIS was founded in 1974 in *Colonia Cinco Mil*. However, in 1988 this organization was “re-founded” when Ceu do Mapia became the national headquarter of the Church led by *Padrinho* Sebastiao. The greater purpose behind this move was the consolidation of all the Santo Daime groups belonging to this lineage, including newly formed overseas groups (CEFLURIS-NA Working Draft Copy, October 2003).

formed this splinter group subsequent to Irineu Serra's death and pursuant to the succession problems that ensued from that event. *Padrinho* Sebastiao himself passed away in the 1990s and was succeeded by his son Alfredo Gregorio de Melo or *Padrinho* Alfredo. *Padrinho* Sebastiao's widow, Rita Gregorio de Melo or *Madrinha* Rita also remains active within CEFLURIS (Labate & Pacheco, 2011).

### **The Supremacy of *Padrinho* Sebastiao**

*Padrinho* Sebastiao was the person behind the Santo Daime adoption of this line of spirituality. We are told that prior to becoming a member of Santo Daime he was known as a shaman figure who had received guidance from another shaman by the name of Mestre Oswaldo, a practitioner of Kardecist spiritism (Labate & Pacheco, 2011). By the time Mota de Mello joined Mestre Irineu in the Santo Daime church he was a consolidated medium. As reported, "he employed the mesa (table) works of spiritual incorporation of the spiritist tradition, where he "manifested" popular spirits such as Jose Berreza Menezes and Professor Antonio Jorge." (Labate & Pacheco, 2011). Furthermore, during the *Trabalhos de Estrela* (Star Works), another spiritist-related discourse, he frequently spoke in tongues--quite a common practice in the early Christian Church (Labate & Pacheco, 2011). Notions of reincarnation, spiritual evolution and ridding oneself of Karma to achieve salvation found nowadays within Santo Daime cosmology hark back to *Padrinho* Sebastiao's early endeavors with spiritism (Labate & Pacheco, 2011).

It should also be acknowledged that on his active path to gain spiritual knowledge, Mestre Irineu also became influenced by spiritualist traditions. At one point during his

trajectory he joined the *Circulo Esoterico de Comunhao do Pensamento* (the Esoteric Circle of the Communion of Thought), a Brazilian spiritualist society dedicated to developing humanity's latent mental and psychic powers, as well as the Rosicrucian order, a worldwide humanistic and spiritual society originating in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe (Labate & Pacheco, 2011).

### **Arriving at Ceu do Mapia**

When Mota de Mello joined the community of Santo Daime in Alto Santo, he decided to live on family land he acquired upon arriving in Acre in the 1950s. Known as “Colony 5000,” the family holding gradually became the focal point of communal Santo Daime activity. In 1981, however, the space was eventually abandoned as the police raided the community once they uncovered the widespread cultivation of cannabis. This shocking experience convinced *Padrinho* Sebastiao to remove himself from mundane preoccupations and the proximity to potential danger the authorities represented (Dawson, 2013). After a brief period in Rio do Oro where he remained for three years, he finally settled on a piece of land 150 kilometers away from what eventually became the village of Mapia or *Ceu do Mapia*. Established in 1983, the community today numbers approximately 1,000 permanent residents. Its present organization highlights a separation of religious and doctrinal responsibilities from the ecological and civic organization of the community. The first set of responsibilities now legally answers to ICEFLU or *Igreja do Culto Eclectico da Fluente Luz Universal* (Church of the Eclectic Cult of the Universal Flowing Light) while the second answers to the organization of IDA or

Institute *Desenvolvimento Ambiental* (Institute of Environmental Development).  
*Padrinho* Alfredo presently runs *Ceu do Mapia*.

### **The Collapse of the Rubber Boom in Northeast Brazil**

Although there is little reliable information on the subject, there are indications that the Costa brothers opened a religious center in the 1920's called *Circulo de Regeneracao e Fe* (Center for Regeneration and Faith) in the town of Brasiléia, Acre. Raimundo Irineu Serra also belonged to the group. The organization of the center--considered today by scholars to have been a forerunner to Santo Daime--obeyed a hierarchy design following military ranks ranging from "soldier" to "marshal" (McRae, 1992).

The Northeastern Brazilian "military ethos" that I associate with the Santo Daime Church holds its roots in the efforts by the Brazilian government to deal with the socio-economic effects engendered by the "rubber boom." The government sought to incorporate into its own politico-economic system this forgotten region then undergoing rapid and violent changes. This was as a direct result of the international capitalist penetration that the rubber boom was attracting. (Stanfield, 1998). As Cemin asserts, "The military base, the military model, ultimately, everything that was constitutive of territoriality and thus identity of the Brazilians in Acre" (Cemin, 2010). Also per Labate, "Santo Daime at its origins also valued the 'civilizing' role of the military." Thus the *fardamento* (wearing uniforms), hierarchy, discipline, as well as other values of the Santo Daime doctrine are associated with the territorial conquest and militarization of social

relations in Acre. Eventually, in 1912 this so-called rubber boom would collapse creating severe socio-political dislocations in the region.

Santo Daime emerged in response to this social turmoil as tens of thousands of unemployed rubber tappers abandoned the idle rubber tapping concessions in the forest to seek employment in Amazonian towns. In this context, early *Daimista* communities can best be described as alternative social formations to the chaotic city environment overrun by landless and unemployed rubber tappers; a kind of halfway house between the *seringais* (a grove of trees yielding rubber) and the new urban life style. Nestled in this interpretation, Santo Daime is seen as an adaptive cultural system, or rite of passage, for rubber tappers expelled from the Amazonian rain forest. To be sure, “the resulting syncretic religion is thus characterized as an ‘individual and collective shamanic trance’ that mediates between Amerindians and Afro-Brazilian culture, and between rural (or forest-located) and urban life” (Labate & Pacheco, 2011).

The “ecstatic” characteristic of the *daime* played an important role with regards to Santo Daime expansion to urban centers such as Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. According to one explanation, the incorporation of Western religious repertoires into the Santo Daime cauldron of religious traditions--made possible by *ayahuasca*’s psychotropic effects--greatly facilitated the transition to urban centers. Furthermore, it has been asserted that urban populations themselves used *ayahuasca* from the beginning during the urbanization process (Labate and Pacheco 2011, p.76). From an institutional point of view, CEFLURIS in the mid 1980s brought about a growing middle-class urban membership. The latter identified in particular with the alternative New Age sub-culture (Labate and Pacheco 2011, p.77).

From its inception in 1930, Santo Daime incorporated a broad repertoire of religious Amazonian traditions. However, as the religion evolved over the next 40 years, the relative importance of the original traditions underwent changes. On the social front, the original Santo Daime base comprised impoverished, mixed-race peasants. Santo Daime today is a globally diffused religion, largely practiced by a predominantly white urban middle class. This is certainly the case with the churches on U.S. soil, and most definitely the Miami church.

In my opinion, even though Santo Daime has been around for some 85 years, the religion is still in the throes of consolidation. I make this claim on the fact the religion does not have a unique religious foundation, although Irineu Serra eventually proved to be a master of ritual performance and organization. It took a musical and kinesthetic direction for Irineu Serra to eventually stamp his own creativity and originality onto the religion. At a doctrinal level, however, it can be asserted that Santo Daime is the sum equal to many religious beliefs and ideas struggling for recognition. Notwithstanding the fact Santo Daime is known as a Christian-spirit doctrine (Beyer 2009, p. 289), I contend its syncretism is unstable or in the making. In other words, the tradition is a “bricolage” of acquired popular religious ideas reinterpreted in new ways and producing new meaning, which as of today is disparate. Furthermore, given Santo Daime is not a tribal religion, it is devoid of its own cosmology, a situation that at times causes its various religious strands to be at odds with each other. As far as my own study of this religion is concerned, I have counted at least eight different spiritual traditions, all of which exert a significant influence on Santo Daime religiosity and belief.

The Santo Daime repertoire embodies local indigenous Amazonian shamanism,<sup>6</sup> European esoterism,<sup>7</sup> Kardecist Spiritism,<sup>8</sup> New Age spirituality,<sup>9</sup> Umbanda,<sup>10</sup> popular Catholicism,<sup>11</sup> as well as possession motifs drawn from the traditional Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé.<sup>12</sup> Most recently, *hinarios* “received” by *Padrinho* Alex Polari have even introduced Buddhist ideology into the already vast Santo Daime repertoire.<sup>13</sup>

There seems to be a general consensus that three major cultural matrices are present in the formation of Santo Daime: The indigenous or Amazonian (through ingestion of the brew and its mode of preparation and consumption along with some

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<sup>6</sup> A predominant influence of “Amerindian” (*caboclos*) is present. Indigenous elements include the use of ritual rattles, divination of natural elements and the presence of a guardian spirit in the beverage, invoked for healing purposes.

<sup>7</sup> Such as the Rosicrucian Order, a worldwide humanistic and spiritual society which claims to descend from the Rosy-Cross Brotherhood of 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

<sup>8</sup> Kardecism is the name used to refer to the spirit knowledge and teachings of French-born, Allec Kardec, as per his book *The Spirit Book* made popular by Brazilian upper classes in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Santo Daime inherited from Kardecism notions of karma, reincarnation, spiritual evolution, “soul indoctrination,” charity for suffering souls and the “Prayer of Caritas.”

<sup>9</sup> The Santo Daime repertoire now promotes the nurturing of the “higher self” through the harnessing of impersonal cosmic energies.

<sup>10</sup> Created in Rio de Janeiro by Spiritist Zelio de Moraes in the 1920s, Umbanda is a spiritist, possession-oriented Brazilian religion centered on the interaction of two sets of spirits: *Caboclos*, the spirit of diseased indigenes and *pretos velhos*, the spirits of dead African slaves. This mixture of traditional African practices brought over by slaves eventually got syncretized with Catholicism and, in some cases, with the writings of Allen Kardec.

<sup>11</sup> Santo Daime has been viewed either as the Christianization of indigenous shamanism or as the indigenization of Christianity. From a worshipping perspective, the Jesus, Mary and Joseph trinity holds a particular spiritual place in the heart of *Daimistas*.

<sup>12</sup> Candomblé traces its origins back to Brazil’s African slave trade. The religion first appeared in Bahia in the early 1920s. As is the case with its Cuban counterpart Santería, Candomblé is centered on the worship and ritual possession of a complex pantheon of gods or *orixás*. Candomblé is the most African-centered religion in Brazil and therefore, it enjoys a vast popular appeal amongst the black Brazilian Diaspora.

<sup>13</sup> Latest hymns by Polaris are imbued with a distinctive Buddhist flavor and include such invocations as the “Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.” *Padrinho* Alex Polari’s *hinario* is entitled *Nova Anunciação*.

aspects of the ritual), the European (via Catholicism and esotericism) and the Afro-Brazilian (African presence of entities in cosmology *Daimista*).

Although my intention is not to rank these different influences by order of importance, in my opinion, the Amazon indigenous strand is probably the most significant one. This is because the foundation of Santo Daime is deeply imbedded in shamanic indigenous practices, including the all-important ritual ingestion of the *ayahuasca* brew. Indigenous religiosity is also permeated by folk Catholicism, in my opinion ranking second to the indigenous influences in order of importance.

### **The Centrality of the Indigenous Tradition**

In order to better understand Santo Daime, we need to understand its constitutive parts in greater depth. However, as I mentioned before, all these discrete traditions have been somehow integrated into a coherent whole via the powerful Santo Daime ritual. Before examining the religious traditions giving life to the Santo Daime church and its ritual, I want to touch upon five important attributes and contributions made to Santo Daime identity as a religion borne in the Amazonian rain forest by the *mestizo* and indigenous traditions that have inhabited this part of the earth for millennia:

1.- Connection to the natural world - It includes relatedness to the animal world and the sky above. In Brazilian Amazonian jargon, connection to the natural world, plain and simple, means respect for the jungle. Brazilian Native Indians took advantage of the vast plant world found in the jungle, morphing this relationship into an extremely sophisticated one of nature-knowledge. This knowledge, gradually and in a profound way, was incorporated into their life way. Within this connection, the figure of the



shaman medicine man and its accompanying use of the psychotropic *ayahuasca* became critical. *Ayahuasca* has served so much the indigenous Brazilian Indian communities that it can safely be said that we are now talking about a “culture of *ayahuasca* forest.” These are the principal elements of that culture and their application to Santo Daime:

2.- Ritual performance – It stands as one of the most important elements of the central axis of constructive Santo Daime spirituality. As a matter of fact, since most Santo Daime rituals involve music (singing accompanied by instrumentation) from beginning to end, it could be argued that Santo Daime is a “singing religion.”

3.- Healing - To the Native Brazilian Indian, healing is not just a matter of body curing, but also a matter which involves the soul wholeheartedly. Holistic understanding of healing by indigenous religions worldwide is by now a well-documented and understood phenomena. For the Indian shaman, healing is an all-inclusive enterprise involving body, mind and soul. This is why healing always takes place within the context of a ceremony or ritual. During a healing ceremony, the shaman invokes spiritual agencies in order to be guided in terms of diagnosis, treatment and medicine prescription. Regarding the adoption of indigenous healing practices by the Santo Daime church, it has been said that every Santo Daime “work” is in essence a healing “work.”

4.- Spirituality in order to serve the community - In many ways, the path of shamanism can be seen as the original template for what has been referred to as subtle activism. Although shamans are regularly consulted to heal individuals from their illnesses, their primary function appears to be as guardians of the psyche and the ecological equilibrium of the tribe as a whole. In Santo Daime, healing takes place both at an individual and

group level. Group healing during a Santo Daime “work” occurs by being present in the “current,” i.e. by being firm in the face of *daime*-induced visions and agitations.

5.- Indigenous folk Catholicism – One of the results of the extended Portuguese colonial domination in Brazil was the conversion of the indigenous people to Christianity. This was a task carried out with extreme proficiency by the Jesuit order, a Catholic organization that undertook quite perilous voyages around the world primarily to save souls (Chasteen 2001, p.40). Hence, local Indian and shamanic influences on Santo Daime already contained the seeds of Catholicism. Nevertheless, a multi-layered Christian syncretism by Afro-Brazilian traditions encroaching from different directions also operates on Santo Daime. Consequently, while some indigenous folk Catholic practices have directly seeped through the cosmology of Santo Daime, others have been indirectly introduced via the influence of Candomble and Umbanda, two Afro-Brazilian traditions also syncretized with Catholicism.

As stated earlier, despite a consensus that popular Catholic influence is the most visible in Santo Daime, I personally believe it is the Amazonian indigenous strand that predominates Santo Daime. This is because of the central role played by *ayahuasca* during Santo Daime works. The church would not have evolved into its present state had it not been for the *ayahuasca* sacrament. Dependence on the medicine and all it signifies remains of paramount importance to *Daimistas* and the identity formations stemming from it stand as proof of this claim.

### **The Tukano Indians: A Template of Santo Daime**

The origins of Mestre Irineu's first contact with *ayahuasca* are sketchy. It is generally believed that sometime after his 1912 arrival to Rio Branco, capital city of the state of Acre, a Peruvian *mestizo* healer first initiated him to the use of *ayahuasca* (Macrae, 1999). Other versions mentioned two *ayahuasqueros* by name. This version states that Mestre Irineu was introduced to the *ayahuasca* brew by two brothers, also rubber tappers of African descent, Antonio and Andres Costa (McRae, 1992, p.46). Yet another version stipulates Irineu Serra came into contact with the Tukano Indians who inhabit the border Amazonian rainforest landscape where Brazil and Colombia intersect in the North East (Mizrach, 2009). The version is very plausible because of the long practiced tradition by apprentice shamans to be trained in far away places by shamans belonging to varied, distant communities.

Given the location of Tukano Indian communities in the Vaupes territory--North of the state of Acre, in Amazonas--it is plausible Irineu Serra came into contact with these Indians perhaps during his long permanence in the region. The vast number of tribes forming the extensive Tukano family--and the fact the expert canoe makers they were enabled them to reach far beyond the limits of their community-- further supports this theory. Santo Daime beliefs mirror the analysis of Tukano cosmology since in both cases a female deity rises as a central theme to their supernatural narrative stories. Although female images associated with these two traditions are not identical, what matters for our purposes is the perennial importance of the female archetype.

Insofar as Santo Daime is a tradition born out of the Amazonian culture, I find this version very respectable. It lends support to that idea of continuity; the use of

*ayahuasca* within an unbroken tradition. The idea Irineu Serra may have started a tradition, which fully preserved the ethos and basic patterns of *ayahuasca* shamanism, I believe, can be fully appreciated when these ancient, indigenous traditions are compared with Santo Daime beliefs and ritual practices. If this is so, then Santo Daime is a clear case whereby indigenous religious use of a psychotropic plant was transferred wholesale to another *mestizo* culture via contact and exchange. Keeping that in mind, I will now proceed to compare and contrast the main sacred rituals of the Tukano and Santo Daime traditions, while focusing on the role human-plant relationships may have played in the formation of religious awareness.

### **Tukano and Santo Daime Cosmology**

No one can tell when the Indians of the upper Amazon discovered the “otherworldly” effects of the vine of the soul. However, it is probably not too far-fetched to suggest it is at least as old as the characteristics of Tropical Forest Culture (TFC). The TFC was based on intensive root-crop agriculture and its establishment appears to go back to as early as 3000 B.C., or even before (Furst 1976, p. 45). Tukano mythology places the origin of *yaje*<sup>14</sup> at the very beginning of the social order when it is said to have appeared in human form soon after the male Sun had fertilized the female Earth with its phallic ray and the first drops of semen had become the original people (Furst 1976, p. 46).

According to such myth, the Sun-Father had promised the Tukano people a miraculous drink. He told them they should welcome it as a supreme gift that would

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<sup>14</sup> *Yaje* is the term used by Tukanoans to refer to *ayahuasca*.

forever link the people of the earth with the brilliant power of the heavenly forces (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978, p. 3). The narrative involving the actual creation of the drink involves the stellar performance of a woman. This is the first woman in creation who in addition to excite men into a web of confusion, gives birth to a male child that was going to be *yaje* or the narcotic vine (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978, p. 3). Obviously referring to the state of intoxication produced by said *yaje* brew, the myth informs Tukanos that when men looked at this woman “they almost fainted; the brilliant light and the sight of the blood-red child were causing them to lose their senses. They felt as though they were drowning in swirling waters” (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1978).

Irineu Serra also experienced the appearing of a brilliant woman during a night of the full moon. The story is central to the emergence of Santo Daime since it is a woman who asks Irineu Serra to form a church. According to early primary sources, when Irineu Serra was still familiarizing himself with *ayahuasca*, “he had a vision of a beautiful lady who was sitting on a throne. She later identified herself as the Virgin of Conception, the universal Goddess.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Yaje and the Mythic Origins of Society**

Why do Tukano Indians drink *yaje*? Pages of Tukano research inform us that the purpose of a *yaje* ritual is to unveil the psycho-cultural mechanism of the social group at hand. According to Furst, “the Tukano say that one who has had the *yaje* experience awakens a new person, a true Tukano, fully integrated and at one with his traditional

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<sup>15</sup> Foreword, Hinario “O cruzeiro”. Master Raimundo Irineu Serra (received between 1935 – 1940). Revised edition 11.02.2002.

culture, for what he has seen and heard in his ecstatic yaje trance has confirmed and validated the ancient truths of which the shaman and elders have told him since childhood” (Furst, 1976).<sup>16</sup> Or, as told by Reichel-Dolmatoff, “according to our informants of the Vaupes, the purpose of taking yaje is to return to the uterus, where the individual sees the tribal divinities, the creation of the universe and humanity, the first human couple, the creation of animals, and the establishment of the social order with particular reference to the laws of exogamy” (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1978). Indeed, probably as a consequence of the nature of living arrangements whereby various groups share opened quarters in long houses, incest must then have become a concern. As a result, the original Tukano ritual refers back to the incest the Sun-Father committed with his daughter (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978).

### **The Tukano and Santo Daime Rituals: Performance and Symbolic Communication**

The Tukano ritual begins after sunset and takes place within the long house. The men sit in the front half, the main light source being a tall resin-covered torch emitting an intense red glare. Meanwhile, women and children are confined to the back part of the house where they sit in complete obscurity relative to the ceremony.

During the first two hours or so, monotonous recitals alternate with music and dancing. The men wear the seed rattles tied to their right ankles and right elbows, and while dancing in a line, mark the rhythm with large stamping tubes of wood. They play flutes and pan-pipes during most of the night-long ritual along with a few small whistles.

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<sup>16</sup> Underlying most indigenous religious rituals is the search for personal and communal identity. For example, one can find similar explanations of the meaning of the Huichol initiation in the magic of the peyote quest. They are looking for life and a sense of tribal identity.

A special instrument consists of a turtle shell and a clay trumpet of horns. Musical or acoustic stimulation is considered very important. The repetitive sound of the seed rattles, the notes of the flutes or the long-drawn wails of the clay trumpets are said to modify the luminous images appearing in their view field, after a few drinks of the narcotic potion.

Once the ritual ceremony gets underway, Santo Daime efforts surpass Tukano musicality. This is because of the doctrine's primary emphasis on music and singing. To a third-party observer actually, a Santo Daime ritual would probably look like a musical concert of sorts. There's a reason why Santo Daime has been called a singing religion.

