

Brazilian ayahuasca religions in perspective

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The central theme of this selection of articles is a phenomenon that involves the emergence of religious groups in the Brazilian Amazon that build their systems of ritual, myth and principles around the use of a psychoactive brew known by several different names, one of which is the Quechua term 'ayahuasca'.¹ These religions – Santo Daime (in its Alto Santo and CEFLURIS branches), Barquinha and the União do Vegetal – are generically labelled as 'Brazilian ayahuasca religions' in anthropological writings.

Although the field of studies of these religious movements has seen much development in recent decades, there are still very few publications in English, especially in the area of anthropology.² This collection seeks to address this absence and offer visibility to the research conducted in Brazil, most of which has been carried out by Brazilian researchers. The current collection has attempted to select a representative sample of the main types of approaches that have been used. It also offers a view of the historical development of this field of research in Brazil, especially from the perspective of the human sciences, particularly anthropology. We have included articles previously published only in Portuguese, in compilations that one of us has also organized (Labate and Araújo 2004; Labate *et al.* 2008). This is the case of the articles by Mariana Pantoja Franco and Osmildo Silva da

1. Luis Eduardo Luna explains the etymology of this name as: *Aya* – *person, soul, dead spirit; Wasca* – *rope, vine, liana*. According to Luna (1986: 73–74), this name is one of the most used for the brew as well as for one of the plants that compose it: the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi*. Ayahuasca can be literally translated into English as 'rope of the spirits' or 'rope of the dead' and even 'vine/liana of the spirits/dead'. In all the ayahuasca religions discussed in this collection, the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* is combined with the leaves of the bush called *Psychotria viridis*, which contain the active principle DMT (*N-dimethyltryptamine*). The vine and leaves are boiled together, following certain ritual prescriptions. The final result is a plant preparation that is considered sacred and consumed in religious ceremonies. The brew has different names in each of these religions and in their several sub-groups.

2. For a bibliographic survey on this field of studies see Labate, Rose and Santos (2009).

Conceição, Arneide Bandeira Cemin, Edward MacRae, and Wladimir Sena Araújo. Some of the other articles were previously published in Portuguese in other books and Brazilian journals, such as the articles by Luiz Eduardo Soares and Domingos Bernardo Gialluisi da Silva Sá. The compilation also contains original contributions written by researchers dedicated to these topics, such as the texts by Christian Frenopoulo, Sérgio Brissac, Sandra Lucia Goulart, and Labate *et al.*

We hope that this selection will make explicit what the study of the ayahuasca religions has to say on classical and contemporary issues in anthropology. The compilation presents a broad and varied set of ethnographic approaches employed in the initial mapping out of this phenomenon, thus establishing its historical and cultural origins. This book should provide a basis for the development of future work on these religions both in their original contexts and in their expansion throughout Brazil and the world. Their expansion and diversification throughout Brazil and the world may be related to modern projects of religious transit, the construction of national identities by the reappropriation of Indian and popular elements in transnational circuits, migrations and religious diasporas, cultural hybridism, and so on.

Although there is a tradition of ayahuasca consumption by shamans, rubber tappers, and mestizo healers in several countries of South America, such as Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela and Ecuador, the formalization of churches that use the brew only occurs in Brazil. As in the cases of Bwiti in Gabon (who use iboga, *Tabernanthe iboga*) and the Native American Church in the USA and in Canada (who use peyote, *Lophophora williamsii*), these religions re-elaborate the use of psychoactive preparations, inserting them into local belief systems through a reading influenced by Christianity. In the Brazilian case, there is a manifest combination of the Amazonian ayahuasca folk healer (*curandeirismo*) heritage with popular Catholicism and with the African-Brazilian tradition, Kardecist spiritism, and European esoterism (especially via the Esoteric Circle for the Communion of Thought [*Círculo Esotérico da Comunhão do Pensamento*] and Rosacrucianism. We turn to a brief history of the groups.

The first Brazilian ayahuasca religion was the one known as Daime or Santo Daime, created in the 1920s and 1930s by Raimundo Irineu Serra – or Mestre Irineu, as he is known by followers – in Rio Branco, the capital of Acre state, in the north of Brazil.³ Of African descent, Mestre Irineu was born in the state of Maranhão (in Northeastern Brazil) and arrived in Acre (in Western Amazonia) during the second decade of the twentieth century to work as a rubber tapper (*seringueiro*), that is, in the extraction of latex rubber. During this period, Mestre Irineu came into contact with the brew, probably used by indigenous, mixed-race (*mestizo*, *caboclo*) and riverine (*ribeirinhos*) populations since time immemorial, and which would become fundamental in the religion he founded in the frontier zone between Brazil and Bolivia. In the 1930s, he moved to Rio Branco and began to organize his new religion. Here, ayahuasca came to be called Daime. The name Daime, which has also come to identify the religion, is derived from the invocations made by the users of the brew during its consumption and ensuing religious ceremonies. ‘Daime’ is derived from the verb ‘to give’ (*dar*), and remits to the notion of

3. For a history of the Santo Daime, see: MacRae (1992), Goulart (1996), Groisman (1999), Cemin (2001) and Labate and Araújo (2004), among others.

grace received (health, healing, knowledge, revelation, peace, love, etc.) from a divinity or spiritual entity. Mestre Irineu developed his religion in a place known as *Alto Santo* [Holy Rise]. This name refers to the fact that the spot where he installed his church in 1945, in a peripheral rural area of Rio Branco, was at the top of a hill. The name has also come to designate his group of followers. Mestre Irineu registered his religious group in the government registry just three months before his death in July, 1971, after which it came to be officially called Universal Light Christian Enlightenment Center [*Centro de Iluminação Cristã Luz Universal*] or CICLU.

In 1945, another ayahuasca religion emerged in Rio Branco, created by Daniel Pereira de Mattos, who also came to be known as Mestre or Frei Daniel⁴ Just like Mestre Irineu, Mestre Daniel was of Afro-Brazilian heritage. He also arrived in Acre early in the twentieth century; probably some years before Mestre Irineu. They were friends and Mestre Irineu initiated him into the use of Daime, and he joined Mestre Irineu's religion in the 1930s. However, with time, his experiences with Daime led him to the revelation that he had his own 'religious mission', which would only be fully accomplished with the creation of a new religion. It is said that, initially, Mestre Daniel was known in the region as a *rezador* (prayer specialist).⁵ He would help travellers, hunters, or rubber tappers who passed through the area in the forest where he built his house and a little chapel in which he began to develop his spiritual activities. Some of these people became his first followers. With time, Mestre Daniel blended his activities as a *rezador* with the consumption of Daime. The rites gradually became more complex. One of the most striking characteristics of the religious system created by Mestre Daniel is its ostensible closeness to practices and beliefs from Afro-Brazilian religions, such as Umbanda.

Initially, Mestre Daniel's religion was known in Rio Branco as the *Capelinha de São Francisco* (Little Chapel of St Francis), because of his devotion to this Catholic saint. Later, the groups who identify and are affiliated with the religious tradition founded by Mestre Daniel became known – mostly by people who did not participate in the religion – as *Barquinha* (Little Boat). There are several explanations for this name. One of these harks back to Mestre Daniel's period as a sailor, before he came into contact with Daime and took residence in Acre. In fact, as Araújo and Frenopoulo both explain in this collection, images and meanings linked with the sea and with sailors are abundant in Mestre Daniel's religion.

The União do Vegetal – or UDV, as it is also known – emerged in 1961. The official name of this religious group – also registered with the government shortly before its founder passed away – is Union of the Vegetal Beneficent Spiritist Center (*Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal*) or CEBUDV. Chronologically, this is the third ayahuasca religion in Brasil.⁶ It was founded by José Gabriel da Costa, also known as Mestre. Mestre Gabriel was born in the countryside in the state of Bahia and arrived in Amazonia in 1943, where he worked in various rubber camps (*seringais*) for several years. While both the

4. For a history of the Barquinha, see: Araújo (1999), Goulart (2004), Frenopoulo (2005) and Mercante (2006), among others.