Regarding other elements in the ritual space, the situation is mixed but the influence is certainly obvious. To begin with, *Daimistas* form a square pattern, with male participants occupying one half of the floor and female members the other half. Albeit qualitatively different, this separation of the sexes is a common element in both traditions. Another point of intersection between Tukano Indians and *Daimistas* is related to the serving of *ayahuasca*, which in both cases is done at regular intervals using cups containing small amounts of the brew. Tukano women, however, are not allowed to drink *yaje*, whereas the Santo Daime ceremony makes no difference whatsoever between men and women. Likewise, we are told that in the Tukano Indian ritual, men will dance most of the time while women will only occasionally join them. Santo Daime rules dictate everyone dances during a "dancing" work.

In both cases, the ritual begins after sunset and goes on for most of the night. In the case of Santo Daime, the ritual spans from five hours--in the case of a *concentracao* or concentration ritual-- to twelve hours in the case of a long *bailado* or dancing ritual. Hence, in both cases, it is not unusual to spend the entire night engaged in ritual

ceremony. The inherent difficulty and physical challenges required by a ritual of this length contribute to the heightening of ecstatic experiences privy to ritual practitioners from both traditions.

### **The Tukano and Santo Daime Rituals: The Liminal Stage**

It seems that when physical and mental endurance is put to the test, a symbolic structure hence magically emerges. The symbolic ordering of the ritual experience in situations of severe stress is common to all religious rituals. This is consistent with Turner's lineal arrangement of ritual experience, whereby participants symbolically move from structure to *liminality* and back to structure.<sup>17</sup>

For the Tukano Indians, the entire ritual is orchestrated in a very complex fashion. No sound, movement, or light effects are arbitrary occurrences but rather obey an overall plan of well-defined and predetermined sensory signals (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1978). The same applies to the Santo Daime ritual. Dawson ascribes importance to the military-style discipline imbued in ritual participants, saying that this may "fruitfully be understood as a disciplinary regime responsible for the maintenance of physical and symbolic order" (Dawson, 2013). But he then goes on to say the Santo Daime ritual is characterized as much by fluidity and contestation as it is by fixity and hierarchy (Dawson, 2013).

Strong parallels can be drawn between these two traditions during the state of liminality when participants are fully ensconced in their work. According to the Indians, the liminal experience can be divided into three stages. During the first stage, after some

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<sup>17</sup> Victor Turner (1920 – 83) coined the term *liminality* to refer to the middle stage of a rite of passage; anti-structural, ambiguous, creative.



violent bodily reactions including vomiting and diarrhea, the person will feel like flying upward through the Milky Way and will perceive a number of luminous sensations. The onset of the second stage is marked by a flight that takes the individual beyond the Milky Way. The ecstatic flight now offers visions of dreamlike scenes that overwhelm the beholder. Assisted by shamans, the Indians see in these visions mythological scenes full of profound significance.<sup>18</sup> At the third stage, the individual relives the primordial incestuous act through a series of dreamlike images. An embryo is hence procreated from which the person is reborn once the narcotic trance has ended (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1978).<sup>19</sup>

The liminal stage during a Santo Daime ritual closely resembles the Tukano experience. To begin with, ritual participants will meet with strong bodily reactions similar to those experienced by the Tukanos during their ritual. Likewise, the Santo Daime ritual is designed to penetrate the transcendent realm in search of answers and healing. Individual ritual participants go through a myriad of dreamlike images or experiences in an attempt to attain self-understanding. In the same vein as Tukano Indians, Daimistas perceive a series of visions imbedded with profound symbolic significance. According to the testimony of a practitioner:

*The powerful visionary/mystical experiences that individuals have during Santo Daime works are called “mirações.” Like classical mystical experiences, these mirações are said to be exceedingly difficult to describe, at least with any degree*

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<sup>18</sup> In visualizing these figures, the explanation by the shamans is important because it constitute an element of imprinting which stabilizes similar visions on future occasions. At this stage, the participants are experiencing a complex reversal of time in which the participant symbolically “dies.”

<sup>19</sup> According to Reichel-Dolmatoff, Tukanoan society is conspicuously male-centered. Underlying many of their rituals is the idea of affirming male dominance. Its purpose, however, is not the submission of women--assigning them to an inferior position--but rather the control of their sexuality.

*of adequacy, but I think that it is fair to say that these experiences are not only frequently ecstatic, but they also carry with them profound teachings about the nature of reality. Speaking from my own experience, having drunk Daime numerous times, it has often felt as if during these *mirações* that massive amounts of profoundly uplifting information about the nature of the cosmos and our destiny as human beings was being directly downloaded into my cells. In addition, drinking the Daime has allowed me to gain, frequently, powerfully, and directly, within my own experience, numerous mystical insights about the multi-dimensional nature of this universe. I've often felt as if, with the grace of the Daime, having been permitted to explore, with awe and gratitude, the wondrous beauty of these other dimensions, as if I have been lifted above the confines of my previous Flatland understanding of existence and have been granted a "higher" and "deeper" perspective on the universe. I have also been given the chance to become personally and intimately acquainted with numerous beings who inhabit these "trans-physical" worlds, e.g., the Christ, the Holy Mother, archangels, "guides," and assorted other (often very, very "otherworldly") entities.<sup>20</sup>*

The experience results from the powerful combination of *ayahuasca* and hymnals singing. As the leader of the Miami Santo Daime church explained:

*Santo Daime Hymns operate at three levels: First, we receive an instruction to the mind which helps us to become better persons; second the anthem conveys the channeling spirit's energy (vibrations) and contains direct instructions to our own spirit. The messages received have the power to change our karma for good and; thirdly, the "call," which is done automatically through the songs serves to convene different energies (spirits, elementals, beings of light, etc.). Many times someone acts as a medium for a wandering spirit that needs to be helped. Additionally, the lyrics should be understood as the doctrine of Santo Daime is precisely imbedded in the hymns. All a practitioner can do to help with pronunciation, diction, and intonation is excellent in this regard.<sup>21</sup>*

<sup>20</sup> Barnard, William C. "Entheogens in a Religious Context: The Case of the Santo Daime Religious Tradition." Paper presented at the 2013 AAR National Congress in Baltimore. Pp. 2 – 3.

<sup>21</sup> Conversation held with Alberto, the Protector of *Ceu da Lua Cheia*, Miami, in October 2012.

Perhaps the most important argument supporting the Tukano connection to Santo Daime is found in the similarity of their ritual practice. The centrality of *ayahuasca* or *yaje* was found to be prevalent in both traditional rituals. Furthermore, both traditions in their own ways develop strategies for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the sacred and the profane. Both traditions ascribe such distinctions to realities sought to transcend the powers of human actors. It was shown that both the Tukanos and *Daimistas* struggle on a contested terrain; in a site of disjuncture, rupture and contradiction: The liminal space.

In the end, whether the Tukanos indeed acted as the transmission belt from which Santo Daime obtained its Amazon indigenous influence is not all that important. What is important and difficult to deny is that Santo Daime adopted a wholesale aspect of local Amazonian indigenous culture, whether Tukano or not. The plant medicine's healing properties, as accessed by *Daimistas*, are not just privy to the Tukano tribes but point to the sacred patrimony the Amazon jungle offers to all its inhabitants.

### **Santo Daime Hybridity: the Influence of other Traditions**

In order to better understand Santo Daime, we need to approach its constitutive parts with much diligence. As I said before, the many doctrines making up this religion do not necessarily amalgamate into a coherent whole. In this brief review, I will start with those traditions closer to Mestre Irineu's heart.

The Afro-Brazilian influences in Santo Daime paved their way into the tradition with Mestre Irineu himself. As a black descendent of African slaves, he and the rest of the Afro-Brazilian rubber tappers from Northeast Brazil were exposed and probably

belonged to the Vodun cults of Maranhao and specifically *tambor de mina*, the name given in Maranhao to the African-origin possession cults known elsewhere as Candomble (Labate & Pacheco, 2011). The origins of Santo Daime are indeed associated with *Casa de Minas JeJe*,<sup>22</sup> one of the constitutive “nations” of the *tambor de minas* cult and a traditional center of preservation of African culture and religiosity in Brazil. As a matter of fact, the words *Titango*, *Tintuma*, *Agarrube*, which are invoked as the three wise men in Mestre Irineu’s hymnal *O Cruzeiro*, are associated with royalty in Benin. Likewise, the words *Daime* and *Juramidan*,<sup>23</sup> the most important spiritual entities in Santo Daime, are associated and supposedly possess a secret meaning with the cult of *Da*, the secret serpent of the *Fon* (Labate & Pacheco, 2011).

### **Umbanda & Candomble: Afrocentric Medium & Orixá Traditions**

Umbanda crisscrosses with Candomble as both religions revere the same pantheon of gods. In the case of Candomble, however, the *Orixas* play a more prominent role since they take direct possession of their devotees in complex trance and dancing sessions. Umbanda’s greatest contribution to Santo Daime is its form of mediumship anchored in African and European traditions. Prominent Umbanda spirits visible in Santo Daime doctrine are *Tranca Rua*, a redeemed tortured soul, the Indian *caboclo* “Seven Arrows”, the lustful *Pomba-giras* and Queen of the Ocean *Yemanjá* and her servant *Jurema*.

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<sup>22</sup> JeJe is a word belonging to the Fon cluster of languages spoken in Southern Benin, Africa.

<sup>23</sup> Another version of the origins of Juramidan insinuate that it is a reflection of the “Jurapi” masculine initiation ritual found widely in Amazonia, where it serves as a bridge across multiple indigenous cultures.

The annals of Santo Daime history, as narrated by *Padrinho* Alex Polari, tell of a dramatic cosmic war between *Padrinho* Sebastiao and the Umbanda entity *Tranca-Rua* (Polari, 1999). The narrative states that *Padrinho* Sebastiao emerged victorious after a long and protracted struggle with this entity that was attempting to engulf the Santo Daime church. *Tranca-Rua*, it is said, was eventually subdued and converted from an evil entity to an entity subservient to Santo Daime's higher good. As a result of this experience, Sebastiao authorized exchanges with the Umbanda religion without however encouraging dilution or allowing the doctrine to lose its identity on the coattails of said alliance. Notwithstanding, Umbanda's influence on Santo Daime would eventually reach such proportions that a new spiritual current called *Umbandaime* emerged out of these two traditions. Presently, it is not unusual to see Umbanda practitioners attending Santo Daime rituals and vice versa.

Candomble actually means "dance in honor of the gods," and as the name indicates, rituals in this religion are feasts of music and dance rooted largely on African traditional religious beliefs and practices (Omari-Tunkara, 2009). Music and dance are important parts of Candomble ceremonies, since dancing is the conduit for worshippers to become directly possessed by *Orixas*.

Candomble devotees believe that every worshipper of this tradition holds his or her own individual *Orixa* controlling his or her destiny and acting as a protector. Omari-Tunkara points out that "possession, the hallmark of this religion, represents the descent of the *Orixas* to the material plane to be seen and to impart their brand of healing." Unlike Umbanda, animal sacrifice is prevalent in this tradition since it is believed that blood is one of the principal repositories of *axe*, or life energy, necessary to sustain the

gods. Regarding the element of syncretism with popular Catholicism, Omari-Tunkara claims “many changes that occurred in art and religion were adaptive and defensive; the overlay of African Gods with Catholic saints is just one example of this type of accommodation” (Omari-Tunkara, 2009). Candomble brings a rich and popular Catholic-pan African syncretic spiritual tradition to the Santo Daime collection of influences. They include the centrality of music in the ritual space and a pantheon of *Orixas* or gods where the aggressive *Ogum* and the sensual *Yemanja* (also *Yemoja*, *Iemanja*)--who has been syncretized with the Virgin Mary (*Nossa Senhora de Conceicao*)--figure prominently.

### **The Virgin Mary: Santo Daime’s Spiritual Sovereign**

As I have indicated before, the female archetype is central to the Santo Daime doctrine. Irineu Serra himself declared it was the Virgin Mary who instructed him to form the Santo Daime church. As now evident from the above discussions, however, the Virgin Mary is also a deity conspicuously found in most of the traditions that exert their influence over Santo Daime. She is, as it were, an element that agglutinates all the traditions contributing to a much needed spiritual coherence to the Santo Daime narrative.

In the case of Santo Daime, the Queen of the Forest instructed Master Irineu to establish a new religion with the *ayahuasca* tea as its main sacrament. He wrote (or “channeled,” as some might put it) a seminal *hinario* making up the liturgy of this new religion. “Daime” in Portuguese does not actually refer to the name of a saint as believed by some. Instead, it represents the imperative “give me.” This appeal for divine illumination is so ingrained in Serra's liturgy it became synonymous with the church and

the plant itself, the latter often being referred to simply as *daime*. "Santo Daime" literally means "Holy Vine."

Probably the most emblematic and powerful historical event informing the history and development of the Santo Daime church was the apparition of the Virgin Mary to church founder Raimundo Irineu Serra.

She is the one who, of his own account, instructed him to form a church. According to the church Norms of Rituals, "Senhor Raimundo Irineu Serra had the vision of a Lady who appeared to him in a great light, in the form of a moon, inside the forest. In this vision, She declared that She was the Virgin of Immaculate Conception, the Queen of the Forest, the Mistress of the teaching of this spiritual lineage."<sup>24</sup>

The instructions received by Irineu Serra required the composition of a series of hymns to be divinely received. Given that Irineu Serra was black and illiterate, the symbolism of this event is extremely profound.

Between 1935 and 1940 and all the while living in Rio Branco, Irineu Serra would eventually go on to write a compendium of 132 hymns called *O Cruzeiro*. It became the sacred testament of his mission. The Master connected the Virgin Mary with the moon and Jesus Christ with the sun. He realized the Virgin of Conception was the spirit of mother Earth, "*a Mae Criadora*." He Christianized the uses of *ayahuasca* without negating the deep reverence that the local Amazonian indigenous had for the spirits of nature.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Norms of Ritual CEFLURIS 97 *Normas* in English, p. 2

<sup>25</sup> For an idea of the lifeway of a group of Indians said to have influenced Irineu Serra, see Reichel-Dolmatoff, Gerardo, *Beyond the Milky Way: hallucinogenic imagery of the Tukano Indians*, UCLA Latin American Center Publications, Los Angeles, 1978.

Among other things, *O Cruzeiro* is an exaltation of the female symbol. The Divine mother is treated with much reverence, respect and devotion. She is looked up to for forgiveness and consolation, as one of the stances in the first hymn “received” by Irineu Serra titled *Lua Branca* (White Moon) clearly shows:

<i>Oh! Mae Divina do curacao</i>	<i>Oh! Divine Mother of the heart</i>
<i>La nas Alturas onde estas</i>	<i>There in the heights where You are</i>
<i>Miha Mae la no Ceu</i>	<i>My mother, there in heaven</i>
<i>Daime o perdao</i>	<i>Give forgiveness<sup>26</sup></i>

The devotional worship of the Virgin Mary, including the various female forms she takes on, are an integral part of the Santo Daime doctrine and found in just about any of the more than one thousand hymns used ritualistically. The Virgin Mary is strongly associated with the idea of love for humanity, an idea characteristically portrayed in the hymns as brotherly love. Again, in *A Rainha me Mandou* (The Queen Told me), his 8<sup>th</sup> hymn, Master Irineu Serra writes:

<i>A Rainha me mandou</i>	<i>The Queen told me</i>
<i>Eu rezar para os meus irmaos</i>	<i>To pray for my brothers</i>
<i>Para Ela la no Ceu</i>	<i>So that She, there in heaven</i>
<i>A limpar meu curacao</i>	<i>Can cleanse my heart<sup>27</sup></i>

### **Yemanja: The Queen of the Sea**

Two images of women dominate *Daimista* culture. They are the Virgin Mary and *Yemanja*. Strong devotion to the Virgin Mary, or “Queen of the Forest,” stands as a

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<sup>26</sup> Santo Daime O Cruzeiro *Inario* by Mestre Irineu

<sup>27</sup> Santo Daime O Cruzeiro *Inario* by Mestre Irineu



model of Santo Daime virtue. It serves to inform *Daimistas* that women must be pure, saint-like, gentle, giving, faithful and loving. The worship of *Yemanja*, on the other hand exalts the sensual power of women as something sacred and good. *Yemanja*'s domain is the ocean and as such she represents the depths of the unconscious, i.e., its shadows, emotions, fertility and life. To put it in Jungian verbiage, these two female images stand collectively as the archetype of the female.<sup>28</sup> As a song paying tribute to *Yemanja*, *Forca do Sol* (Sun Power) waxes lyrical regarding the deity's upper-hand on the material world:

<i>Forca do Sol</i>	<i>Force from the Sun</i>
<i>Forca da Lua</i>	<i>Force from the Moon</i>
<i>Aqui na terra</i>	<i>Here on Earth</i>
<i>Chegam os caboclos</i>	<i>Arrive the caboclos</i>
<i>Forca do Ceu</i>	<i>Force from Heaven</i>
<i>Forca do Mar</i>	<i>Force from the Sea</i>
<i>Aqui na terra</i>	<i>Here on Earth</i>
<i>Chega Yemanja</i>	<i>Arrives Yemanja</i> <sup>29</sup>

“*Trabalho de Yemanja*” (Yemanja work) is a collection of fifty-nine *Yemanja* songs plucked from the myriad of *hinarios* composed by Santo Daime elders. At a symbolic level, this work is possibly one of the most emblematic depictions of the relationship existing between the natural world and the female principle. It talks primarily about this deity's power over nature, including men. Her message is that of a superior deity offering motherly love, protection, and divine wisdom. One of the songs belonging to this compendium of hymns entitled *Yemanja* calls to mind these qualities:

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<sup>28</sup> The *anima* and the *animus*, in Carl Jung's school of analytical psychology, are the two primary anthropomorphic archetypes of the unconscious mind. In the male unconscious, this archetype finds expression as a feminine inner personality: *anima*; equivalently, in the female unconscious it is expressed as a masculine inner personality: *animus*.

<sup>29</sup> Santo Daime Yemanja collection of hymns.

*Eu venho nas ondas brancas  
Das profundezas do mar  
Aos filhos que me acompanham  
Eu sou Mamae Yemanja*

*I come in white waves  
From the depths of the sea  
My sons accompany me  
I'm Mommy Yemanja*

*Aqui dentro do salao  
La for a em todo terreiro  
Tens a minha protecao  
E do Caboclo Guerrero*

*Inside the church  
It is across the yard  
You have my protection  
And that of the warrior Caboclo*

*Quem procurar nesta casa  
A cura dos seus quebrantos  
O Santo Daime e o remedio  
E os hinos seus acalantos  
Quando de mim precisar  
Chame em sua oracao  
Yemanja e o meu nome  
Estou dentro do seu curacao*

*Anyone looking in this house  
The healing of their transgressions  
Santo Daime is the remedy  
And hymns their lullabies  
Whenever you need me  
Keep me in your prayers  
Yemanja is my name  
I'm inside your heart<sup>30</sup>*

The preponderance of *Yemanja* imagery in the Santo Daime ritual is particularly apparent at Miami's *Ceu da Lua Cheia*. In fact, the Miami church hosts a work devoted entirely to *Yemanja* every year in early February, probably also a reflection of the local importance of living by the ocean and all that it symbolizes. Santo Daime religious hybridity--be it the Celebration of The Queen of the Ocean deity or the Umbanda and Candomble ritual aspects-- has continuously fed the confabulation of its constitutive traditions. Drawing on such rich history, the Santo Daime movement--as cloaked as it is in its religious robe--can almost be described as a microcosm of the multi-faceted aspects of contemporary Brazilian society. However, this same history had the effect of instilling a very cautious and suspicious attitude regarding the Church's external environment.

<sup>30</sup> Santo Daime Yemanja collection of hymns.

This is a trait that would later spill over into other churches, including *Ceu da Lua Cheia* in Miami.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Ceu da Lua Cheia: Resistance to Adaptation In Miami**

This chapter aims at fleshing out the myriad reasons why the Miami Santo Daime Church, *Ceu da Lua Cheia*, is running into obstacles in the midst of its acculturation process. Apart from South Beach being known for its trendy nightlife under swaying palm trees, Miami and its sprawling urban area now home to more than five million people embodies a fascinating kaleidoscope of cultural influences and traditions from Latin and Central-America, the Caribbean and even Africa. The cosmopolitan city is also carving out a name for itself on the New-Age religiosity marketplace thanks to local offerings ranging from various “healing centers” to Native-American peyote ceremonies. Though local New-Age proclivities should help, the following chapter will posit how that may in truth hinder *Ceu da Lua Cheia* from breaking through in Miami and effectively acculturate its local environment. The data I collected shall unveil the most prominent issues likely preventing the local Santo Daime church from effectively consolidating its timid foothold in Miami and thereby accounting for its declining membership. These challenges are tied to the following: A strong Brazilian and military ethos, a grueling ritual and a most competitive New-Age environment not to mention the sheer illegality of *ayahuasca* consumption.

#### **The History of Ceu da Lua Cheia**

In 1994, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, a young man with superb artistic talents as a heavy-metal rock’n roll drummer named Alberto was introduced to the doctrine by a

friend called Alejandro. The former was himself a spiritual seeker, leading an existence that of his own account led him to many alternative forms of spirituality, including the exploration of some very dark places. Together with the rest of the Argentinean *daime* practitioners, they held “works” and followed the Santo Daime ritual calendar whenever possible. The *ayahuasca* brew was not locally available and had to be smuggled in from Brazil if “works” were to continue. Inherent to church activities, Alejandro would travel with some frequency to Brazil in search of the brew. After participating in his first Santo Daime work, Alberto knew his personal quest had finally ended. He told me he felt absolutely realized and that he just “knew” this was what he had been looking for. Finally at peace with himself, he became fairly active in the church and in 1995 “took the star,” hence becoming a *fardado*. Alberto’s parents had gotten divorced early in his childhood meaning he never actually knew his father nor had he kept in contact with him. All he knew was that he lived in Florida yet communication between them had never occurred. This situation changed when Alberto’s father one day called him inviting him to come and visit. Alberto travelled in 2000 from Buenos Aires to Miami to meet his father. While leaving with only a tourist visa in hand, he decided in the end to stay in Miami. His father sponsored him and Alberto became a U.S. resident in 2006. Prior to coming to the U.S., his Argentinean *Padrinho* Guillermo had entrusted him with the mission to “keep the candlewick lit.” In 2001, *Padrinho* Guillermo sent Alberto his first shipment of *ayahuasca* disguised in a shampoo bottle. By that time, Alberto had been contacted by a Brazilian *fardado* by the name of Sergio who also resided in Miami. Together they held a small “work” with some other people on South Beach.

A series of events and networks with various individuals consequently developed. One of the more interesting events was that Alberto taught himself how to play the guitar. He subsequently met key people who had knowledge of “works” held in Hawaii albeit loosely here and there. One woman he met had been to *Ceu do Mapia* and completed a documentary. The story went that, from word of mouth, he met yet another woman who had done “works” led by *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto. Between 2001 and 2006 and until he contacted Paulo Roberto, Santo Daime work activity in Miami was sporadic and lacked rigorous organization. Information wasn’t readily available and as a result of some run-ins with the law, secrecy among the early *Daimista* ranks was *de rigueur*. In 2007 however, *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto came to Miami to formally inaugurate *Ceu da Lua Cheia*. The work was held at Bagua, an alternative and holistic center and shop still in existence. The center provides different “spiritual” activities including “psychic nights” once a week. The *daime* brew for that particular occasion was flown in from Hawaii, the sole U.S. facility producing *daime*.

The Miami church is very small and is actually a “point of light.” Ceremonies take place in a rented house in North Miami. Before commencing each service, volunteers prepare the ritual space with implements kept in a closet. After the “work,” everything returns to said closet. Its membership totals only seven *fardados* and five *fardadas*. Five additional “visiting” guests also attend the Miami “works” with some regularity, bringing the total number of attendees to no more than fifteen to twenty people at any given time. This church has not been growing and during the three and a half years I have partaken in “works,” its membership has actually declined. Since I’ve joined, at least five *fardados* have left while new inductions have not kept up with this human

drain. I myself became a *fardado* about two years ago but that hardly counts since I was already a habitual participant. In addition to me and during this time, there has only been one extra *fardado* induction while I cannot recount more than two *fardado* replacements from other churches. Long-standing senior church members Eduardo and Marcela decided to retire last year and relocated to a Santo Daime community in Florianopolis, Brazil. Another member moved to Austin, TX where she became a *fardada*. Another male *fardado* originally from Uruguay also left the Miami church recently without providing any real reason. Finally, a *fardada* who had been with the church since its inception was in fact asked to leave on account of recurring disciplinary issues within the ritual space. Her constant abandonment of the formation line in the *salao*-- only to disappear for hours at a time in the women's changing room--was deemed inappropriate and certainly not a good role model for prospective members. In summary, while the number of guests attending regular "works" has remained even over the last three and a half years, the number of *de facto fardados* on the other hand has dwindled by two or three.

Alongside Alberto's leadership of the *Ceu da Lua Cheia* Miami Church, we find Alejandra, a Brazilian from Rio de Janeiro and Alberto's living partner. They met in the early 2000s at a time when "works" were held in various private homes belonging to members of this newly-formed church. She had no experience with plant medicine and scant knowledge of *ayahuasca* per se. However, she proved herself to be extremely competent and quickly gained a leadership position within the church. In their professional lives, Alberto works as a physical therapist and Alejandra is a claims settler for a multinational insurance company. Their life, however, is totally dedicated to the

church. While Alberto is charged with several administrative duties, Alejandra is CEFURIS-NA's coordinating person behind the "road-shows" featuring Brazilian *Padrinhos* touring the U.S. Because of complex logistics, it is an extremely time-consuming task since at any given time at least four *Padrinhos* along with their *comitivas* will be travelling around the world. When they visit the U.S. the *Padrinhos* will typically visit some five to six churches once or twice a year. All of this must be carefully coordinated not to mention paid for.

When I started with the church, five *fardados* sat at the star-table: Alberto, Alejandra, Eduardo, Marcela and Reinaldo, a Peruvian physical therapist who occasionally incorporates a *caboclo* entity. More than three years later, the star table now congregates four people: Alberto, Alejandra, Reinaldo and Michelle, an American practitioner well-versed in Chinese medicine.

Nationality-wise, this is an international group more or less reflecting the immigrant makeup of Miami: Russia, Ukraine, England, Turkey and France to name a few are some of the nationalities present at *Ceu do Lua Cheia*. Also, given the preponderance of Latino culture in Miami, the number of people from South America and particularly from its Southern Cone (Uruguay, Argentina and Chile) are disproportionately represented. Curiously, only a few hail from the more Caribbean-flavored countries of Colombia, Venezuela and the Central-American region at large. There is little racial mixing as one finds just a handful of *mestizo* blood members. While Americans are also fairly well represented, no more than three Brazilians regularly participate in "works." Members come from all walks of life with many working in the healthcare industry as physical or massage therapists. In addition, some are artists while most are college-



educated or hold an advanced degree of some kind. Generally speaking, I personally have found the people I've met in the Santo Daime churches I've visited, and certainly including the Miami Church, to be both intelligent and socially progressive and/or aware.

“Works” at *Ceu da Lua Cheia* replicate the structured pattern followed by all Santo Daime churches. However, as a consequence of our small size, we do not hold all “works” as stipulated by the calendar of official “works.” For example, we do not conduct a mass the first Monday of every month and we curtail the number of “works” during the December festivity period. Our small size also does not allow us to be included in the full Brazilian *Padriho* “road-show” schedule. For instance, we have never received *Padrinhos* Alex Polari and Luis Mendez or *Madrinha* Clara. Furthermore, *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto and *Padrinho* Alfredo, two other “regulars” on the *Padrinho* U.S. circuit, will occasionally skip Miami during their trips. Those who can afford to travel will compensate by attending such *Padrinho* works in other states with bigger churches such as in Maryland and Texas.

As a man blessed with remarkable stamina, our Protector Alberto singlehandedly leads all of our “works” here in Miami. Like a beacon of light and utter personal strength, he firmly stays put throughout the entire “work” endlessly strumming the guitar. I have rarely seen Alberto take a break, including during grueling 12-hour-long dancing “works.” Alberto is presently working on compiling a collection of songs in *hinario* format numbering some twenty-five songs so far. His latest hymn entitled “The Creator” was in fact dedicated to me not too long ago. I feel so blessed indeed to have been gifted with such recognition. It is not only such an honor bestowed upon a *fardado* but also

because Alberto happens to be a very talented musician. The music is truly enchanting as are the lyrics:

<i>Eu sou um criador</i>	<i>I am a creator</i>
<i>E eu tambem fui criado</i>	<i>And I was also created</i>
<i>Por meu Papai da Luz</i>	<i>By my father of Light</i>
<i>E a mia Mae das Aguas</i>	<i>And my Mother of the Waters</i>
<i>Eu peço a Jesus</i>	<i>I ask to Jesus</i>
<i>Que perdoe as minhas faltas</i>	<i>To forgive my faults</i>
<i>Para nunca me faltar</i>	<i>So I never lack</i>
<i>O valor e a esperanza</i>	<i>The valor and the hope</i>
<i>Todos tenham paciencia</i>	<i>Everyone have patience</i>
<i>Que um dia vou chegar</i>	<i>That one day I will arrive</i>
<i>Quem estuda esta ciencia</i>	<i>Those who study this science</i>
<i>Pode encontrar a paz</i>	<i>Can find the peace</i>
<i>Vai devagarinho</i>	<i>Go very slowly</i>
<i>Para ver aonde vai</i>	<i>To see where you go</i>
<i>Se aprende um bocadinho</i>	<i>If you learn a little bit</i>
<i>O Mestre vai te abraçar</i>	<i>The master will hold you</i>
<i>O Beija Flor chegou</i>	<i>The Hummingbird arrived</i>
<i>Batendo as suas asas</i>	<i>Flapping his wings</i>
<i>Vibrando com todo amor</i>	<i>Vibrating with all love</i>
<i>Limpendo a nossa casa</i>	<i>Cleansing our House<sup>31</sup></i>

Alberto very clearly explained to me these hymns are simply “received” and that they differ greatly from regular musical and lyrical composition where there is a given author. According to him, “the hymns comes down completely from above, with music, lyrics included...even the person who will be offered to, if that happens to be the case.” When Alberto last sung this hymn it was accompanied by soft percussion and one single

<sup>31</sup> Song form hinario “received” by Alberto, the Protector of *Ceu da Lua Cheia*.

rattle, which produced a very high pitch sounding more like a thousand little bells. Everyone found it to be magical. There is a real climax characterizing the end of a Santo Daime ritual. Chosen *hinarios* are typically very uplifting both musically and insofar as their actual content and meaning. The lingering post-ritual feeling is very much reminiscent of Turner's idea of *comunitas* or great social unity and communion. Since Eduardo retired, we no longer enjoy flute instrumentation at *Ceu da Lua Cheia*. However, we now have a Brazilian *fardada* who accompanies with a keyboard. The fact remains, music and Daime are literally the heart and soul of our "works." They lift us up, transport us and ultimately integrate us into something whole and sacred.

### **The New Middle Class: Ceu da Lua Cheia's Membership Pool**

Andrew Dawson describes Santo Daime membership as being composed from a "new middle class" (Dawson, 2013). He defines the average *Daimista* as "college or university educated and, when not self employed, generally engaged by state institutions or private firms as professionals responsible for, among other things, health and social care, information technology, education, culture industry and service sector provider"(Dawson, 2013). This definition concurs very well with my own observations of the Miami membership. The subjective well-being of said new middle-class is closely tied to how and what it consumes, as it is concomitantly ensconced in commodity capitalism. The Miami socio-cultural landscape is not any different in that regard. In light of this new epistemology, let us now examine the broader social context delineating the potential "recruiting" of new *Daimistas*.

Peter Berger was one of the first members in academia to hone in on the appearance of market dynamics across the religious field. According to him, the combined dynamics of structural secularization and socio-cultural pluralism engendered the permanent presence of competition across the religious landscape (Berger, 1967). In his *cause célèbre* book “The Sacred Canopy,” Berger explains the shift along with the consequences of such late-modern trend. According to such trend, the logic of market economics has come to dominate religious institutions as well.

*The key characteristic of all pluralistic situations, whatever the detail of their historical background, is that religious ex-monopolies can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client population. Allegiance is voluntary and thus, by definition, less certain. As a result, the religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be marketed. It must be “sold” to a clientele that is no longer constrained to “buy.” The pluralistic situation is, above all, a market situation. In it, the religious institution become marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities (Berger, 1967, p. 138).*

Two important consequences arise from this new consumerism seeping through the religious landscape. The first one deals with changing market tastes and the dynamic element of changeability once it is injected into a situation to such a degree that “it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the religious tradition as unchanging verity” (Berger, 1967). The dynamics of consumer preference, once present, can introduce a “wild card” effect into the mix. This produces a situation whereby religious content becomes akin to “fashion” (Berger, 1967). Themes of duty and obligation are associated with traditional religiosity. Modern religiosity on the other hand is characterized by other

more circumspect goals of self-expression and realization, as they tend to define consumers who can freely pick and choose on the “religious market-place.”

### **Ceu da Lua Cheia: Declining Membership in Miami**

During the almost four years I’ve been attending Santo Daime works at the Miami church, I have personally seen a decline in membership. As mentioned at the outset, this “point of light” has netted a loss of two fardados in the period under examination. That is in contrast to other Santo Daime churches around the U.S. that can attest to a moderate increase in member ranks. Though I haven’t gone with a fine tooth comb through such membership statistics, I am aware the Austin, TX church has grown of late while the same can possibly be said about Maryland, the two churches I’m most familiar with outside of Florida. The issue of declining membership at *Ceu da Lua Cheia* hence is a puzzling one because, as I explained previously, Miami *per se* happens to provide a very open-minded and vibrant New-Age backdrop congruent with Santo Daime ideals.

From a broad macro perspective, two contradicting forces seemingly in opposite directions are working to hinder acculturation efforts of Santo Daime in Miami. I would contend the level to which a NRM church is ensconced in New-Age ideology works both in favor of and against acculturation for *Ceu da Lua Cheia*. It supports acculturation because, as discussed in the Chapter One, tenets of New-Age religiosity echo most of the principles characterizing Santo Daime. Paradoxically, one of the most defining elements having to do with how New-Age relates to its followers is in essence undermining prospects for growth at *Ceu da Lua Cheia*. To be specific, Peter Burger’s theory indicates that the fact that Santo Daime is bitterly positioned against proselytizing is seriously

undermining membership growth. Put differently, for institutional growth to occur, that institution must be known to the public and admittedly *Ceu da Lua Cheia* is not interested in this. Pursuant to CEFLURIS global directives, *Ceu da Lua Cheia* is adopting a policy of cautious safeguarding and invisibility. The problem is that for religions to succeed in an increasingly secular and competitive marketplace, they do need to market themselves, according to Peter Berger.

Miami's *Ceu da Lua Cheia* actually was formed almost by accident. *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto for sure gave it a formal stamp of approval but that was really it. The Church grew of its own accord without an actual plan and/or allocated resources. It took almost five years before Alberto could even make a commitment to keep the candlewick lit. Seven years after Paulo Roberto formally inaugurated the Miami Church little has happened in the way of organization and/or strategy. As it is acutely aware of its predicament and per the new *Padrinho* Alfredo directives to build churches and plant *ayahuasca*, *Ceu da Lua Cheia* is timidly beginning to develop an organization. Alberto and Alejandra have surprisingly asked *fardados* to attend new administrative meetings over the last three months alone. When I brought up the issue of lack of growth at the very first meeting, however, I was quickly silenced. The meeting minutes read: "Alfonso brought up his concern over church growth; Alejandra responded that growth is a natural process." As I understand it, a "natural process" essentially means "we are not going to go out and recruit people."

Given that CEFLURIS has stated for the record it is not actively pursuing an international growth strategy, it is no wonder then the Miami church finds itself in such an acculturation predicament. One example illustrating such dilemma for *Ceu da Lua*

*Cheia* comes to mind. To my knowledge, all local peyote ritual ceremonies are routinely and discreetly communicated via email to an undisclosed list of participants. Given how the profile of those participating in peyote ceremonies closely resembles that of Santo Daime *aficionados*, we could hence argue that to the extent *Ceu da Lua Cheia* does not disseminate information about “works” the church clearly is losing a golden opportunity to enlarge its membership. Personally I have attended two peyote ceremonies and numbers easily reach 50 to 70 people. Even closer to home is the case of a former Santo Daime *fardada* who conducts Santo Daime-like ceremonies in her South Beach apartment quite regularly. If the information I have received is any reliable, this person, who is quite visible in social media outlets such as Facebook, gathers an average of twenty to forty people single handedly. What is significant for this study is that the ceremonies conducted by this person include both the use of *daime* and *hinario* singing. Furthermore, her clientele’s profile, while economically better off, is by and large no different than that found at *Ceu do Lua Cheia*.

### **A Hostile Legal Environment**

While Western authorities consider *ayahuasca* an illegal “drug,” its central use as revered sacrament at the very heart of every Santo Daime ceremony—and before them for indigenous tribes at large-- squarely puts it in the category of an entheogenic substance, as opposed to a mere recreational “drug” with its accompanying stigma. An entheogen --meaning “generating the divine within”--is a psychoactive substance

typically used within the well-defined context of a religious, shamanic or spiritual ceremony.<sup>32</sup>

As this chapter will explore, Santo Daime acculturation in Miami is marred by a plethora of issues. One of the most important is the “elephant in the living room,” or the current political and legal climate vis-a-vis *ayahuasca* legalization in the U.S.

The 1990s were turbulent for the Santo Daime Church on the North American continent with federal authorities on several occasions confiscating *daime* shipments (Lowell, 2014). Canadian police, for example, seized *ayahuasca* supplies landing into the country in 2000. The highest-profile arrest involved the leader of the Santo Daime Church in Ashland, Oregon who was led away in handcuffs after federal agents intercepted a *daime* shipment that had arrived at his home (Haber, 2011). That arrest and ensuing courtroom drama, nonetheless, became a landmark case legalizing the religious use of *daime* in Oregon, the first US state to afford such protection to the religious use of *ayahuasca* for the Santo Daime Church only (Lowell, 2014). The fact that Santo Daime religion espouses, among many other things, similar values to Christianity (hymnal preponderance of the Virgin Mary, rosary praying and generally a certain Catholic ethos that seeps through) may have been a convincing factor helping to legalize the religious usage of *ayahuasca* in the state of Oregon, as was the case earlier in Brazil. One could speculate the Santo Daime movement may potentially soon plant another legal flag on Hawaiian soil. One reason could be that authorities have never once raided the established facility currently churning out *daime* for all US churches, implying perhaps a

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<sup>32</sup>*Padrinho* Paulo Roberto himself during a recent Santo Daime ceremony in Miami was very clear in reminding his audience that as long as use of the *daime* was within the strict confines of a religious ritual it remained unequivocally sacred and thus very far removed from the profane.



more tolerant climate for *ayahuasca* use in Hawaii. Another potential softening in the US illegal stance toward drinking *ayahuasca* was also evident at the recent Santo Daime Plenary Meetings I attended in September 2013 outside of Washington DC. It was made clear there that “no one is going to jail.”<sup>33</sup>

Another Brazilian Ayahuasca Religion *Uniao do Vegetal* (UDV) has also worked hard in the U.S. to gain greater legality for the religious use of *ayahuasca*. In fact, and perhaps as an omen for more political and legal progress to be achieved for Santo Daime in the U.S., UDV in August 2010 was able to secure a landmark agreement with the U.S. Drugs Enforcement Agency (DEA). That agreement, settling a dispute regarding administrative issues involving *ayahuasca*, “provided a legal process for the UDV to import and use *ayahuasca* without creating any legal precedent that the DEA would view as detrimental to the Controlled Substances Act (CSA)” (Labate, 2012). On U.S. soil, to earn religious freedom and the legal protection namely for the religious practice of entheogens, one must litigate under the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). Such Act requires the claimant religious group to prove that government laws burden their religious practices and that the religious practice in question is subordinate to a sincerely-held religious belief (Labate, Beatriz & Feeney, Kevin, 2002).

Though modest progress has been achieved of late with regards to the legal use of entheogens in the context of religious ceremonies, the U.S. political and legal climate at

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<sup>33</sup> Generally speaking, the Santo Daime Church striving to legally protect its religious use of *daime* mirrors what the Native American Church (NAC) successfully accomplished a few decades earlier. The NAC from the 1960s throughout the 1980s successfully battled for their right to use the psychedelic cactus peyote as their sacrament in all of their religious ceremonies. The religious use of peyote is now firmly protected under US federal law pursuant namely to the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 and other court cases won in the early 1990s. Hence, the NAC to this day remains a trail-blazer for all other alternative faiths relying on entheogens for their US-based religious ceremonies.

large remains rather controversial. Increased media exposure of trendy “ayahuasca tourism” in Peru or Brazil may help somewhat in paving the way one day for complete legality of the religious use of *daime* in the U.S. However, a much bigger player in that endeavor would be the role played by the CA-based Multidisciplinary Association of Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), a repository for the latest advancements in psychedelic medicine research and their contribution to human healing. As I will explore later in my conclusion, MAPS currently plays a central role in the arena of scientific research and consequent potential legitimizing of mind-altering substances, including *ayahuasca*.

### **Availability of the Sacrament**

Santo Daime international expansion has in fact brought to the forefront the very issue of reduced availability of the brew. That’s because worldwide demand cannot possibly be met by relying on what is harvested in the wild alone. *Padrinho* Alfredo foresaw such growth predicament back in the 1980s when he set up the “Daime Forever” program that ensured the propagation of the plants to ensure uninterrupted supply (Lowell, 2014). *Padrinho* Alfredo is now even pushing for every individual Church around the world to independently grow and produce their very own *ayahuasca*, rendering them self-sustainable in the long-run. The *Banisteriopsis Caapi* vine historically has only been found in the Amazon rainforest where abundant sun and high humidity are *de rigueur*. One would think its cultivation would be more of an issue in colder climates, say Alaska or Norway. *Chacruna* leaves on the other hand could be protected if grown in greenhouses. Meantime, the issue of *daime* availability for the North American continent *per se* is well-assured for now as American churches enjoy

their own fully-fledged production facility in Hawaii. Easily produced in Hawaii thanks to its tropical climate, the *daime* is then shipped to every U.S. and Canadian Church by means of heavy-duty plastic jugs as opposed to glass. Broken glass jugs would indeed mean a devastating loss of the labor of love that is the making of such sacred brew.