5. 'Rezadores' were, and continue to be in some places, important persons in the Brazilian rural milieu, agents of popular Catholicism in areas where the reach of the Catholic Church and its official representatives was rather limited. These people have been the bearers and executors of a whole body of knowledge of prayers, cult of the saints, ceremonies, festivities, etc. linked with the Catholic tradition.

6. For a history of the UDV, see: Andrade (1995), Brissac (1999) and Goulart (2004), among others.

Santo Daime of Mestre Irineu and the Barquinha of Mestre Daniel emerged in Rio Branco, the UDV was shaped in Porto Velho, Rondônia (a neighbor state of Acre). It seems as if Mestre Gabriel never met the founders of the other two ayahuasca religions and while they called the brew by the same name (Daime), in the UDV it was called Vegetal or Hoasca.

These three religious groups and the mythical, doctrinal and ritual constituents installed by each of their creators – Mestre Irineu, Mestre Daniel and Mestre Gabriel – are to this day the main sources for the formation of other groups of ayahuasca users in Brazil, even those who do not immediately define themselves as religious (Labate 2004). Some of the first researchers of this religious phenomenon (Monteiro da Silva 1983; La Rocque Couto 1989) adopted the Santo Daime term *linha* (line or thread) to designate the Santo Daime, União do Vegetal and Barquinha groups, understanding that the distinction between ‘lines’ occurs in their mythical narratives, ritual forms and the collection of entities that populate each of their pantheons. In a comparative analysis of these three religions, Goulart (2004) attempts to detect their contrasts, continuities and fragmentation processes. She argues that the distinctions between Santo Daime, Barquinha and UDV express particular developments of a single set of beliefs and practices, that is, a tradition that is common to these different religions (Goulart 2004).

In all three religions, the passing away of the founders stimulated a process of ruptures and formation of new groups. A succession dispute began after the death of Mestre Irineu in 1971 and led to the emergence of segmentations in the group he originally created in Rio Branco. The largest of these, in numerical terms, and the most expressive, regarding the intensification of internal differences in this religious tradition, is the *Centro Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra* [Raimundo Irineu Serra Eclectic Center of the Universal Flowing Light] or CEFLURIS, which was created by Sebastião Mota de Melo – known as Padrinho Sebastião – in 1974, also in Rio Branco. CEFLURIS has been one of the groups most responsible for the expansion of this religious phenomenon, both in Brazil and abroad.

Mestre Gabriel, founder of the UDV, passed away in 1971, the same year as Mestre Irineu. From that moment his religion also suffered a series of fragmentations and the creation of new groups. It is not easy to classify all these groups. We wish to explicitly avoid the term ‘dissidence’. Besides being derogatory for some, the idea of ‘original purity’ cannot be sustained from an anthropological standpoint, since all groups are under constant processes of transformation and cultural re-creation.

Toward the end of the 1970s these religions began to expand, triggered by the creation of groups linked to the União do Vegetal and CEFLURIS in the large metropolises of southeastern Brazil. In fact, among the ayahuasca religions, the UDV and CEFLURIS are the largest groups in terms of membership⁷ and the most expansive. The Barquinha, whose founder died in 1958, is represented by different groups (called ‘centers’), which are autonomous and have idiosyncratic particularities. All have modest membership numbers, and most remain confined to the Acre region – as also occurs with Alto Santo.

As Goulart (2004) and Labate (2004) have observed, the expansion of these religions seems to be driven by their intense secession processes. In this way, segmentations led to expansion, expansion to diversification and, again, segmentation. This circular movement

7. The UDV counts some 15,000 members and CEFLURIS has about 4000 (Labate, Rose and Santos 2009).

of fabrication and constant multiplication of ritual practices and symbolic systems marks this religious universe. The current volume seeks in part to deal with this diversity, offering a panorama of the Brazilian ayahuasca domain.