### **The Piercing Daime Work**

Based on my own research and observations, church members are on a personal quest for spiritual wholeness and a more holistic life-style congruent with their perceived identities or the ones they want to forge for themselves. *Daimistas* consider their church an arena for transformative experiences. Within this context, the *sui generis* Santo Daime “work” may be described as a “one-stop shopping” place for accessing the spiritual nourishment needed to construct and consolidate desired identities. An analogy to this would be a gas station whereby cars stop by to fill up and continue their way on the road. As explained further down, the ritual itself can be positively overwhelming. In addition to this, it takes about three days to adequately process the benefits of said “work.” Given how Santo Daime operates on the fringes of the legally and morally constructed Western discourses, some *Daimistas* hence take comfort in their church as an ally in their struggle for a kinder and just world. To the more disenchanted, the Miami Santo Daime church may even look like a symbolic platform for activism, militancy and resistance. Despite this, joining the ranks of Santo Daime tends to be perceived as an element of spiritual enjoyment and gratification; a way to feel accomplished. Notwithstanding reports by *Daimistas* that are ultimately subjective, “works” remain an ordeal enabling participants

to journey into the darker corners of their mind in search of a different reality, one where they will need to confront their own fears.

This may be true for the senior *fardado/a* for whom Santo Daime is a way of life and who has developed character traits enabling him/her to cope with the more challenging aspects of this religion. History will show, however, that neophytes on the other hand can easily be deterred from attending further Santo Daime works. To be sure, one of the main reasons explaining membership decline is the toughness of the Santo Daime *trabalho*, as already explored in my previous chapters. But suffice it to say that if “getting well” (vomiting or diarrhea) is looked upon as symbolic purification by the seasoned *fardado/a*, any given prospective new member may in contrast regard this as more of a detestable and gruesome act to be avoided at all costs. What follows is a written testimony emailed in answer to my inquiry as to why the person stopped attending Santo Daime works at the Miami church:

*Attending a work demands I devote an entire day or night to a group ritual that ultimately I know will benefit me personally but also humanity at large in the end, and I love the concept. It's just that it's so physically grueling!! I'm a light weight and a bit of a sensitive nature both physically and emotionally so it's easy for me, especially if I've been served more daime than usual, to just, well, start “flying away”!... As the effects of the daime linger for another two or three days in me after the “work,” I will undeniably experience a sense of relaxation which, no matter how wonderful it feels, is not very conducive to returning to “reality” and to all the “chores” and “duties” I am constantly facing in my personal life...I feel a little unproductive. It's a bit of a double-edge sword as in, I want to allow myself to relax as I feel my heart is more open and kinder to everyone I encounter thereafter, be it my mother or the young woman preparing the cappuccino I just ordered in a cafe. On the other hand, I don't necessarily feel very productive or*

*wanting to “go out and conquer the world,” though I may feel like this another day or two later.*<sup>34</sup>

The grueling nature of a Santo Daime work cannot be overstated. I already mentioned how one person I sponsored in the past fainted during the work due to low blood pressure. I recall another case involving a young yoga teacher who stopped attending the Miami works because, in her own words, she “became weak” and therefore could not keep up with what was demanded in the *salao*.

The fact is the regimented order imposed on ritual participants and the sheer difficulty of a Santo Daime *trabalho* stands at crossroads to what New-Agers are seeking. Or to frame it differently, Santo Daime “works” turn modern market’s contemporary utilitarian values right on its head. In a world dominated by a fierce market mentality, the easy, comfortable and pleasant are privileged over its polar opposites, the difficult and the challenging. The new middle class--resting on a logic of commodity exchange--has little patience with systems emulating any type of deprivation. Consumed as society is with desires of immediate gratification and marred by a “short-memory” mentality, one then inevitably and quickly discards the unpleasant. For this reason, *Daimistas* understand very clearly why their sacred services are not actually called rituals or ceremonies. They reckon how a ritual or a service is what takes place in any given local church at 10 AM on Sundays. *Daimistas* in contrast will need to actively “work” when attending their church events.

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Alice in Miami on October 9, 2013; a lawyer in her thirties.

### **The Prevailing Brazilian Ethos**

Another reason working against acculturation is that Santo Daime posits a most Brazilian-centric ethos. To begin with, Portuguese is the official ritual language in Santo Daime, meaning most of the work will be based on Portuguese hymns. Though *hinarios* are always translated into English, with very few exceptions they are sung in the lusophone language. It is virtually impossible to move into positions of leadership at the Miami Church or elsewhere unless one speaks Portuguese. Furthermore given obvious close ties to Ceu do Mapia and Brazilian culture at large, people are strongly encouraged to learn Portuguese. Moreover, people are always advised to visit *Ceu do Mapia* and spend a considerable amount of time in the rainforest attending *feitio* works and the like. While most *Daimistas* undeniably enjoy the Portuguese and Brazilian character proper of Santo Daime, many nevertheless shy away from actually delving into such culture, preferring instead the display of local, colloquium parlance. For this reason, I would dare to even postulate that what may be occurring with the Santo Daime church in Miami is in fact a process of “reversed acculturation.”

### **Disturbing Ritual Practices**

The strange and bizarre quality of some of our “works” such as Illumination or Mediumship works probably hampers greater local acceptance of our church. While *Ceu da Lua Cheia* still follows CEFLURIS Santo Daime lineage, aspects of mediumship have increasingly started dominating our “works.” This should come as no surprise since after all it was *Padrinho Sebastiao*--the man CEFLURIS-NA considers its leader--who broke with the tradition articulated by Mestre Irineu, one that does not contemplate mediumship

works.<sup>35</sup> From the point of view of a newcomer, however, mediumship may indeed look very “weird.” Mediumship entails people routinely incorporating spiritual entities. This situation often leads to bizarre, knee-jerk body movements and facial expressions or body language that are esthetically ugly and sometimes even violent. What happens in mediumship is that a spirit will search for the most “appropriate” body and then decidedly incorporate it. Occasionally, dark spirits will enter the body of people vibrating at lower levels indeed causing great havoc for them. Such a spectacle may be quite frightening for some.

Together with the above, I have also been told by non-returning guests that the strong Catholic flavor in Santo Daime works acts as a total deterrent for them. As most New-Agers reject Roman Catholicism, many first-timers hence quickly lose interest especially if they line up the military ethos with the Catholic paradigm. Because the plethora of Catholic prayers and numerous *hinario* references to specific Roman Catholic language are so robustly imbedded in the ritual ceremony, our latest fardado defection occurred largely from the off-putting effect the Catholic creed had on this individual.

### **Essential Commitments: Money and Time**

Some people have advanced some very pertinent practical considerations as to why they’ve come to reject in the end Santo Daime in Miami. I once asked a mother of one child why she was no longer attending the works. I taped this conversation and therefore I can reproduce it as it was chronicled to me:

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<sup>35</sup> The lineage claiming to follow the original unbroken doctrine as constructed by Irineu Serra is the faction that goes by the name of “Alto Santo.”

*Two big impediments are the gigantic time commitment that is required and just how expensive it is to simply attend works, even more so when it involves out-of-state travel for a Padrinho visit... As a mother of a very young child, I find myself exhausted on a daily basis by the demands of parenthood as it were. I feel a sense of guilt as I feel torn between my personal need to invest time in developing my own spirituality and my need to take care of my child who needs me. If only works were not so long and physically taxing!! When I come back, say at 4 am, I do not have the luxury of catching up on some much needed sleep (as the many single people I have come to know in the Santo Daime community get to do, I'm sure) as I know my child is going to wake up by 7 am. At which point, I will need to prepare his breakfast, getting him ready for preschool if it's a weekday morning etc. The second biggest challenge with Santo Daime is the sheer high cost of attending works and the accompanying childcare costs. Should my child's father not be able to take care of him overnight, or he wants to attend a work with me, the issue of childcare is a very difficult one, I would say. Based on my rough calculations, were I to devote myself as a fardada and attend all regular works and travel three times a year out-of-state for Padrinho visits, just to begin with, my "Santo Daime bill" would reach upwards of \$10,000 a year, imagine!<sup>36</sup>*

In the case of my personal situation, which I based on some 50 rituals annually and at least three out-of-state trips to attend *Padrinho* works, the bill adds up to \$4,600 annually. Considering that I live by myself and that my growing child lives with her mother, I do not have any childcare costs or the like of my own. However, I am considering visiting Ceu do Mapia soon and that would be a \$5,000 trip. My own subjectivity concerning the cost of Santo Daime works is that the investment made is returned with interest in the form of healing and spiritual growth.

Having said this however, the above figures are somewhat misleading in that they hide the true time investment required by Santo Daime. To be sure, if one considers that the human body while still under the influence of the *ayahuasca* tea the next day needs yet another extra day or two after a work to fully "integrate" the material learned during

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Julia in Miami on October 9, 2013; a divorced attorney in her thirties. October 14, 2013.



said work, then total annual time devoted to the doctrine jumps to approximately four months. Under such circumstances, Santo Daime can then easily be described as a “way of life.” This complements a strong sense of group identity and what *Daimistas* perceive as their own uniqueness with regards to their participation in rituals. I received the following testimony from a guest who clearly emphasized the commitment required by the doctrine:

*I was introduced to Santo Daime about a year ago and remain what is called a “visiting guest”. Due to personal life circumstances, I have not been able to attend “works” on a regular basis, perhaps slowing down my quest to develop my spirituality. Planning to attend a “work” for me, in and of itself, is a great commitment yet I’ve done it with great awareness and gratitude for a ritual that I believe has helped me immensely in even coping with the aforementioned difficult life circumstances. What I know of Santo Daime and of the inducted fardados and fardadas is that it has become a way of life for them and they are personally very committed to the cause, their own evolving spiritual development and also to helping other people who may be marred in a spiritual crisis. I actually view a Santo Daime ritual as a Spiritual 911 of sorts...However, the sheer enormous investment of time demanded by the Santo Daime church is something that has detracted me from taking the leap to become a fardada, no matter how grateful I am to Santo Daime... As I said, to me, it has even been the equivalent of a Spiritual 911 when I’ve experienced depressive and dark thoughts. As I am someone who feels very deeply and with great passion, it is deceptively easy for my emotions to flood me, as my challenge in life is to not become imprisoned by them.<sup>37</sup>*

### **Competition: The New Rule of the Religious Marketplace**

Admittedly, given how Santo Daime does not proselytize, the Miami church is simply not equipped to effectively compete in the religious service marketplace. Borrowing from economics and business parlance, *Ceu da Lua Cheia*’s competitive edge is weak as it faces direct competition from the following religious actors: Travelling

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Silvia in Miami on April 23, 2013; a yoga teacher in her forties.

South American shamans conducting rituals in the Miami area, Native-American peyote ceremonies, Holotropic Breath workshops led by pseudo experts, local self-invented *ayahuasca* “gurus” holding ceremonies at their private residences, psychic centers offering a vast esoteric repertoire, etc. All these actors are by nature well-organized and actively engaged in disseminating their services, something that is typically done via email and/or social media such as Facebook.

For sure, the ethos of a *Daimista* stands at cross-currents with the consumer culture pervading the new middle class. This situation undoubtedly creates tension because Santo Daime membership draws significantly from this group. The all-embracing character of late-modern capitalism requires that such people’s market values spill over onto the domain of religious participation. How can one reconcile this with *Daimista* culture?

In her treatment of late-modern consumer culture, Roberta Sassatelli uses the notion of de-commoditization to describe a variety of practices social actors enter into in their everyday dealings with the market. By engaging in such behavior, she explains, they re-signify standardized commodities by transforming them into goods with personal meaning (Sassatelli, 2007). Whereas the act of consumption *per se* remains, the process of de-commoditization hereby reframes the meaning and use of the commodities consumed by relating their significance not to the act of consumption itself but to other forms of value such as affection, relationships, symbolism, status, etc. The act of re-framing thereby transposes commodity use into a significant practice, the meaning of which is greater than that ordinarily associated with everyday consumption (Sassatelli, 2007).

Santo Daime, however, does not totally behave as a New-Age institution. Even though both New-Age philosophy and Santo Daime practices share many common traits - beyond the syncretic elements of the religion--Santo Daime does not celebrate the “cut-and-paste” boldness of true New-Age religions. A shift in perception therefore must occur if more New-Agers are to become committed *Daimistas*. Based on Sassatelli’s insight into re-signification of commoditization, new potential *Daimistas* would hence be more or less obliged to frame their contemporary consumption in a manner that would confer it a new meaning process of commoditization. This attitude would be instrumental in diffusing the above stated tensions.

### **Ceu da Lua Cheia: An Organization without a Staff**

To illustrate statistical chances for *Ceu da Lua Cheia* to survive in the Miami religious landscape, I will hereby extol Max Weber’s theory. As mentioned at the beginning, one can use the Max Weber analysis of the tension between charismatic domination and bureaucratic authority to answer in a compelling and clear way questions concerning not only acculturation but also institutional church survival itself. In his “routinization” of charisma argument, Weber talks about the death of the charismatic founder and about the gradual transformation that has to take place if the religion is to survive. According to Weber, the founder’s charismatic type of authority must be converted into a priestly or bureaucratic type of authority to ensure institutional continuance.

However, as it was discussed previously, the mother church in Brazil is having a difficult time making the transition from a charismatic movement to a formal religious

movement. And the mark of this struggle extends to the Miami church. No one from *Ceu da Lua Cheia* is dealing with administrative matters unless they are related to CEFLURIS-NA. Hence, on the basis of Max Weber's theory, the Miami church should be reaping mixed results. As an example, we have Alberto as our leader but, should he be unable to lead works, no one is aptly qualified to replace him. Furthermore, there is a bit of a "no man's land" in the way of a rational infrastructure or established bureaucracy. According to Weber, the Miami church would need to develop an administrative skeleton capable of running the church with efficacy, thus liberating Alejandra from such added responsibilities. Up until very recently, this was not happening. Throughout the years I have participated in this church, I have been surprised at the lack of activity beyond the confines of the work. For example, given my initial lack of knowledge about Santo Daime and my yearning for more information, I proposed we set aside some evenings to lecture on the doctrine. Needless to say, my request was not given serious consideration. I have since then learned the teachings or instructions for the purpose of spiritual and moral edification is something minimally employed in this doctrine. *Daimistas* would reply to such concerns that the *daime* and the hymns are all you need. They seemingly value the absence of teaching as they would rather mull on their own thoughts and consequently reach their own conclusions. The pervading feeling is that the only way to learn about the doctrine is through self-study. Ritual participants actually disconnect themselves from the church and its accompanying doctrine once the ritual ceremony has ended, that is, until the next work is programmed and communicated to a regular member list.

So as to justify their lack of effort in developing a more modern infrastructure capable of asserting itself in the religious marketplace, *Daimistas* tend to fall back on the clever phrase “the *daime* is for everyone, but not everyone is for the *daime*.” As an organization, Santo Daime believes that only those who truly feel a “calling” to join the Church will do so, regardless of their personal circumstances. Weber believes this is a dangerous state of affairs as charismatic leadership can only ensure continuance provided said charismatic leader is available to perform his duties. In addition to this, when one updates such argument to conform to modern times, the consequences of not having a properly developed rational bureaucracy becomes even more detrimental than during Weber’s day and age. To be sure, we have seen that survival in the religious marketplace must engage an organization capable of marketing and handling the varied aspects of relating to the world at large.

As I extolled in this chapter, the evidence I collected revealed that Miami’s *Ceu da Lua Cheia* is highly reluctant to engage in any form of acute proselytizing. The enduring illegality of the *ayahuasca* brew in the U.S. and how that is forcing the Miami Church to continue operating in an underground clandestine way remains the biggest impediment to effective acculturation. The Miami church also faces stiff competition from other and perhaps more popular local New-Age movements. Issues ranging from the rigid Brazilian military essence of a ritual to how time-consuming it is all contribute to stalling Santo Daime expansion in Miami. Finally, a lack of effective bureaucracy at the very heart of *Ceu da Lua Cheia* represents a huge threat to Santo Daime being able to successfully encroach onto the local religious landscape. Belonging to the U.S. umbrella organization CEFLURIS-NA--as explained later in Chapter Five--in and of itself isn’t the

answer to the many issues this Santo Daime “Point of Light” is confronted with. Every church around the country in fact faces its respective growing pains and must stand independently on its own two feet. The data strongly supports the notion that one of the main issues impeding assimilation goes back again to the actual difficulty of the Santo Daime ritual as it relies on physical endurance. Chapter Five in fact will explore how performing bodies are a central part of the Santo Daime sacred ritual.

## CHAPTER 5

### Performing Bodies: The Santo Daime Ritual

This chapter will explain the actual skeleton of a Santo Daime ritual *per se*. Multi-faceted aspects range from the essential role played by the sacred *ayahuasca* brew all the way the to military-style mood that permeates the ceremony. Sticking out like a sore thumb, the physically grueling aspect of this intense and quasi extremist ritual remains the major roadblock obstructing the path to membership growth in Miami. Data collected clearly points to people very often being put off by the sheer physical endurance that is required, in addition to the austere military style. The Miami leadership is doing very little, if anything, to soften such hard-core aspects in order to lure more comfort-minded New-Agers in Miami.

#### The Centrality of the Santo Daime Ritual

I will start this section with the very eloquent written impressions a member of the Miami church provided me with. The compelling integrity in which the piece was written convinced me that it should be highlighted at the outset of this section. She is actually a writer and has been with the church for about two years:

*As someone who had developed a growing interest in all matters of spirituality and psychedelic medicine, the occult, mind-altering states of consciousness and their healing effects, I was very drawn to exploring the effects of the plant medicine ayahuasca in particular. I had read a lot about its pharmacological properties but also about its spiritually-healing qualities. I was well prepared for my first-ever “work” by the senior people of the church who told me it was*

important to embrace the daime in its bare essence, as it means, after all, “Give me”...So I really made a conscious decision to leave fear at the door prior to entering the salao. After all, I just love going on adventures! I decided to trust that this plant medicine would open for me a realm of divine visions that would enable me to make so many personal connections, bringing me closer to the Universal Truth, as it were. I had been warned to expect vomiting, diarrhea etc. and to not feel embarrassed by such things as everyone would be going through similar experiences. I have to say, though, that in the two years I’ve been attending works I have yet to “purge” or even have other “classical” bodily reactions, other than stomach aches or general fatigue. Depending on the type of work (whether an Illumination involving mediumship or a Concentration work), I will feel varying degrees of nausea but that tends to come and go in waves. I find that concentrating on my breathing helps me and repeating to myself as a Mantra that I am here to encounter my own divinity, hence I am “OK,” and to even embrace the nausea. I eminently trust the daime to do whatever it needs to do with me. I have made great strides in my “firmness” during the ritual—even though I still need to lie down during a work--making far more efforts to sing and follow the hinarios as I now understand how grounding they are and how they are the crucial teachings. I feel blessed with the amazing and revealing visions I routinely have, from intertwined serpents to jaguars to watchful female eyes with long lashes (symbolizing I am encountering my own spirit, apparently) and even owls and indigenous masks, flowing rivers etc. One other time I experienced a most symbolic vision that involved a pair of legs forcefully kicking open the doors and windows to my inner higher consciousness when I saw this magical divine purple light flooding the realms of my mind... Another powerful physical reaction of mine to the daime directly led me to an important moment of spiritual and personal awakening. I had been drawn to the campfire that had been set up outside of the salao...There, I was literally and dramatically brought down to my knees as if by an external force I could not control. I remember, I was gasping for air! I felt overwhelmed with total deference for the roaring fire, I was bowing to God and feeling overwhelmed with humility. I also felt drawn like a moth to this fire as if it awakened the power of my own femininity while teaching me the intense power of prayer and of the importance of surrendering to something much higher than me. I understood quite clearly in that moment that nourishing my own inner fire and paying attention to my own needs is in fact a way to honor my own spirituality and brand of intuition, to let go of controlling habits etc..I’m grateful I experienced such a magical moment and, ever since, return to it in my memory when in my daily life it just all feels too hard to handle, when I feel so frustrated with the state of my life and sometimes even desperate...That memory serves to



*empower me as a woman trying to make it in a man's world, I guess one could say... It just reinforces my belief that I simply revel being a woman! I love giving the nourishing and tenderness that as women we are divinely empowered to bring into this world...I guess that's what I would say.*<sup>38</sup>

As previously stated, one of Irineu Serra's most important contributions to the development of the shamanic spirituality he became acquainted with in the Amazonian rainforest was the structure he invested into it. I am not insinuating that indigenous shamanic practices lacked edifice or that Mestre Irineu did not have a legitimate, strong spiritual calling to form a singularly unique church. Not at all. I discussed in Chapter Three how the entire Tukano ritual is orchestrated in an exceptionally complex fashion. However, starting from the latter, Mestre Irineu incorporated important changes so as to make the Santo Daime ritual more accessible to all. For example, he placed women at the same level as men hence incorporating a vastly marginalized sector of society right into the ritual, hereby creating a perception of greater equality between the sexes. Irineu Serra's divine revelation challenging him to follow pertinent instructions was distinctive in its own right. That eventually led to the creation of the Santo Daime Church. However, what is truly new and therefore remarkable was the personal stamp he placed on the ritual component of this ancient form of religiosity. Specifically, he infused the structure of the ritual with a manner that is almost exclusively centered on the body. By doing this, Serra created a modern version of a ritual that initially could not be reproduced outside of its natural jungle setting.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Anne in Miami on February 21, 2013. A 43 year old writer.

### **Mestre Irineu: Reinventing the Original Ayahuasca Ritual**

Mestre Irineu's greatest contribution to indigenous ritualistic *ayahuasca* consumption in the Amazonian Rainforest was to have dressed it with a formal, quasi military structure, whereby the manipulation or arrangement of "bodies" in the ritual space played a prominent role. There is evidence to explain why Irineu felt the need to imbue this ritual with a stern form of body-centered military discipline. Hints to the answer may be found in the specific historical context (Serra originally came from Brazil's Northeastern region of Maranhao, migrating to Northwestern Brazil around 1912). Firstly, Irineu Serra upon arriving in Rio Branco joined the ranks of the Territorial Guard, remaining in it for a full decade. By 1930 when he formally opened the doors to worship in his newly created Santo Daime church, he had reached the military rank of corporal (McRae 1992). This must have made quite an impact on this 30-year-old man, imparting on him a greater sense of discipline. His then job description, however, did not involve any actual defense matter or bellicose objective. It focused rather on matters of demarcation of border lines between the three neighboring countries of Brazil, Peru and Bolivia. Secondly, there was the Brazilian government effort to deal with the socio-economic effects produced by the rubber boom. It sought to incorporate into its politico-economic system a forgotten region undergoing rapid and violent changes as a result of the international capitalist penetration attracted by the rubber boom (Stanfield, 1998). As Cemin asserts "the military base, the military model, ultimately, everything that was constitutive of territoriality and thus identity of the Brazilians in Acre" (Cemin, 2010). Labate also states: "Santo Daime as its origins also valued the 'civilizing' role of the military." Thus the *fardamento* (wearing uniforms), hierarchy, discipline, as well as

other values of the Santo Daime doctrine are associated with the territorial conquest and militarization of social relations in Acre. Finally and in line with this narrative, there was the social turmoil caused by the 1912 collapse of the rubber boom preceded by the deplorable working conditions awaiting the migrant rubber tappers. We are told that many were held there by a cruel form of debt peonage. A Brazil historian commented the following on the plight of the *seringueiros* (rubber gatherers) of that period: “Dwindling numbers of Indians were pressed into service as *seringueiros*, recreating many of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ worst scenes of enslavement and abuse.” (Burns, 1993).

Therefore I believe such transition from a soft-core indigenous *ayahuasca* ritual practiced by Amazonian jungle aboriginals to the Santo Daime militarized version is in direct response to the deplorable social conditions of that time and to earlier government efforts to manage and claim territorial sovereignty over its territory in the midst of a contested struggle with foreign capitalist penetration. These came about on the coattails of, not only the collapse of the rubber industry, but the overall effect of the dehumanization such boom produced on the individuals who formed the core of the extractive labor force.

### **The Santo Daime Ritual: A Test of Endurance**

One reason explains first and foremost why *Daimistas* make use of the Portuguese word *trabalho* or work when referring to the Santo Daime ritual. This ritual, lasting anywhere from five to 12 hours--depending on what type of ritual--can be described as nothing less than an ordeal. In my personal three-year experience of going through

rituals, I have witnessed many people collapse to the floor, utterly exhausted by the physical requirements and/or as a result of the effect of *ayahuasca* ingestion. I have recorded images in my mind of the struggle ritual participants typically experience. I can see it in their faces and in the way their bodies react to it. Yet before one can partake in such spiritual elevation (sometimes even leading to an “out-of-body” or even “Near-Death” experience), one must prepare the body with ideally 12 hours or more of fasting or a light diet devoid of heavy meats and cheeses prior to the ceremony. Sexual abstinence is also recommended.

In this one instance I sponsored a person who had asked to attend a ritual. It was she who told me she was ready and willing to participate in the Santo Daime church. This person did not last very long on traditional disciplined standing formation as required by ritual rules. After about half an hour following the first serving of *ayahuasca*, I observed her becoming pale and weak. Her concentration dwindled; she stopped looking at the collection of hymns we were singing and in a moment’s notice proceeded to collapse to the floor. She was aided by another woman to the side of the *salao*--a place designated for those who cannot remain standing and in formation--where she remained laying down for the rest of the ceremony. After the ceremony lasting at least five hours, she mentioned to me she suffered from low blood pressure and the collapse was possibly due to that. This person came back for a total of maybe three or four times. Despite some modest improvements in her overall strength and firmness, she still was never able to remain in place during the entire ritual since she needed to go and “lay down” on a regular basis. She came to the conclusion that Santo Daime was not for her. She commented that, as a

result of the effects of *ayahuasca*, she did not feel safe driving back home after the ritual, perhaps even feeling some form of paranoia.

Another case involved a young male with a distinctly cocky attitude, partaking in his first *trabalho* in the Miami church and accompanied by his youthful brother. From what I could surmise in their demeanor, their idea was just to “get high,” actually not an unusual objective for many people seeking out Santo Daime works for the first time. According to the “dispatcher of Daime” during that ritual, this individual asked for more *ayahuasca* than what was given in the small paper cup everyone is privy to. He got his wish and was served an additional portion, which essentially filled up the glass to the brim. What occurred next is something this individual is bound to never forget. He spent the entire rest of the ritual on his knees vomiting his heart out into special receptacles typically placed on the floor for that very purpose on the outer edges of the *salao*. This space is reserved for participants to “get well,” as in purging/vomiting. His brother, on the other hand, remained seated but had to be reprimanded for his improper laughter as a result of spirit incorporation by another participant. We never heard from these two young brothers ever again.

CEFLURIS-NA Practical Guidelines have the following to say about getting well: “During the Work, you may experience dizziness, nausea, or other physical upsets including vomiting and diarrhea. We sometimes refer to this as ‘getting well’ with the understanding this is part of the healing function of the Work. You may wish to bring additional tissues, although these are provided; you may also wish to bring hand towels and/or a change of clothes.” (CEFLURIS-NA – Practical Guidelines, 2007).

In order to contain or avoid possible transgressions to the ritual order as the examples above depict, Irineu Serra grounded the Santo Daime ritual into internal discipline and external regulation. According to “Santo Daime: a New World Religion,” Dawson describes how these two factors “combined to constitute a ritual repertoire which might fruitfully be understood as a disciplinary regime responsible for the maintenance of the physical and symbolic order” (Dawson 2013, p. 44). Referring to a case he personally witnessed--similar to the one cited above--Dawson explains how the interaction between guests to church rituals and those charged with upholding the ritual order revolves around the physical management of the ceremonial space. To be sure, Dawson informs us how “the *fardados* who have been assigned as *fiscais* (fiscals or “inspectors”) must work to preserve the integrity of those parts of the ritual space deemed off-limits to the young man.”

There are also many labor-intensive steps involved in the making of the *daime* brew itself. Being asked to participate is considered an honor afforded only to senior Church members. Every aspect of this process lasting as long as two weeks is in fact already a ritual or *feitio* in and of itself. Every aspect of said *feitio* hence is considered sacred. The issue of gender separation in Santo Daime--though not explored in my thesis--and reflected at every stage of a Santo Daime ceremony is also present during the aforementioned *feitio*. Before macerating and boiling said vine, male only *fardados* hit it very hard, an activity that is very taxing on the body. Women *fardadas* exclusively meanwhile are charged with methodically cleaning the leaves. Women *fardadas* are also the only ones singing in the background for most of the length of the sacred preparation ritual.

Before such preparation can even begin, however, it all starts with the “hunting and gathering” of the raw materials, itself also lived as a religious experience. Most of the *daime* produced for Churches around the world is cultivated in Ceu do Mapia, the historical seat and ecological community of the Santo Daime movement located in the Western part of the Brazilian Amazon. Scout parties disappear for days into the jungle with the mission of collecting enough raw plant material for production. Such people drink *daime* to begin with “in order to heighten the senses and facilitate finding it in the dense tangle of foliage” (Polari, 1999).

### **The Santo Daime Ritual Space: Inside the Salao**

In order to conduct Santo Daime *ayahwasca* rituals, Irineu designed an extremely regimented and highly functional ritual space. At the heart of this ritual space is the actual chosen church locale. Though many ceremonies--including those of the Miami Santo Daime church--take place in makeshift rented spaces, those fortunate enough to have their own churches design it in the form of an hexagon. With the exception of the space dedicated to two “healing rooms” and two bathrooms, the majority of the remaining space hence remains opened and is used to accommodate the ritual. A large wooden table in the shape of the six-pointed Star of Solomon occupies the center of the ritual space.<sup>39</sup> Rituals call for this table to be dressed with a tablecloth emblazoned with the two-sparred

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<sup>39</sup> This should give the reader an indication of the millenarian worldview of Santo Daime. The preeminent Old-Testament Jewish King David was viewed during the early days of Christianity as the foremost divinely inspired model of liberation from Roman oppression as sought by Jews.

Cross of Caravaca,<sup>40</sup> around, which are then, arranged a rosary, pictures or statues of the Virgin Mary, Jesus and photographs of Mestre Irineu and Padrinho Sebastiao. Four long candles and a flower arrangement are also placed on top of the table. CEFLURIS ritual norms stipulate that “on the table must stand the Holy Cross, principal symbol of the doctrine of Mestre Irineu, and at least three lighted candles, which symbolize the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars. Also a fourth candle should be placed in honor of all divine beings and spiritual guides of the Doctrine” (Norms of Ritual – CEFLURIS 2007). The table is considered the source for receiving and transmitting the energy currents from the astral plane. Along with the leader, it constitutes a mechanism capable of capturing and distributing the power of the astral plane between the brotherhood and the cosmos. Some groups may also include an additional table located at a conspicuous distance and adorned with more Santo Daime iconography such as statues of archangels Rafael, Gabriel or Michael, crystals, representation of Afro-Brazilian entities, icons and scriptural excerpts of assorted Eastern religions and non-mainstream spirituality (Dawson, 2004).

The star table is regarded as an important focal point through which the “spiritual current” generated in the ritual space is harnessed and directed. The local leader called a Commander sits at this table and is joined by musicians and instrumentalists who work under his closed supervision. Given that Santo Daime is a singing religion, the Santo Daime culture is gifted with more than its normal share of excellent musicians, most of whom have attained a distinguished position within church structure. The reason they can

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<sup>40</sup> This cross shows a double-cross bar placed over the main vertical axis. According to Santo Daime beliefs, the second cross bar is representative of the second coming of Christ. This cross is associated with the miracle conversion of the Muslim king ruler of the Spanish town of Caravaca de la Cruz in 1231 CE.



sit at the six-star table is linked to their evolved spirituality and advanced understanding of the doctrine. The center table is typically occupied by an equal number of male and female ritual participants. However, it is typically a female (*la pushadora*) who is responsible for leading or “pulling” the ceremonial singing. This role, along with others to be explored at more length below, is considered one of the most prestigious ones within the ceremonial space.

Moving away from the center, one half of the ritual space is occupied by male participants while the other half is by female practitioners. Indicative of the militarism at the heart of the Santo Daime special arrangement, these groups are commonly referred to as the male and female battalions. Furthermore, from a symbolic and spiritual perspective and congruent with Santo Daime beliefs, these battalions also have the added responsibility of acting as “soldiers of the Queen of the Forest,” in reverence to the Virgin Mary. These battalions are further subdivided and organized according to ritual seniority, marital status and a person’s height. Senior married members are placed nearest to the Commander who is adjacent to the table, as the more junior members are placed farther away from the table. Ritual guest participants--those not yet inducted into the doctrine as *fardados*--are placed the farthest away from the center table, by gender, behind the *fardados*. Depending upon the *salao* shape, the battalions form four or six roads of lines facing inward towards the star table and segregated by gender. For certain works, seating is arranged for both battalions respectively. Otherwise, the ritual space is generally free of furniture because the work is either a “dancing” work or standing up is mostly required. The area reserved for the serving of *daime* or *ayahuasca* is typically across from the star table, somewhere that doesn’t interfere with the space occupied by

both male and female battalions. On this table rests a crystal jar with *daime* brew, several paper cups for serving the sacrament, along with other assorted items and pictures of important *Padrinhos* or *Madrinhas*.

The sacrament is served at regular intervals during a Santo Daime work by the daime dispenser, either the current Protector himself or a senior *fardado*. Ceremonial drinking of the sacred *daime* involves the formation of two distinct lines separating male and female ritual participants, each one of them respectfully and patiently waiting to be given their personal cup to drink (often times after a personal sign of the cross). Once the *daime* has been ingested, participants then return in silence to their respective places. During the ceremony, any interaction between the male and female halves is strictly forbidden. Circulating between and within each battalion section is strictly governed and occurs solely at the instigation of those in authority. As stated by Dawson, “in principle, and upon first entering the ceremonial space, ritual attendees are expected to present themselves to the relevant fiscal or guardians whereupon they are assigned a place in which they should remain unless or until told otherwise.” (Dawson 2014). Once a ritual is underway, and in order to maintain “balance” within the ranks, it is commonplace for practitioners to be moved within and across rows throughout the course of the ceremony. CEFLURIS-NA Practical Guidelines impose upon ritual participants the following corporeal limitations:

*We ask everybody to help maintain a sacred space by keeping social conversation to a minimum before and during the service. If you need help, please speak to the Guardian or the person leading the work. During the service, Guardians assist you on many levels. They will provide physical and/or emotional assistance if needed. We ask that you honor the Guardian’s requests when they ask you to take*

*a certain place. Please inform the Guardian before you change places, leave the room, or go to lie down. We ask that you remain in your original place unless a Guardian asks you to move. Contact the Guardian when you need to lie down or go to the bathroom. Whenever possible, leave and return to your place in between hymns. Unless you are unable to walk, it is best to stand up and return to your original spot for the closing of the Work.<sup>41</sup>*

Other positions of importance in the ritual space are occupied by fiscals who are experienced *fardados* in charge of assisting and/or controlling or attending anyone experiencing difficulties during the ceremony. Each battalion is assigned a fiscal; a position occupied via several shifts involving perhaps up to three people per battalion in one ceremony. One individual is however always assigned as head fiscal.

### **More Rules: The Fardas**

In order to enhance the regimented *salao* structure, Mestre Irineu decided that officially-inducted female and male member “bodies” would be required to wear a specific uniform just as they do in the military. Such uniforms are in an egalitarian fashion, providing uniformity, conformity and de-sexualization. Non-inducted guests are expected to dress in white attires, with women specifically required to wear long skirts and shoulder-covering tops. For the *fardados*, two types of attire exist: The blue *farda* and the white *farda*. Most works are done using the blue *farda*. The uniform is very traditional with the women’s blue *farda* being reminiscent of Amish pastoral simplicity. It consists of a blue dress, white shirt with a black bowtie. The men wear navy blue slacks and a white shirt with a navy blue tie. Both wear black shoes. The white *farda* is an all-white attire for both women and men. The tie remains navy blue. Women are

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<sup>41</sup> CEFLURIS-NA Practical Guidelines.

supposed to cover up their body parts so as to not become a sexual distraction to men. The white *farda* reinforces this idea since it enables women to play out an image of virginal and ethereal beauty historically associated with the non-sexual aspect of womanhood. Along with the white *farda*, women wear a rhinestone crown with white and silver sequins on their head in reference to the “Queen of the Forest.” In Brazil, there is sometimes a rose for women who have already been sexually “initiated,” while a palm-leaf will delineate those girls from the virgins. The differentiation in Brazil includes virgins forming a subgroup within the women’s battalion. This is not the practice in the U.S. where the formation arrangement is restricted to height, age and seniority. An assortment of flowers, ribbons, and pins may also be worn in order to differentiate the married from the unmarried.

### **The Santo Daime Ritual: Opening of the Work**

Irineu Serra also created a small prayer ceremony to open the works, hereby conveying a sense of ritual order deeply anchored in discipline. The traditional way for most works to officially open consists of the sign of the cross, followed by one Lord’s Prayer and Ave Maria and the Key of Harmony, in the case of rituals that start with the Oracao; and three Lord’s Prayers and Three Ave Marias’s in the case of official *hinarios*. In the U.S., these prayers are articulated in both Portuguese and English. In addition, praying the rosary also precedes all works unless the work is a *Concentracao* work. CEFLURIS ritual norms concerning rosary-praying state: “The rosary with which the official *hinario*’s with white *farda* are opened, prayed 30 minutes before the opening of the *hinario*, with the participants standing around the Holy Cross. In general it is led

(*puxado*) by the female commander. The Rosary is opened with a Credo, Lord's Prayer, three Ave Marias's and 'Glory to the father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, now and forever and always. Amen" (Norms of Ritual – CEFLURIS 2007).

Popular Catholicism<sup>42</sup> remains one of the major influences on Santo Daime. The brand of Catholicism Santo Daime incorporates, however, is not the Roman apostolic genre. In fact, the Holy Sea does not view the living faith of its doctrine as active in the Santo Daime Church. Nonetheless, to those who are unaware of this, Santo Daime appears to be too Catholic and when presented with its militaristic ethos certainly too authoritarian. I have seen people, including *fardados/as*, who have been asked to leave the church for not submitting to the stern Santo Daime ritual rules. But most importantly, I have encountered many people who after having their first ceremony experience do not come back due to their backlash against strong Catholicism. Commentaries I typically hear in my post-ritual interviews a few days after the event range from: "I was totally turned off by the Catholic prayers" to "I had a great, revealing experience, but I felt uncomfortable with the Catholic aspect of the ritual."

### **Hinarios and the Ritual Calendar**

Beyond the militaristic structure of a Santo Daime ritual ceremony, it remains even more important to delve into its actual purpose. However, before exploring the

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<sup>42</sup> Popular Catholicism can be defined as Catholic practices that do not adhere to Roman Catholic Church's Catechism. This is a document of religious instructions, which assembles small authoritative documents written since the beginning of Christianity. Broadly speaking, the Church accepts acculturation, not syncretism.

symbolic ritual aspects *per se*, it is important to understand that *Daimista* ritual practices are governed by the “Official Calendar of Works” (Dawson, 2013).

The official calendar lists a total of 43 rituals made up of 19 Hymnals and 24 *Concentracao* works. Although all Santo Daime works are considered to be “healing works,” their nature may vary significantly. I will make use in this next section of the ideas of Marcell Mauss--together with an in-depth analysis of some Santo Daime rituals--to gauge and further understand the Santo Daime repertoire as a symbolic system of spiritual production anchored into a militarized body-centered structure. For now, suffice it to say that given the various strands influencing this doctrine, “works” can focus on such vastly different traditions as mediumship (*Cura*, White Table and St. Michael Works), silent introspection (*Concentracao* Works), Mestre Irineu’s birthday (where his *O Cruzeiro hinario* is sung), funeral work (*Missa* Work) and the work conducted during the actual making of *daime* (*Feitio* Work), to name a few.

Hymns, or more aptly called *hinaros*, are the focal point of the Santo Daime ritual ceremony. The “force” accessed via the consumption of the ritual *ayahuasca* sacrament is harnessed and integrated by individual ritual participants into a collective “current” through the shared singing of these hymns (Dawson 2014, p 60). The Miami Church leader explained to me how the Santo Daime doctrine is transmitted via hymns. Broadly speaking, Santo Daime hymns appear in two liturgical settings. First, hymns exist as part of a collection known as *hinaros*. Although some hymnals contain hymns donated or offered as gifts by others, most *hinaros* are authored by a single individual and are arranged chronologically in the order the hymn has been received from the astral plane. These individually-produced hymns are officially closed at one point during the

production period so a new *hinario* can be produced. Examples of these complete works are:

- a. Raimundo Irineu Serra – *Mestre Irineu*

*O Cruzeiro* (The Cross)

*A Santa Missa* (The Holy Mass)

- b. Sebastiao Mota de Melo – *Padrinho Sebastiao*

*O Justiceiro* (The Righteous one)

*Nova Jerusalem* (The New Jerusalem)

- c. Alfredo Gregorio De Melo – *Padrinho Alfredo*

*O Cruzerinho* (The Little Cross)

*Nova Era* (The New Age)

*Nova Dimensao* (New Dimension)

- d. Paulo Roberto Silva e Souza – *Padrinho Paulo Roberto*

*Luz na Escuridao* (A Light in the Darkness)

*Nova Alianca* (New Alliance)

*Caminho do Ceu* (Path to Heaven – to be completed)

The second set of hymns corresponds to compilations of individual hymns strategically put together for specific rituals. Such song compilations are used for a *Concentracao* (Concentration), an Illumination work or a *Yemanja* ritual work.

A Santo Daime ritual encompasses the non-stop singing of a complete *hinario*, part of a *hinario* or a shorter collection of hymns from different *hinaros*. During a ritual people are either sitting down or dancing in the form of a *bailado* (“dance work”), which is less common. Rituals typically last between five and twelve hours. In the case of dance works, participants use three different dance-step forms or musical rhythms:

Mazurka, waltz and, not curiously, a march. They are accompanied by musicians mostly playing acoustic guitars, maracas (rattles) and occasionally some soft drumming. Other instruments I have observed in ritualistic Santo Daime ceremonies include the accordion, piano, flute and/or harp. Amidst these instruments the maracas play a crucial role within the ritual space. The maraca is both a musical instrument and a spiritual weapon. It marks the beat and aids participants to summon up force for the *trabalho*. Similar to hymns and through sheer guided human will, the maraca intensifies and makes the force vibrate, potentializing spiritual power. It is used in all dance rituals.

Music is so central to a Santo Daime work that it would be impossible to become a Protector or Church leader if such individual did not play an instrument or had not developed the capacity to “channel hymns.” I feel this is a direct testament to the strength and wisdom of indigenous Amazonian shamanic culture and a reminder of the debt Santo Daime owes to the production of culture by such people. As I mentioned before, these ancestral people are the ones who discovered the healing plants that Santo Daime now depends on for the creation and sustenance of its own unique brand of spirituality. Music, *ayahuasca* and the personal attitude of each participant all intersect in magical ways to create a truly revealing and ultimately holistic and transcendental experience.