The expansion of these groups was accompanied by an intensification of the debate over the juridical and social legitimacy of the consumption of ayahuasca, in the complex and polemical intersection between state and religion. In 1985, the Brazilian *Divisão de Medicamentos* [Medications Division] (DIMED), a former agency of the Ministry of Health, included the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine in the list of products prohibited for use in the Brazilian territory. Shortly thereafter, the *Conselho Federal de Entorpecentes* [Federal Narcotics Board] (CONFEN) assembled a multidisciplinary team to investigate the ritual use of ayahuasca in the Santo Daime and the União do Vegetal. Domingos Bernardo de Sá (see this volume) was head of the team comprised by professionals from several fields. The investigation lasted for two years and, in 1987, ayahuasca was removed from the DIMED's list of prohibited products and was authorized for ritual use, partly because DIMED had prohibited the vine without consulting the opinion of CONFEN as procedure required.⁸ Ayahuasca's legality was questioned again in 1988 and 1992, but CONFEN consistently confirmed its decision to allow the use of ayahuasca in ritual contexts, incorporating however a new recommendation that it be withheld from people with psychiatric problems, pregnant women, and minors.

A digression is in order here: one of the most polemical issues in the history of the legalization of ayahuasca use in Brazil and one which involves a genuine clash between the several ayahuasca groups in the country concerns the ritual consumption of another psychoactive plant, *Cannabis sativa*, by CEFLURIS – the most eclectic and experimentalist Santo Daime group – which refers to this plant as *Santa Maria* [Saint Mary or Holy Mary]. The practice was influenced by the arrival of backpackers and other young people in Acre in the mid-1970s. Although the other ayahuasca-using groups frequently argued that the use of Santa Maria by CEFLURIS would jeopardize the whole legalization process of ayahuasca in Brazil, this did not happen. This topic which unfortunately had to be left out of this volume, except for a brief mention in the article by Labate *et al.*; poses interesting theoretical and political questions, which still remain to be studied.⁹

On November 4, 2004, a resolution from the National Drug Policy Council (*Conselho Nacional de Políticas sobre Drogas*) – CONAD [the successor agency to CONFEN] recognized definitively the right to the free exercise of the religious use of ayahuasca, thus

8. For a history of the process of legalization of the use of ayahuasca in Brazil see MacRae (1992), Goulart (2004) and Labate (2005), among others.

9. We suggest that the reader see MacRae (2008) for further information. He compares the use of Daime with that of Santa Maria, especially in reference to the efforts to ritualize the consumption of these substances. The author argues that the favourable social learning and cultural conditions regarding the use of Daime – which as we said has been legally permitted since the mid-1980s – have allowed for the development of effective internal social controls by the group. The use of *Cannabis*, on the other hand, remains legally prohibited. According to the author, this encumbers the institutionalization of local norms and rituals regarding its use, eroding the culture's capacity to exercise control and hampering its ability to prevent eventual undesirable effects of use of the substance. This empirical example is used in support of the broader argument that the development of social and cultural control mechanisms by local communities is a more efficient process than is the imposition of coercive legal controls by external institutions.

reinforcing the social legitimacy of these groups. This resolution removed the prior restrictions on the use of ayahuasca by pregnant women and minors. It also instituted a multidisciplinary working group (*Grupo Multidisciplinar de Trabalho, GMT*) charged with conducting a nationwide registry of all ayahuasca using groups, attending to its religious use, and experimentally investigating the therapeutic use of ayahuasca. The working group was constituted in 2005, with six representatives from the ayahuasca-using groups and six researchers from various fields. Domingos Bernardo de Sá and Edward MacRae once again were included in the team.