### **Marcell Mauss and the use of Body Techniques**

The specialized literature is not oblivious to the creative uses of the body as the medium or tool for the attainment of spiritual ecstasy. Marcel Mauss for example intimates that during a ritual ceremony *Daimistas* in effect become embodied subjects who move intersubjectively in spaces free of boundaries, except for the vibrations



produced by bursts of singing. In his study of the Santo Daime ritual, Arnide Cemin relies on the Marcel Mauss idea of symbolic constructions carried out on the body and thought (Cemin, 2008). Spiritual work, according to Cemin's account of Mauss includes the body as support in its totality. According to this theory, difficult or heavy *trabalhos* occur due to the disorderly or negative charge of energies the ritual needs to transmute into harmonious and positive energies. The *trabalho* at that moment then becomes light. A church member is sometimes unable to free him or herself from the negative energies the *trabalho* has triggered. These energies linger for a while with him or her, provoking symptoms of disharmony, which are manifested in various forms both in the actual individual and/or in people around him or her. Thus he made comments regarding the proper way to ideally harness the *daime* during a work.

This and other related expressions refer to the multiplicity of techniques in which the body serves as support- uniforms, concentration, coordination of movements in the dance steps, the singing of hymns and the rhythm of the maraca, and even the physical effects of the liquid. The latter range from accepting its smell and taste to the physiological sensations often triggered: Drowsiness, heart palpitations, vomiting, diarrhea, astral journeys (the sensation of death and rebirth, anxiety, pleasure; beautiful, illuminating and/or terrifying visions). There also needs to be an acceptance of the codes of conduct within the system, most notably obedience, humility, and love for all members of the church.

It is very difficult to adequately verbalize the effects of a Santo Daime work. Given that works vary in intensity, a lot depends on the type of personal work undertaken by each individual devotee. What follows are the testimonies of a male *fardado* from the

Miami Santo Daime church. My question to this individual was, in which ways has the Santo Daime ritual and, specifically, the taking of daime helped you spiritually?

*Drinking daime gave me the experience of communion with the divine. Before I had this experience, I thought faith was for people that needed to hold beliefs without evidence to support them. My direct experience of communion with the divine has completely turned my life around. There's really no other way to say it. Once you experience this, all of your values get turned completely on their head". To this, I followed up with another question, What aspects of your external life (not tied to the church) have benefited as a result of this? "My entire life has been transformed. I have simply left behind so many bad habits, such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, drinking diet sodas, eating fast food or junk food. My health is so much better now than it ever was before. My relationships are now based on a completely different set of values. This is not to say all the changes were easy! I had to lose a lot, such as my 22-year marriage, a lifestyle based on material things, an ego-based view of the world... The last four years have been very difficult and there were many points when I felt very dark and alone as I went through all of these changes. I'm so grateful.<sup>43</sup>*

In my interview with another professional male who happens to be gay I received direct reinforcing comments concerning the regimented structures of the ritual ceremony.<sup>44</sup> In fact this *fardado* saw himself as a *bona fide* warrior of the light:

"The experience in the ritual varies. I am conscious of being a soldier and being firm in the line." During the ritual he says it is definitely otherworldly. He says he surrenders his ego. He is conscious that during the ritual he is in a sacred space and that thoughts that come to his mind are not his. So he is a soldier marching for the light. This means

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Adam in Miami on May 17, 2013. A - 43 year-old professional.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Jim in Miami on December 15, 2013. A - 33 year-old physical therapist.

accepting people as they are. Accepting conflicting situations in life without reacting to them.

Obedience is clearly highlighted in Mestre Irineu 's hymnal *O Cruzeiro*. All other hymnals also make reference to this obedience theme one way or another because it remains one of the basic ingredients in the process of the follower adapting to the system. In the old days, it was pretty much established that disobedience was akin to rebelliousness. Cemin tells us this has to do with what Mauss called “education in cold blood,” referring to response-delaying movements that inhibit movements unauthorized by the system in question; allowing in sequence, coordinated responses in the direction of the desired ends (Cemin 2010).

### **The Ritual Space: The Practice of Firmness**

During the entire length of a Santo Daime ritual a premium is placed upon the attitude of so-called *firmeza* (firmness). Firmness is the necessary character trait required to remain in formation--or in the assigned position line--while under the mind-altering effect of the *ayahuasca* brew. This is something, which at times feels like an impossible task to accomplish. The efficacy of a Santo Daime ritual, however, depends in fact on everyone remaining put in his or her place. The understanding is that by undergoing this ritual participants together form a “current” that swirls around the ritual space. Once in place, sustaining such “current” hence becomes necessary for the efficacy of the work. Firmness is what differentiates the neophyte from the seasoned *fardado* and it is deemed to be an element of spiritual maturity imbued with symbolic and actual prestige within

the church. The song No. 80 of Mestre Irineu's *O Cruzeiro* entitled "*Chamo a Força*" (I Summon the Force) succinctly makes the point:

<i>Chamo a força, eu chamo a força</i>	<i>I call the force, I call the force</i>
<i>A força vem nos amostrar</i>	<i>The force comes to show us</i>
<i>Treme a terra e balanceia</i>	<i>The earth shakes and quakes</i>
<i>E Vos não sai do seu lugar</i>	<i>But you don't leave your place</i> <sup>45</sup>

According to CEFLURIS-NA Norms of Ritual:

The "current" is the spiritual force of the work. It is the effort and energy-invested by everyone so that communion of all with the sacrament is invested with profound spiritual result. The dancing and the music generate an energy that is channeled by the vibrations of the maraca. All this propitiates an inner work of spiritual uplift and expansion of consciousness, which support the *miracões* (visions), the insights and diverse teachings that occur during the work with every member of the current. The hymns guide our ritual expedition. They awaken, encourage, advise and instruct us so that we may be able to make our inner dive, always within the protection of the current. The firmeza of the current rests within the firmeza and consciousness of every brother and sister and his/her obedience to the rules of the work.<sup>46</sup>

The way I was taught by Alberto, the Protector of the Miami church to better confront the Santo Daime ritual is by means of concentrating and focusing on the hymns. I was told doctrines reside in the *hinários* and that consequently it was imperative to pay close attention to them if one wanted to properly learn from the teachings. This is something I have gotten accustomed to and which I generally accomplish with little disruption (although I do have to relieve myself or purge from time to time). I also play

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<sup>45</sup> Song from Santo Daime *O Cruzeiro* hinario by Mestre Irineu.

<sup>46</sup> CEFLURIS-NA Norms of Ritual.

the maracas and sing while I do all this. This combination of focused attention and singing makes me someone who exhibits firmness. From where I stand, however, I watch others drop to the floor as the work progresses. I also work as a fiscal and I must be present and attentive should someone require my assistance. In as small a setting as the Miami church, *fiscales* do not necessarily have to be standing outside the current like in larger *salaos*. Paying close attention to the doctrine in my personal experience results in profound insights that are naturally helpful in answering the existential nature of my questions. These answers do not come immediately when a question or situation typically needs to be understood. They suddenly appear either as a voice in my head or they are flashed out in words onto the movie screen of my mind as I sing the *hinarios*. I recognize that the great sense of structure I have endeavored to describe in this paper in fact helps me in my own personal work during a ritual. It is perhaps due to my submission to the rules of the game and to the fact that I do not allow myself to flow freely during the “work” that my experiences hence don’t lead me to the astral or to other *miracaos*. Although I am clearly aware that I am in fact experiencing an altered state of consciousness, I remain as it were grounded throughout.

This idea of firmness, therefore, is important and consistent with Irineu Serra’s construction of a space where discipline was important. The first song in the hymn compilation and ritual ceremony named *Concentracao* (Concentration) says:

<i>Firmeza, firmeza no amor</i>	<i>Firmness, firmness in love</i>
<i>Firmeza, firmeza aonde estou</i>	<i>Firmness, firmness where I am</i>
<i>Eu estou firme con meu Jesus</i>	<i>I am firm with my Jesus</i>
<i>Eu estou firme nesta luz</i>	<i>I am firm in this light</i>
<i>Aonde estou</i>	<i>Where I am</i>

<i>Firmeza, firmeza no amor</i>	<i>Firmness, firmness in love</i>
<i>Firmeza, firmeza aonde estou</i>	<i>Firmness, firmness where I am</i>
<i>O Mestre manda eu trabalhar</i>	<i>The Master orders me to work</i>
<i>O Mestre manda eu me firmar</i>	<i>The Master orders me to firm myself</i>
<i>No lugar onde Ele esta</i>	<i>In the place where he is<sup>47</sup></i>

Building upon Marcel Mauss' analysis, Cemin delves into the extent of how so-called firmness places great demands upon the body. We can therefore say that works actually designate corporeal techniques in the Maussian sense. That is, they have to do with body attitudes or the "arts of using the body" in their quest to achieve a specific end: The proper adaptation of the neophyte to the system, in this case a system of military-like formation in a ritual space which is being strongly threatened by forces challenging group discipline. However, according to Santo Daime belief, this is required in order to create possible magical flight or passage to the astral plane (Cemin, 2010).

According to Cemin, "the organization founded by Irineu Serra takes on the form of an 'army' (the followers, who are organized into male and female 'battalions', call themselves 'soldiers of the Queen of the Forest'): 'There is in the whole context of group life a kind of education of the movements in closed formation', a standardizing 'example and order' that is the main principle," he concludes.

Thanks to this standardizing, Cemin insinuates, it becomes possible for ritual participants to intervene in society, including those contexts where the unconscious or chaos may predominate. Having learned the basic pattern of *ayahuasca* shamanism, Irineu Serra adapted it by re-orchestrating the shamanic system via a series of defined movements. The latter are capable of exercising control over reality as experienced in an

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<sup>47</sup> Concentration song sung at *Concentração* Works.

altered state of consciousness by directing the domain of the conscious person over his or her emotions and unconsciousness. Talking about the Mauss idea of control over reality via the intelligence imbedded in the movement of bodies, Cemin further states “he attributes this function to society, that is, to social practices; hence, we can agree with Mauss when he asserts that “there really is, behind all our mystic states, corporeal techniques... There are biological means for entering into contact with God.” (Cemin, 2010).

In the context of African religions or Afro-Brazilian religions, being in contact with gods means the incorporation of a spiritual being. As one of the traditions informing Santo Daime, Umbanda has contributed to such experiences in the form of mediumship. This tradition was also folded into the doctrine via the teachings of Allen Kardec. *Padrinho* Sebastiao, the man who succeeded Mestre Irineu, took Santo Daime in this direction. Mediumship however is not for everyone. I personally do not commune with it nor do I have the requisite psychic abilities or proclivities. An interview I had with a medium *fardado* from the Miami Santo Daime church reaffirmed my own convictions. This individual is a married professional male whose personal experiences are very strong, embodying almost brutal movements as a result of spirit possession. He explained how he started his journey as a medium at a “Mesa Branca” *trabalho* in N.Y. where he took mediumship vows. Notes from his testimony read as follow:

*Once that is done there's no way to go back. This is a learning process of ever-greater openness to that path. Mediums channel all kinds of spirits beginning with unhappy spirits who died in terrible circumstances and are looking for redemption. These spirits can heal by coming through an *aparelho* and drinking a*

*little bit of daime. Then there are the all the rest of the spirits, which come in, and sing, play music, dance, etc.*<sup>48</sup>

He is learning and doesn't understand very much what is happening to him. He feels a tremendous energy that must be released through his hands. If he doesn't do this, he would lose his balance and fall. He doesn't advise becoming a medium. He said it is very difficult, very scary... "Sometimes bad spirits may try to come and take over". This, he confessed, is not something he likes. He also explained that daime should not be taken unless within the parameters of a protected ritual. He has done it and apparently had bad experiences. He says there are many levels of mediumship. He pointed out Alberto's mediumship as very elevated, spiritual. He claims that every time Alberto speaks he is channeling.

Daimistas can come to appreciate the many forms of corporeal discipline as imbedded in the structure of Santo Daime works since, after all, they themselves hail from different walks of life and carry along their respective plethora of emotional issues. The response of a Miami female guest is telling in this aspect.<sup>49</sup> According to her testimony, this person was experiencing out-of-body experiences even before joining the Santo Daime church as a regular guest. I'm referring here to mediumship experiences, incubus and other paranormal sensations. She claims to be an "empath" (a psychic's ability to take on the feelings of others and therefore to be equipped to experience people as they are). She also insisted she has "channeling" abilities. This person confided to me she had had a very difficult childhood, marred with abandonment, drugs, LSD

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Stephan in Miami on August 15, 2013. A - 44 year-old professional.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Gloria in Miami on September 18, 2013. A - 40 year-old dancer.



experiences, etc. She made it clear that in addition to the experience of altered states of consciousness it was structure that she therefore sought.

Juxtaposed to the above, I have encountered others, which testify to more gentle integrative experiences. This testimony allegedly pertains to a *concentracao* work. The *fardado* in question was female and happens to be ecologically very conscious to the point of being an activist:

*I could never accurately describe this experience with words. The daime is divine. Physically I feel nausea, lightness, dizzy. The force affects my breath and so I sit up straight concentrating on the hymns. The healing of wounds physical and spiritual then is allowed to take place. I feel I received direct guidance in three areas: One, the self where I'm able to connect with answers. Where I'm able to hear or trust. Here, in this first area, I receive strength and intuition. Secondly, I experience the visitation of divine beings. This is part of what I would call a "strong miracao" whereby I engage them via telepathic conversations.<sup>50</sup>*

Mestre Irineu thus erected a Santo Daime ritual that put a premium on stringent militaristic style and unyielding firmness required by each and every participant. Data I have gathered enables me to conclude that many people reject the backbreaking aspect of the ceremony. Meanwhile, others simply cannot endure such a physically intense ritual due to their own sensitivities. Chapter Six will explore how the very reasons rendering Irineu's implacable ritual structure eminently exportable by the same token have contributed to impeding its international expansion. The available data will provide compelling evidence that once abroad the regimented military aspect of the Santo Daime

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Barbara in Miami on February 28, 2013. A - 41 year-old community organizer.

ceremony in fact overshadows everything else. Among other things, Chapter Six will demonstrate how CEFLURIS' lack of a coherent internalization policy is encumbering and in some cases as in Miami, stopping the process of assimilation even in the coattails of increasing demand for experiential religious practices.

## CHAPTER 6

### The Global Expansion of Santo Daime

The evidence I have hereby garnered so far points to the fact the Miami Santo Daime church is devoid of a clear roadmap on the road to local acculturation. That is consistent with issues the Santo Daime doctrine is facing in its official expansion efforts--or lack thereof--on the global stage. In this Chapter I will explain the seemingly contradictory admission by *Ceu do Lua Cheia* that it is not trying to increase membership. The statement is contradictory because the same leadership concomitantly acknowledges a need to become more established by building an actual temple in lieu of the current “church-in-a-closet” rented model. Such ambivalence is also obvious with Santo Daime leadership in Brazil as no clear message seems to be articulated. Consequently, churches overseas seem to be left to their own devices most of the time. This is paradoxical as one would think Santo Daime would better harness the higher profile now enjoyed by *ayahuasca* around the world both as a legitimate religious entheogen and an effective way to treat many modern illnesses.

#### Santo Daime’s Strategy for Global Expansion

Noted Colombian scholar Luis Eduardo Luna, who one way or another, has been linked to *ayahuasca* research and empirical experience for some forty years now, says it all in his paper entitled “Some Reflections on the Global Expansion of Ayahuasca.” He notes, “*Ayahuasca* in the contemporary world is a complex phenomenon and it’s here to stay. The genie is out of the lamp. He will not go back inside. The plants and even the

brew can be acquired on the Internet with apparent ease and efficiency. *Ayahuasqueros* of all kinds are emerging as more people are exposed to the various traditions.”(Luna, 2011).

*Ayahuasca* stands at the epicenter of an array of discursive platforms, ranging from environmentalists to neo-shamanism to the global debate raging around the politics of illicit drug trade. Of course, *ayahuasca* happens to be the sacred sacrament of the Santo Daime church, hence producing an unforeseen predicament. That is because people in the Santo Daime community now find themselves fully enmeshed in the controversial debate their sacrament has triggered. The old *Ceu do Mapia* boundaries can no longer contain or restrict Santo Daime from wider recognition. Paradoxically, yet as a result of this, it has also been a challenge for the Church to further develop its constellation of global relations.

Having said this, in my view, two forces combine to explain the internationalization of Santo Daime. One is exogenous and is tied to the “theatrical-military” structure developed since its very inception by Mestre Irineu’s genius organizational skills. The other is endogenous and obeys to the dynamics of secularization in modern contemporary society whereby religions have among other things become extremely personalized private endeavors. This phenomenon can also be traced back to actual consumer behavior in advanced capitalism, one that points to individualized choices of products and services. New-Age religiosity, however, is generally critical of Western values.

Closely tied to this is a growing discontent with and cynicism toward the healthcare industry regimented by Big Pharma, be it its products or services. This

situation has more or less forced consumers to seek alternative healing treatments, including the exploration of the shamanic plant medicine universe. Furthermore, this new assortment of natural medicine is also sought for its psychedelic properties and attendant consciousness-expanding powers. Although this post-modern worldview has facilitated the globalization of Santo Daime, the international expansion per se of CEFLURIS has not been easy. *Au contraire*, Santo Daime efforts in that regard have been marred by difficulties and confusion.

### **Santo Daime's Exportable Edifice**

Mestre Irineu was certainly not contemplating the exporting Santo Daime to other continents when he designed its ritual structure back in the 1930s. Those were different times for sure. His world was just a speck in the grandiosity of the 2.100 million square miles encompassed by the Amazon Basin of South America. Most importantly, however, he was feeling a deep sense of gratitude. At the time, he felt much gratitude indeed with added reverence particularly toward the “Queen of the Forest,” the woman who revealed him the sacred Santo Daime doctrine, rendering him the “chosen one.” Surely, Irineu Serra, as a poor illiterate black man and son of slaves must have felt such weight of responsibility on his shoulders.

I explained in the previous chapter the possible reasons why Irineu Serra gave Santo Daime a martial character, namely to its religious ritual. I also showed by the same token that, to some degree, the specialized literature recognizes said observation. Now I will take these initial observations as a point of departure to further argue how easily “exportable” the Irineu Serra structure happens to be.

Unlike other more established churches, Santo Daime remains unencumbered by extra ritual, administrative, social, investment management, civic engagement or other bureaucratic and social obligations and consequently is easily transportable. Its light structure allows for easy replication no matter where. Given that Santo Daime is fundamentally one long military-like ritual that won't allow itself to be modified, works can consequently occur anywhere provided there is at least one very knowledgeable individual present. Before this can happen, however, the Brazil leadership must approve of such person who has to have proven himself by first becoming a *fardado*. Such man (a certain veil of patriarchy has historically shrouded Santo Daime indeed) must also have demonstrated the leadership qualities of a Commander. Putting aside *hinarios* and *ayahuasca*, Santo Daime at the end of the day, however, isn't a religion based on a requisite degree of faith, studying, reading or anything that may preclude a group of people from carrying out a ceremony. That is because Santo Daime is above all an Experience. The experience this church promises is nothing less than the possibility of reaching a transcendental dimension where healing can actually unfold. CEFLURIS in Brazil is the organization that provides the set of norms regimenting rituals.

I recall an amusing situation during a white *farda* dancing ritual about two years ago at the Miami Santo Daime church *Ceu da Lua Cheia*. We were on that occasion joined by two or three "guests." These are people who have demonstrated interest in the church and who have been extended an invitation to participate in a ritual, pursuant to a thorough check and the attendance of the Santo Daime New Member Orientation class. The fact is one of these guests was not doing very well because he apparently could not

stand on his own two feet even for a short while.<sup>51</sup> This rather youthful person remained for most of the work right next to the entrance door crouched on the floor. He appeared alert at times but other times just seemed to be asleep. Once the work finished and most people had left, I approached the Commander and enquired about this guest lying on the floor by the entrance door. He told me laughing this young person had come up to him and told him: “You know what? You look like Elvis Presley!”

Needless to say, I found the story hilarious. However, upon further reflection, I began to ponder how our young initiate’s comment may be uncovering a larger truth indeed. This young man is absolutely right, I thought, as without intending it, he was revealing to us the fabulous performativity aspect of the Santo Daime ritual. I had always enjoyed the music and singing all participants collectively participate in, yet I had never truly appreciated in its entire dimension the magnificence of its performative theatrical aspects. This young participant who incidentally never returned to another work, however, had boldly pointed out such reality. I then understood that Santo Daime rituals are scripted, choreographed, directed and performed, much like a Broadway show. Now I believe these rituals are in fact a total art form. Again, in the same vein as a Broadway show or say a Balanchine ballet, Santo Daime rituals can easily be packaged and reproduced given a proper set of artifacts and easy-to-get ritual paraphernalia. Production and performance therefore, stand as important elements of transferability for the Santo Daime church.

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<sup>51</sup> I say this with much reservation because there is not such a thing as doing well or, for that matter, doing badly. Santo Daime recommends all participants stand firm in his or her place but this is not a requirement. Those feeling overwhelmed by the “current” and feeling weak can lie down and expect to be cared for by one of the fiscals.

True, Santo Daime is a visually striking display of great music, subtle dancing and participant cohesion. The aforementioned young man, in addition, had been participating in a white *farda* work meaning everyone was elegantly dressed in white garments. The women's white *farda* includes a crown of pearls and long dresses, making the women look like wedding brides. The men sport an all-white suit and shirt with a navy blue tie. Double green lines run down the side of their trousers. No wonder then our young guest confused our church leader Alberto with Elvis Presley. Tall and handsome, Alberto typically sings and plays the guitar swaying his body from side to side during the entire ritual with an enduring smile to all. The rest of us accompany him by marking the beat with our maracas or rattles. The spectacle of a well-organized Santo Daime ritual is dashingly beautiful. Bodies moving and singing in unison to the beat of grand Brazilian rhythms is how a neophyte would describe it.

I will make my point succinctly clear: The Santo Daime ritual is easily transportable or exportable thanks to its regimented organization, elementary forms of movements within a simple stage setting, completely scripted routine, and efficacy in the deployment of magico-symbolic repertoires. Whatever bodies in formation do in Mapia, Brazil can be replicated in New York, Miami or Tokyo. By definition, everything is the same; even the language, which is always Portuguese. Before continuing on with the next item on the list facilitating the internalization of Santo Daime, I will first discuss what is presently taking place on the ground regarding this matter.

### **CEFLURIS' Strategy for Global Expansion**

In many respects, the international expansion of CEFLURIS has generated similar



organizational challenges to those experienced during its initial movement beyond the Amazon region. As explained in Chapter Four, the number one challenge for CEFLURIS has been the lack of socio-cultural conventions for the tolerance of ritual *ayahuasca* consumption, a situation by now completely resolved in Brazil. Having said this, the Santo Daime Church has made not insignificant inroads in that regard. The church is currently present on every continent, boasting numerous currents and points of activity in approximately 40 countries worldwide. But the question remains: How is the church able to expand if *ayahuasca* continues to be regarded in the same way as cocaine and heroine? Or, more to the point, what is CEFLURIS' strategy for international expansion?

*Padrinho* Paulo Roberto and *comitiva* in March 2014 conducted a two-day "Illumination Work" here in Miami. They were finishing off their U.S. tour in Miami before flying back to their home church in Rio de Janeiro. We at *Ceu da Lua Cheia* hosted some fifty *fardados* and guests. They came from various states including Maryland, Vermont, New York and Texas. I was able to personally talk to *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto on the last day after the work. I began by telling *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto--who speaks perfect English and holds a degree in Psychology--that given the fact he was a pioneer opening up churches in the U.S. some people in the "current"--another name given to the church--likened him to Paul, The Apostle. I asked him to tell me how that had happened. I had sketchy information on the advent of Santo Daime in North America. At the very least I knew that in 1987 he had been invited to give a speech at Harvard University. Such event had led to the first Santo Daime work ever to be held on U.S. soil. I also knew of a meeting with some forty therapists and psychologists in Cambridge, MA to discuss another gathering later that year. An attorney joining that

group had been given the assignment to clarify whether it was even legal to proceed. I also knew the legal research already in existence had determined that under MA statutes and federal laws, *ayahuasca* was indeed legal. *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto's answer to my question was as follows:

*During a trip I made to the U.S. a very powerful female psychic approached me. She caused quite an impression on me. I had heard already of an impressive woman who had attended the Cambridge meeting. This woman told me she envisioned me opening several Santo Daime points of light throughout the U.S. territory.<sup>52</sup> She also told me about a premonition dream whereby she saw the world connected by points of light representing Santo Daime churches. This woman seemed to be very well connected. She travelled with me on this mission to establish churches.<sup>53</sup>*

I then proceeded to ask what most preoccupied me: What is Church policy regarding international expansion or globalization? I already knew that in 2006, according to Santo Daime records, there were thirty fully-fledged churches, points of light and prayer groups totaling some 350 *fardados/as* (including Canada and Mexico). To that figure, one can reasonably add another half representing regular guests or future *fardados*. I calculated some 500 people actively participating in Santo Daime rituals at least twice a month. Hence I wasn't surprised by the *Padrinho*'s answer:

*We don't have an international expansion policy of any kind. We are not interested in cross-border ventures or looking to expand. We only entertain inquiries, but we as a church do not proselytize. When someone approaches us and shows an interest in opening up a Point, we listen and take it under advice. Back in 1987, individuals wanting to set up churches in the United States*

<sup>52</sup> *Ceu da Lua Cheia*, a church with less than 30 *fardados* is referred to as a Point of Light

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Santo Daime *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto in Miami on March 8, 2014.

*approached me. I consulted Padrinho Alfredo and he answered that it was OK provided that we are invited. These efforts are therefore not initiated by us. Today, we continue applying this policy.*<sup>54</sup>

I personally believe this does not entirely settle the question surrounding CEFLURIS's international expansion policy. I understand--and it is reasonable to expect--that Church matters concerning expansion into territories where *ayahuasca* is illegal must be treated with great care. During my conversation with *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto, he did stress the requisite discretion, if not outright secrecy, regarding Church affairs abroad. Furthermore, very well-informed inside sources have told me that *Padrinho* Alfredo is actively pushing U.S. churches to build temples and grow their own *ayahuasca*. As a matter of fact, *Ceu da Lua Cheia* in Miami is presently looking to purchase undeveloped land in order to build a church. Hence, my conclusion regarding Santo Daime expansion policy with respect to the U.S. is inconclusive. I believe the unfavorable legal climate in the U.S. has much to do with it. This has led to confusion of sorts at CEFLURIS headquarters, as manifested by the contradictory messages coming from its leadership.

Having established that CEFLURIS cannot articulate and even less develop a coherent international expansion policy, seeing how it is faced with such a hostile international legal environment, I shall now continue with the exploration of those forces pushing for acculturation overseas. I will deal in this next section with late modern perspectives tending to accelerate and assist the transition of Santo Daime to other continents beyond legal constraints. The most relevant event in that regard has been the

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Santo Daime *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto in Miami on March 8, 2014.

explosion of New Religious Movements (NRM) in contemporary culture. Of particular interest here is the post-modern trend of what is commonly referred to as the New-Age movement.

### **New Religious Movements (NRM) and the onset of New-Age Religiosity**

The overseas expansion of Santo Daime needs to be understood within the dynamics of a broader social-religious phenomenon. According to Dawson, there are three distinct elements combining to form the conditions of greater pluralization of the religious landscape and the ensuing rise of new-era religiosity. The first one is the appearance of new groups with novel organizational repertoires that have broadened the religious spectrum.<sup>55</sup> The second one is the development of an individualistic ethos of personal choice, which has emboldened seekers to explore new repertoires. The third element is the presence of macro organizational dynamics at an international scale such that the first two factors can materialize. The most relevant of these factors concern the onset of a “New-Age” religious orientation, the enduring cross-cultural secularization of the religious field and the forces of globalization (Dawson, 2011).

Briefly speaking, NRMs sprung in the mid 1960s and should be understood as a product of the counter-culture of that period. Sociologist Stephen Hunt describes how “the counter-culture offered a critique of technical rationality, a scientifically dominated culture, established social institutions, and dominant forms of morality “ (Hunt, 2003). Many of these movements developed at the end of the “hippie” era and attempted to

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<sup>55</sup> What comes to mind here is the proliferation of Native-American Indian worship instances in urban cities where peyote-based ritual practices occur. Seekers of plant-based oriented religiosity typically attend these gatherings.

restore a supernatural view of the world while offering communal and alternative lifestyles. These movements blasted onto the religious landscape as brand-new phenomena. They were and still are innovating forms of religion on the fringes of mainstream Christianity as well as other dominant forms of institutional religions. These new religions cannot easily be categorized because they display differing sets of attitudes toward the outside world. Some aim at sect-like organization and their teachings are in direct conflict with wider society. Others are world-affirming movements and may be thought of as “client” or “audience-like” cults. Adherents to these movements behave as consumers who are buying a service such as healing or realizing personal abilities.<sup>56</sup> A third group appears to display world-accommodating attitudes and could possibly be squeezed in between the first two groups. They often tolerate other faiths and are consequently more pluralistic in their outlook (Hunt, 2003).<sup>57</sup> In the next section where I will focus on the acculturation problems of Santo Daime in Miami, I will make use of some of the existing NRM research to illustrate the type of people that become converts, on the one hand, and the reasons why they may leave, on the other.

While the New-Age movement does not equate NRMs, it also could not have developed outside of its sphere of influence. Nonetheless, both movements are vastly different. In Hunt’s view, “many of its origins can be found in the esoteric culture of the

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<sup>56</sup> The automaticity to unquestioningly commodify anything of value in the Western neoliberal world is called “commodity fetishism,” to borrow a Marxist term. When a society is based almost entirely on the “production of commodities by means of commodity,” we then have a situation whereby market relations influence almost everything that people do, something that was not the case in pre-capitalist societies where commerce was much more restricted.

<sup>57</sup> NRMs derive from all religious traditions. Some derive from Christianity. Examples are “The Family,” “The Jesus Fellowship” and assorted messianic communities. Others derive from Hinduism such as “The International Society for Krishna Consciousness,” “Sai Baba” and “Shri Swaminarayan.” Others such as “The Unification Church” and “Rastafarianism,” are syncretic in nature.

mid to late nineteenth-century, when spiritualism and occultist practices flourished in Western Europe and North America. The great difference is that the various interrelated strands which constitute this movement display a profoundly eclectic and syncretic pattern of beliefs and practices.” (Hunt, 2003). This definition is remarkably close to the constitutive and eclectic elements found in Santo Daime. Not to get confused because while Santo Daime incorporates and folds into a single worldview elements of several traditions, New-Age religions do not. New-Age encompasses a cultic smorgasbord only insofar as people pick and choose from what is on offer. In other words, a new sympathizer chooses discrete pieces from a diverse repertoire of religious traditions and constructs his or her own spiritual platform. Having said this, however, New-Age and Santo Daime ideas are remarkably similar.

Hunt says that New-Age is cultist in the sense that “it frequently appears to be in tension with society and opposes many of its core values, not least of all a rampant materialism and rationalism.” (Hunt, 2003) Paradoxically, however, he claims New-Age is concomitantly most optimistic, celebratory and utopian. This idea of playfulness and celebration throws New-Age squarely into the domain of post-modernism; that is as system of organization and classification of culture. To be sure, and according to post-modern writers, religion in the emerging age frequently embodies individualistic religious “experience,” reflecting today’s culture and specifically its attraction to the fleetingly dramatic, titillating, and exotic. Such an emphasis on experience may be at the expense of codified beliefs that inform traditional religions (Hunt, 2003). According to Jean-Francois Lyotard--a foremost French thinker associated with post-modern theory--the collapse of social and cognitive structures has imbued post-modernism with a

willingness to combine cultural expressions from various symbols of frameworks of meaning. Again, what easily comes to mind is the Santo Daime flair for the exotic and the hybridity of its philosophical foundation.

New-Age and Santo Daime share another element, that is the effect of the speed with which social changes are happening in the modern world. One singular effect caused by the erasing from historical memory is a collective state of ignorance and the impeding subjective necessity it creates to produce new narratives with religious movements seeking to restore, reform or revive true spirituality. This is, again, one of the promises of Santo Daime: Finding truth and divinity at the heart of the plant, hence why it is aptly called “plant teacher.” Yet another similarity is that New-Age spirituality is millenarian. This perspective is tied to the end of the millennium and to the collective anxiety generated by the way economic activity is organized to confront an uncertain future. On the coattails of postmodern society, Santo Daime connects the crashing down of present cultural structures with the belief in the ushering of a New Age.<sup>58</sup> In Hunt’s view, “the New Age, then, offers a radicalized version of human potential, resting on spiritual rather than psychological foundations” (Hunt, 2003). By and large, New-Age sacred texts are “channeled” works. A Course in Miracles (ACIM) is a great example of this phenomenon.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, all Santo Daime *hinarios* are allegedly “received.” Finally and again in total congruence with Santo Daime attitudes and beliefs, New-Age places an unmistakable emphasis on the Self. The *Daimista* idea of finding one’s own true self and

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<sup>58</sup> Santo Daime has a millenarian quality. The *hinarios Nova Jerusalem, Nova Era* and *Nova Dimencao* sing songs of a new world.

<sup>59</sup> This book was channeled in the decade of the 1970s by Helen Schucman, a professor of medical psychology at Columbia University.

to liberate one-self from corrupted and socialized identities also finds resonance in New-Age religiosity. The focus of both Santo Daime and New-Age religion thus is to empower the individual within constituted ideas of a spiritual “Higher Self” who is perfect and claims, as it were, Buddha nature. This leads me to my last observation as I compare these two traditions. That is they both believe in reincarnation, albeit constituted in different forms such as past lives experiences and the like.

One can draw from my New-Age discourse that its core beliefs almost mirror Santo Daime positionality as a NRM. This situation renders New-Age a true ally for the Santo Daime need to expand internationally. To recapitulate, Santo Daime first and foremost is a doctrine emerging from a multiplicity of discrete and disconnected religious traditions, many of which happen to form the New-Age movement repertoire. Secondly and consistent with New-Age belief, Santo Daime worldview is decidedly millenarian in nature yet at the same time remains profoundly optimistic and life-affirming. Thirdly, Santo Daime shares with New-Age the idea of resistance to materialism while concurrently promising the delivery of true spirituality. Finally and in true New-Age style, Santo Daime presents with a theatrical singing ritual that is eminently exotic and performed with much flair. Close parallels between New-Age religiosity and Santo Daime beliefs and practices naturally work together to facilitate the expansion of the latter onto the world stage. From a practical point of view, the New-Age movement could be likened to a landing platform for the Santo Daime launching into the international orbit.

Dawson clearly confirms such perception. In his own words, “facilitated by the cultural flows of late-modern globalization, *ayahuasca* was being consumed by alternate



practitioners and non-main stream religionists as part of a broader new-age psychedelic regime by the mid-1970s” (Dawson, 2013). With regards to implications for Santo Daime international aspirations, he adds: “Whether using *ayahuasca* or not, the desire of a number of otherwise independent alternative practitioners to augment their existing ritual repertoires with practices informed by the daimista paradigm furnished one of the earliest platforms upon which Cefluris expanded beyond its native South American context.” (Dawson, 2013).

In their unlimited curiosity and thirst for new understanding, I have witnessed many New-Agers parade through the Miami Santo Daime Church in search of “The Next Experience.” Some of them are already familiar with “plant medicines” as well as other types of substances enabling one to reach altered states of consciousness. The variety of natural substances consumed by New-Agers passing through our church includes cannabis, San Pedro cacti, *kambo* (poison frog secretion), psychedelic mushrooms, and *mapacho*, an unprocessed Amazonian tobacco taken as snuff. Many of the New-Agers I have spoken to have indicated they are recurring participants in Native American Church peyote ceremonies as well as “sweat lodges.” Others have tried “Holotropic” breath works, a breathing technique developed by Stanislav Grof producing “outer-worldly” non-ordinary states of consciousness. Clearly, these types of New-Agers are attracted to the psychedelic and spiritual effect the *ayahuasca* brew promises. However, there is also another genre of seekers I would loosely connect with a non-traditional brand of Eastern spirituality and mysticism. Many of these follow gurus or claim to harness guru powers. They may combine with these occult practices such as crystals, assorted amulets and symbolic objects with which they may adorn their bodies. But the most important thing I

have noticed is how all of them seem to embody the idea the individual is the ultimate arbiter of religious authority and the primary achiever of spiritual self-transformation. Their strong experiential preoccupation is grounded on a strong individuality, self exploration and personal agency. These people in large measure embody an important core set of beliefs and practices lending support to the ability of CEFLURIS to establish a beachhead on U.S. coasts.

In many ways, Santo Daime expansion is very much a product of its time. According to CEFLURIS, estimates for the number of worldwide adepts of the Santo Daime lineage associated with *Padrinho Sebastiao* and *Ceu do Mapia* hover around 4,000. Meanwhile, followers of so-called Brazilian Ayahuasca Religions number approximately 20,000 (Labate et al., 2009). While the total number of actual participants in a Santo Daime ceremony is likely much higher, it remains comparatively quite small considering there are now churches in close to four dozen countries around the world. Santo Daime has gone transnational in the age of globalization while operating with a rather small scale of people, something that would be nearly impossible in earlier times due to geographic and communication restrictions. Having traced the contours of the ways in which Santo Daime has carved itself a place within the U.S. cultural context and how the external global system in turn supports its internationalization, I shall now delineate the U.S. organizational structure. I will then move on to *Ceu da Lua Cheia*, Miami, and the object of this thesis.

### **From CEFRLURIS to CEFLURIS-NA**

Before turning the spotlight onto the Miami Santo Daime Church *Ceu da Lua*

*Cheia*, it bears to briefly review the history and structure of Santo Daime in the U.S. at large. I narrated my conversation with *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto in the previous chapter. I pointed out the centrality of his personal efforts in such U.S. expansion beginning in 1987. What follows is a brief summary of the events through 2005, followed by a narrative pertaining to the creation that same year of CEFLURIS-NA, the umbrella organization encompassing the U.S. and Canadian Santo Daime churches.

A flurry of activity developed in 1988 as a direct result of the network of connections *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto personally established. That year, a man obtained permission from *Padrinho* Sebastiao to start a church and bring the *daime* brew to Cambridge, MA. Efforts by people to establish churches in the Big Island of Kauai, Hawaii also got under way. Initial legal inquiries with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and United States Customs Services concerning the importing of *ayahuasca* from Mapia, Brazil also happened that year. Concomitantly, by September 1988, the first shipment of *daime* landed in Hawaii and a piece of land was purchased to build a temple. The first ever work was held in Cambridge also in 1988 in the newly instituted church *Ceu da Beija-flor* (Heaven of the Hummingbird). By 1995, the church in Hawaii emerged as the leading Santo Daime church in the U.S. and began to map out its own production of *ayahuasca*. By 1996, *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto and his wife *Madrinha* Nonata, *Padrinho* Sebastiao's daughter, made several trips to the U.S. in an effort to establish churches on American soil. Churches opened later that year in Colorado and Los Angeles. In 1997, *Padrinho* Alfredo inaugurated the "Church of the Virgin Mother" in Maryland while *Ceu do Coracao do Texas* (The Heavenly Heart of Texas) started to hold works in Austin. Later that year, Ashland, Oregon and Sedona, Arizona also held their

first-ever works. *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto was the quintessential lightening rod behind this flurry of new activity. Between 1998 and 2001 more churches started operating, including *Ceu da Lua Cheia* in Miami. By 2006, thirty churches and 350 active *fardados* were reported in North America.

In 2005, twenty-one American churches including the Toronto one met in Santa Cruz, CA to discuss the setting up of a national church. Twenty-four Protectors (Canada, Holland and Japan also attended) signed in December 2005 in Hawaii a Proclamation creating the North American organization. CEFLURIS and the Council of Elders (COE) were in full support of such proclamation. The signatories included the Council of Elders, the Assembly of Protectors, the Synod of Protectors, the Plenary Body, and the Executive Governing Council along with various Committees.

Organizationally, the conglomerate of U.S. churches is a loose voluntary association. However, each individual church is established as a 501(C)3 or a tax- exempt nonprofit organization. Miami Protector Alberto told me he opted to join CEFLURIS-NA in order to “formalize and get several things done.” It is actually difficult to envision churches operating with any degree of efficiency without belonging to such a larger organization. To begin with, CEFLURIS-NA controls and distributes the sacrament in the United States. Secondly, they organize the annual road-show of *Padrinhos* from Brazil, events people excitedly wait for. Thirdly, the organization provides legal protection and via its Plenary Meetings it ostensibly provides guidance and orientation to affiliated churches. Also, pursuant to CEFLURIS-NA principles, churches become “official” when they sign a “Compact.” Miami’s *Ceu da Lua Cheia* signed its own Compact in April 2007, thus becoming an official CEFLURIS-NA church.

The average contribution required for attending a Santo Daime work is \$50. However, special works along with those led by *Padrinhos* and their *comitivas* (groups) are more expensive, usually running at \$150 per day or \$250 for two days. In addition to this, there are sometimes fundraisers of various kinds whereby jewelry or Santo Daime paraphernalia is sold. After subtracting a reasonable amount to cover individual church expenses, the revenue that works generate is sent directly to the Hawaii mother church. There it is further distributed pursuant to various collective understandings formalized during Plenary Meetings. Based on information I have been able to obtain, proceeds are allocated as follows:

a. Ceu do Mapia

- To cover the construction cost for a new church under construction
- To cover costs pertaining to the installation of an industrial kitchen
- To cover Madrinha Rita's ongoing medical expenses

b. Hawaii

- To cover the costs involved with *daime* production (*feitios*)
- To cover administrative expenses and plantation costs
- To cover costs associated with the delivery of *daime* to each church
- To cover costs pertaining to the expansion of production facilities

c. Other

- Legal costs
- Administrative costs
- Four days of Plenary Meetings once a year
- Miscellaneous expenses

CEFLURIS-NA membership appears on the surface to be a logical idea. However, with the exception of *ayahuasca* control, distribution and legal assistance, this

organization does not provide affiliated churches with assimilation guidelines or any type of leadership concerning this matter. CEFLURIS-NA in reality is not a policy-making body nor is it consulted on civic and other matters. As a result, overall growth strategy for Santo Daime Miami, if one had to be articulated, remains timid and is steeped in secrecy due to the enduring illegality of *ayahuasca*. Though Church leaders from Brazil, namely *Padrinho* Alfredo, envision planting the *ayahuasca* flag around the planet thanks to churches that would harvest their own production, how to put this into practice remains a mystery. It seems the Brazil leadership is dreaming of an international grass-roots movement of self-sustaining and economically independent Santo Daime churches. This is despite seemingly empty coffers to carry out such dream. Could it be such a vision is merely a reflection of what the home community of *Ceu do Mapia* in Brazil was able to successfully accomplish, i.e. successful resistance to governmental or corporate intrusion?

## CHAPTER 7

### Summary and Conclusions

I conducted this study with the intent of deciphering and understanding the acculturation predicaments experienced by *Ceu da Lua Cheia*, the relatively young Santo Daime Church located in Miami, FL. Acculturation theory informs us that a church migrating to another country must necessarily adapt to local host-country conditions, all of which implies the original church culture by definition must change. It is disconcerting then to observe how ever so resistant to change *Ceu da Lua Cheia* has proven to be.

Given how this church has witnessed its membership steadily decline over the last four years, I have even questioned *Ceu da Lua Cheia*'s viability as an ongoing concern. This appears to be paradigmatic given Miami's pluralistic and liberal religious milieu. Several additional concerns, however, shaped my hypothesis some of which tend to hinder acculturation. I postulated that *Ceu da Lua Cheia* reluctance to let go of a deeply-ingrained Brazilian cultural identity-- including the use of Portuguese during rituals--was a hindrance to assimilation. Likewise, the Miami church adoption of the stern military culture transported from Brazil has also in my opinion hindered the likelihood for *Ceu da Lua Cheia* to potentially lure a more liberal constituency. With regards to this, I pointed out how New-Age religiosity works against the acculturation of this *Daimista* church given how it is driven by a late modern capitalistic market paradigm. That is because among many things such religiosity requires little personal commitment from New-Agers, all the while requiring the active marketing of religious services in a manner similar to private corporations.

Except for one single exception, I was hereby able to confirm my thesis regarding the acculturation issues affecting *Ceu da Lua Cheia*. While the illegality of *ayahuasca* use in the U.S. would appear to be a factor supporting the thesis of acculturation difficulties by the Miami church, the data did not totally support this view. None of my subjects in fact invoked the illegal status of *ayahuasca* as a factor in their decision to participate or not to participate in this church. One reason accounting for this could be that government authorities have never once raided the established facility currently churning out *daime* for all U.S. churches, implying perhaps a more tolerant climate for *ayahuasca* use in Hawaii at least. This facility produces some 2,000 to 3,000 liters annually as it supplies all U.S. churches. This claim, however, must be tempered by the situation on the ground. While the banning of *ayahuasca* consumption remains firmly on the radar screen of U.S. agencies charged with the enforcing of anti-drug laws, the illicit status of this substance by definition operates against acculturation. The stigmatization of *ayahuasca* has forced *Ceu da Lua Cheia* along with all other U.S. churches to operate in an underground and clandestine way.

According to my findings, declining membership at *Ceu da Lua Cheia* can also be attributed to the all-encompassing strong Brazilian identity and its “militarized” regimented ritual style. Many respondents who opted not to return to the church after a work all highlighted how the obvious “authoritarian” style wasn’t attractive to them. Furthermore, they regarded the powerful Brazilian culture shrouding the church as an unnecessary hurdle especially with regards to the singing of the *hinarios* which is conducted in Portuguese.



The prime reason invoked by those people who opted out was the sheer difficulty of the work. I have discussed at length in this thesis the actual drilling effect of the Santo Daime work on participating bodies. Suffice it to say here, the gargantuan effort and dedication of both energy and time a Santo Daime ritual requires does appear to be an obstacle for most people. In addition to the work demanding a super-human effort on the day of, one consequently needs at least one extra day to simply recuperate from it. Some people also feel a Santo Daime ritual in the end interferes too much with their regular lives and pressing schedules. Others feel that partaking in Santo Daime also ends up hurting their relationships or family life, particularly if they are the only ones participating in works.

It is obvious that partaking in the Santo Daime movement presents challenges far greater than those perhaps required by more traditional faiths. Vast time investment issues are such that one can easily assert Santo Daime is in fact nothing short than a way of life. If this is so, then individuals with families would need to involve their entire family in Santo Daime. For example, those *fardados/as* who have either joined the Church or regularly participate in Santo Daime ceremonies despite a lack of support from their spouses have consequently encountered serious marital issues. Last but not least, in this laundry list of objections to joining *Ceu da Lua Cheia* one also finds the not insignificant costs linked to actual church membership. It is not uncommon to have to spend anywhere between \$5,000 and \$7,000 annually for those intent on partaking in all official works.

### **The New Middle Class and New-Age Religiosity**

The seemingly “cut and paste” quality of the New-Age post-modern era renders it the leading competitor in the religious market place. One would think it would then make Santo Daime a virtual “shoe-in” for the spiritual audience in Miami. However, as previously stated, while New-Agers may always have been aware of the existence of Santo Daime, they would appear to dismiss it rather too quickly once they actually experience it in the flesh. There are many reasons why that is occurring, not the least of which being the fact that New-Agers by definition do not commit to any one religion. Another reason is that Santo Daime does not gyrate to the tune of the laws of market economics. Themes of discipline, duty and commitment don’t even register in the vocabulary of New-Age religiosity. Thus there is little *Ceu da Lua Cheia* can in effect do to counter-balance such blatant reality. The aforementioned situation is even more distressing for the Miami Church given that, contrary to New-Age tenets, Santo Daime religion does not openly market itself to the local New-Age public or to members of any other religious tradition for that matter. Consequences of this dual action are that repudiation is enhanced from the former and social lack of connectivity is cemented by the latter.

### **Organizational and Strategic Weaknesses in Miami**

The under-developed organizational framework of *Ceu da Lua Cheia* also bears a tremendous weight on church ability to “recruit” new members (I use the term “recruit” loosely as I’ve clearly established beforehand that proselytizing is not a hallmark of Santo Daime). Going by the Weberian dictum connecting the rationalization of

charismatic authority to institutional continuance, *Ceu da Lua Cheia* is clearly veering into the danger zone. Even though the Miami Santo Daime Church operates autonomously, real authority at the end of the day rests squarely with *Ceu do Mapia* in Brazil and with the *Padrinhos* who run it. Unfortunately for *Ceu da Lua Cheia*, *Ceu do Mapia* directives regarding overseas church consolidation do not provide an effective compass. What then remains points to weaknesses with regards to church bureaucracy and internal organization at *Ceu da Lua Cheia*.

Complicating an already delicate assimilation dossier is the fact that CEFLURIS, and by extension *Ceu da Lua Cheia*, are using a two-tracked approach when dealing with *de facto* overseas expansion. On the one hand we have external posturing by the Church and, on the other, a seemingly different set of internal goals even though they are not written in stone. With the former we encounter statements by the Protector of *Ceu da Lua Cheia* that the church is not interested in increasing membership ranks. We also hear official statements such as those by *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto that CEFLURIS has no plans to expand. Regarding the latter, the rhetoric dances to a different tune and certainly is more forward-looking insofar as overseas expansion is concerned. Within said context it then becomes easier to understand *Padrinho* Alfredo's "marching orders" to all U.S. churches to build temples and plant *ayahuasca* fields. Such are the methods used when an institution is forced to operate on the fringes of the legal order. Similar to the predicament faced by the thirty other Santo Daime churches in the U.S., *Ceu da Lua Cheia* finds itself in the middle of this conundrum without really knowing what to do. Furthermore, though it may serve as a somewhat reassuring anchor, CEFLURIS-NA membership in and of itself does not guarantee victory given how this institution experiences similar anxieties

to *Ceu da Lua Cheia*. Having said all this, I believe the future of *Ceu da Lua Cheia* remains uncertain for now. Unless the Miami church takes immediate steps to increase its membership, its rank and file may dwindle even further, endangering the continuity of its very presence there.

Two developments may however assist *Ceu da Lua Cheia* to find a solution to its acculturation puzzle. The first one has to do with very recent developments at the heart of the church and the second with the seemingly beneficial turn of events regarding the profile of *ayahuasca* on a global stage. Concerning recent developments at *Ceu da Lua Cheia*, it is encouraging to see this church is finally actively encouraging its *fardados* to engage more forcefully in administrative matters. A solid “bureaucracy” will however not set in unless changes in this regard first take place within the Mother Church’s organization in Brazil. The other reason working in favor of *Ceu da Lua Cheia* is that its future is tied to positive developments concerning *ayahuasca* medical and clinical research.

### **Recommendations**

As the head of Santo Daime Church at its “headquarters” in *Ceu do Mapia*, Brazil, *Padrinho* Alfredo must urgently imbue this organization with a bureaucracy solely dedicated to assist its overseas churches in their mission of expansion and acculturation. A targeted program designed to help overseas churches develop on their own ought to be fleshed out so as to enhance the Santo Daime profile on the global scene. Stronger and more targeted leadership out of Brazil is hereby required if Santo Daime is to make it on U.S. shores including Miami. U.S. churches including Miami must also

understand the assimilation challenges confronting them. A limited, discrete effort by *Ceu da Lua Cheia* to expose itself to the Miami New-Age community would benefit this church's integration into the community and go a long way to ensure its permanence in Miami.

From a narrower focus, several acculturation solution steps may be implemented by the Santo Daime church both in Miami and around the U.S. Such recommendations are tied to Catholic ritual aspects, dress code, using other languages, a more proactive church structure and image as well as the sheer length of this strenuous ritual. The latter all stem from Weber's theory repertoire. Finally--and echoing Berger's theory this time--how the church can gain in visibility so as to "recruit" more followers is another central aspect of acculturation I will hereby delve into.

The rampant Catholic ethos stands as a major impediment to successful acculturation. One potential panacea to luring more followers would be to tone down the Catholic rhetoric. Catholic terms and symbolic repertoire are pervasive in the *hinarios* and in ceremony artifacts on display. Images of the Virgin Mary especially are omnipresent. One could still accommodate such change without stripping Santo Daime from its core Catholic aspects. Given the original importance of The Virgin Mary apparition before Mestre Irineu, its image will understandably always remain at the heart of Santo Daime values and beliefs. Nonetheless, one could award for instance more ceremonial weight to *Yemanjá* as opposed to the Virgin Mary. Another way to dampen the Catholic ethos at the heart of Santo Daime would be to better educate prospective members during their orientation sessions prior to their first work. One would make it very explicit that Santo Daime is not an arm of the Vatican and that this doctrine does not subscribe to any

official Catholic dogma. Rather, one would spell out that any use of Catholic imagery or language is only symbolic and metaphorical and reflects in part ambient so-called “popular Catholicism” in South America. This would potentially prevent newcomers from being taken aback--as some typically are--on the occasion of their first ceremony. I am also in favor of conducting formal teaching sessions for guests who are confused by the multi-cultural Santo Daime doctrine or for those who simply want to deepen their knowledge of this church.

Loosening up the rigid dress code--perhaps doing away entirely with uniforms--could also help nurture Santo Daime acculturation efforts. The issue of uniform is perhaps a bigger acculturation issue here in Miami than say in more conservative “markets” such as Washington DC. This is because Miami is a more fashion-conscious cosmopolitan city, habitually labeled more “flamboyant” than other U.S. cities.

Another way to aid acculturation in the U.S. would be to increase the extent of the English-language repertoire of *hinarios*. This may convince more English-speaking individuals to give Santo Daime a chance as some may be intimidated by the mere singing in Portuguese. For some people, speaking a foreign language may not be their *forte* to begin with. Singing more *hinarios* in English could prove a huge acculturation boost for Santo Daime in Miami not to mention in the U.S. at large. *Padrinho* Paulo Roberto himself reiterated that point when he last was in Miami. He chose to sing a particular *hinario* typically sung in Portuguese this time entirely in English.

Church leadership should work harder on establishing a proper bureaucracy, holding more frequent meetings of *fardados/as* so as to brainstorm more efficiently with regards to how to step up church membership. It would be important to open up the

inner-circle debate on how to render church growth an absolute priority. Instituting an internal mentoring program of younger inducted members would help ensure a more ingrained sense of continuity in the number of work participants should for example Church Protector Alberto be unavailable or ill. This would be an indirect way of acculturating. Vouching there are always enough people to hold down a work is in fact a question of mere survival for the Miami Church. It is imperative the leadership and its *fardados/as* render their church more than just a so-called “Point of Light,” instead committing to make it into a fully-fledged *bona fide* church. This would give it more clout and ensure a higher number of sought-after *Padrinho* visits to Miami.

Another major acculturation obstacle remains the unmitigated difficulty of a Santo Daime ritual. Followers traditionally wishing one another “*bom trabalho!*” (“Have a good work!”) is no coincidence. Akin to the painstaking erecting of a tall building, ritual participants must work very hard indeed for extenuating hours to improve themselves so as to make the world out there a better place. Each participant is ensconced in her or his own pursuit of higher consciousness under the influence of the *daime*. Meanwhile, the extent of the collective ceremonial effort uniting these “soldiers of the forest” is something to be reckoned indeed. What some people may also find difficult or unattractive in this ritual is the rigid military ethos. Staying in formation is a ritual hallmark to the point that, should someone habitually step “out of the line,” that person could be asked to leave. As opposed to the Miami Church, larger churches are more flexible with regards to one’s freedom to step in and out of the *salao* during the ritual which is always formally “opened” and “closed.” Once the Protector “opens” the work, no one else is permitted to enter. Because the Miami Church is a rented house with a

garden perhaps too close for comfort to its next-door neighbors, no one is allowed to step outside especially not to mention enter during the entire duration of the work. That can be too harsh or even claustrophobic for some. Should the Miami leadership relax its rigid ceremony standards, this would encourage more people to join Santo Daime hence supporting *de facto* acculturation.

Leaving aside the military style, the mere physically taxing aspect of the ceremony can be off-putting or even frightening to prospective members unaccustomed to stepping out of their “comfort zone.” Having the courage to squarely face one’s own inner demons and plethora of fears via intense “purging” (vomiting etc.) is in fact what a Santo Daime ritual is all about-- for a large part. Human fear-driven behaviors have always been amongst the most corrosive and destructive as they single-handedly shut down human creativity not to mention the flow of universal love. The latter is one of the cornerstones of Santo Daime. Yet no matter how committed people might be to their spiritual journey, not everyone will be willing to submit themselves to such intense physical discomfort. Another challenge is also how long a ritual typically lasts. As described earlier, ceremonies can last anywhere from five to an astounding twelve hours, namely in the case of *bailado* works. The required physical endurance is something more sensitive constitutions may simply not be able to bear despite good-faith efforts.

Perhaps if the Miami leadership were to make more of a conscious point to shorten the length of a ritual would membership finally grow and foster. Furthermore, because our modern times have rendered us consumers of information and services twenty-four hours a day, people-- especially in Miami where temptations of all sorts are rampant--may have a harder time convincing themselves Santo Daime is worth the time



and effort. In the end, only the true *cognoscenti* of the divine medicine and the value of intense self-knowledge may go to the effort of partaking in a work. Devoting such an immense chunk of time to a religious ceremony can nonetheless remain problematic for some. Parents of young children, for example, may simply not be able to stay away from their offspring for such extended periods of time. The offering of childcare services by a rotation of volunteer church members in proximity of a ceremony could be a solution to the combined issue of time and money that is such a challenge for members with young children.

How then can the Miami Church manage to better acculturate in a city that seemingly offers too many other distractions yet where the ambient New-Age marketplace happens to be thriving? By being a more astute participant in said New-Age marketplace without succumbing to the proselytizing CEFLURIS-NA does not condone. A good example relates to one of our church members, now an enduring pillar of ritual strength. The only reason she found out about Santo Daime in the first place is because she was one day perusing the community bulletin board at a local alternative healing center. The simply-written advertisement was compelling and intriguing enough for her to want to explore what the doctrine was all about. She never looked back. An important acculturation tool could be simply to increase the amount of notices on bulletin boards--including online ones--at local alternative outlets, be they “healing centers,” organic health-food stores, energy medicine offices or even yoga studios. The many psychic fairs also regularly on offer in Miami could also be ideal--though still discrete-- “hunting grounds” for Santo Daime. In effect, a more proactive form of “word-of-mouth” would

enhance acculturation efforts and help the Santo Daime Miami Church especially gain a firmer stronghold onto the local New-Age scene.

While the issue of gender in Santo Daime rests far beyond the scope of my thesis, it is worth noting the absence of women at the upper echelons of Santo Daime--specifically as *bona fide* Commanders or church leaders. Likely a direct fall-out from Brazil's more patriarchal society, men only lead the Santo Daime Church. A Commander's wife or partner, however, may at times contribute to the ritual with the leading of rosary-reading, singing or even a *concentracao* in the absence of said husband/partner. One way to encourage acculturation in an ultra-modern American society would be to enable women--whether the wife/partner of the Commander or another senior female member--to actually serve as Commander and leader of said Santo Daime chapter. Also, younger more modern-conscious women may shy away from the actual stern uniforms. A way to encourage acculturation could be to allow women to wear instead what female guests routinely adorn, less conservative though still demure all-white long skirts and modest tops that cover shoulders at all times. Last but not least, the financial aspect of all U.S. churches should be assessed by CEFLURIS-NA with a view to encouraging growth. The institution of a church fund to be used as a lending pool to member churches should be seriously considered. If membership is to increase and acculturation furthered, the construction of temples should be a priority. In order to carry out such venture the availability of scarce economic resources is a must.

## CHAPTER 8

### Recommendations for Future Study

If my instincts serve me right, in the U.S. the political climate is rapidly changing in directions that are auspicious to the increasing use of entheogens. If this is so, only with the implementation of just some of my recommended steps, *Ceu da Lua Cheia* would enjoy a brighter future in Miami. Should the field open up as a result of the increased scientific and clinical research interest in *ayahuasca*, the next story to be written will be ever more different rendering this very thesis obsolete. Also, recent trends in the legal arena would seem to indicate the eventual legalization of *ayahuasca* may not be so ephemeral after all, particularly within the context of its ceremonial sacred use.

### The Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS)

It is clear by now The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) is lending an essential helping hand to the Santo Daime acculturation dossier, including here in Miami. That is because this organization is shining a new and much-needed light on the many psychotherapeutic benefits *ayahuasca* use is now associated with, helping to remove some the stigma and fear accompanying it in the past. The allure of Santo Daime is closely tied for many to its potent shamanic identity and the promise of attaining Higher Consciousness. Nonetheless, I believe actual medical research lifting the veil on the very real medical and even life-saving virtues of *ayahuasca* in theory can only help Santo Daime doctrine better acculturate in Miami, the U.S. and the world at large.

Founded in 1986, this dynamic non-profit based in Santa Cruz, CA is single-handedly helping to unlock the door to further education and research into the healing benefits of psychedelic medicine. Once relegated to the dark Underworld, scientific research into the plethora of health benefits linked to these “illegal” mind-altering substances is now back into full gear. After some of the abuse and deaths associated with the misuse of psychedelics (LSD especially) back in the late 60s and early 70s, the federal government then hastily cracked down on such scientific research, while recreational use of psychedelic drugs became a federal offense. Respectful scientific exploration into the arena of psychedelic medicine and its huge potential as approved treatments in medicine and psychiatry, however, is now firmly underway and has gained momentum over the past fifteen years or so.

The mission of MAPS is to “honestly” inform and educate the public at large on both the risks and benefits linked to the “careful” use of psychedelics and entheogens from *ayahuasca*, LSD, MDMA (“Ecstasy”) and Psilocybin to marijuana (MAPS Mission statement, 2014, [www. MAPS.org](http://www.MAPS.org)). This organization clearly states its vision as one where we live in “a world where psychedelics and marijuana are safely and legally available for beneficial uses, and where research is governed by rigorous scientific evaluation of their risks and benefits.” As a sign of the times, even the US government today is timidly dipping its toes into the burgeoning field of medical psychedelic research albeit via supervision and guidelines only. Due to a lack of outright governmental or industry funding, the future of MAPS though remains precarious as it depends entirely on private donations. This organization in fact acts as a bridge of sorts between the related

fields of New-Age religiosity, neuroscience, medicine, psychotherapy, spirituality and human creativity at large.

However, on a more reduced scale and given the above hasn't yet occurred, I believe new Santo Daime research should precisely focus on the strategy according to which this institution has managed to survive and expand even in the face of a hostile environment. It is interesting how the government has reacted to the challenges religious institutions have deposited at the feet of legal order. Such research may shed light on the dialectical relationship between governmental agencies and religious actors. Likewise, given the dizzying promise Santo Daime espouses with regards to healing many human ailments and diseases, it is puzzling to see how little public interest this brew in reality still generates. So many people, unbeknown to themselves, could benefit from the medicinal properties of *daime*. For example, a rigorous scientific examination of members of one of the largest Santo Daime churches on U.S. soil and its likely positive data could go a long way toward softening the federal government stance on *ayahuasca* use. One could envision a study say over two years recording the improvements in mental and emotional health of those *Daimistas* hailing from educated urban middle-class ranks in the U.S. Such scientific findings would surely mirror those previously recorded in Brazil in the mid to late 1990s. It was deemed there that those regularly drinking *ayahuasca* within a religious ritual ended up being more mentally stable, less prone to criminal disorder and were generally more peaceful citizens.

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