The working group (GMT) released its report, presenting a ‘deontology’ for the use of the brew – that is, a charter of ethical orientations to regulate consumption and prevent inappropriate usage (see also MacRae in this volume). The final report condemns the commercialization of the brew, recommends that the groups avoid promoting ayahuasca tourism, encouraged ecological self-sustainability of the groups through the plantation and management of the plant specimens that compose the brew, and criticizes the promotion of ayahuasca as a panacea or as a form of therapy, explicitly rejecting *curandeirismo* (folk healing or quackery).

Hence, whereas it was questioned in the past, the legitimacy of the use of ayahuasca in religious contexts currently appears to be reasonably well accepted in Brazil, despite continuing to face some resistance at the level of the state as well as in some of the more conservative sectors of society, such as certain religious or political groups. Generally speaking, the regulation of the use of ayahuasca in Brazil, though not wholly impervious to the restrictive influences of scientific medicine, is exceptional in the history of global drug legislation in that it has combined biomedical knowledge with the discourse of social scientists and the voice of representatives of the ayahuasca religions. This helps in the development and strengthening of mechanisms of cultural regulation within the user groups of this particular psychoactive substance, a process that is usually hindered by repressive drug policy.

The article by Mariana Pantoja and Osmildo Silva da Conceição opens this collection. Though not directly focused on the ayahuasca religions, it provides important details and reflections on the wider context of their emergence. The authors – an anthropologist and an Amazonian rubber tapper – offer a historical report on the use of ayahuasca among laborers engaged in the extraction of rubber from the tree *Hevea brasiliensis* in the valley of the Upper Juruá river, an affluent of the Amazon located in western Acre. Although the relationship of the Santo Daime, Barquinha and UDV with rubber tapper culture has been emphasized since the first studies of these religious traditions (Monteiro da Silva 1983 and Goulart 1996), up to now the literature has barely explored the consumption of the brew among rubber tappers themselves. Examining salient events and individuals who, from the end of the nineteenth century to the present, forged the history of the occupation of the Upper Juruá, this article, with its flowing style, broadens our understanding of the historical processes which constituted the cultural, political and economic basis of the emergence of the ayahuasca religions. The uses of ayahuasca in the Upper Juruá described by Franco and Conceição embrace practices that combine diverse strands of Christianity – from popular Catholicism to more recent Evangelical Protestant groups – with the Indian and riverine (*caboclo*) traditions of Amazonia. The rubber tappers’ perspectives express

not only a religious ethos, but also their political struggles, pointing to the fine intersection between politics and religion.

Moving away from the earlier uses of ayahuasca, the next article, by Arneide Bandeira Cemin, analyses the main rituals of the Daime or Santo Daime. Cemin's reflections largely stem from her fieldwork with a group located in the city of Porto Velho, state of Rondônia, known as CECLU (*Centro Eclético de Correntes da Luz Universal*) [Currents of the Universal Light Eclectic Center], closely associated to the more orthodox group commonly known as 'Alto Santo'.¹⁰ In her ethnography of the rituals, the author investigates the central notions of the 'Daime system', such as the category of 'spiritual works', and the way in which doctrinal principles are assimilated by followers during ritual experiences. Cemin supports much of her analysis on Marcel Mauss' classical concept of 'corporeal techniques', combining analytical and native categories in a productive way.

The article by Luis Eduardo Soares moves on to unravel issues raised by the expansion of these religions into the large metropolises of Brazil, a process that began in the early 1980s. Soares reflects on the presence of the CEFLURIS branch of the Santo Daime in the city of Rio de Janeiro, attempting to place Santo Daime in the context of what he labels the 'new religious consciousness'. This term embraces an array of attitudes and cultural and religious interests characterized by a taste for experimentation and constant nomadism based on the principle of individual freedom, as opposed to unconditional and exclusive faith. In this sense, the dissemination of Santo Daime beyond Amazonia is seen to be part of a wider and deeper movement that is related to the development of modern values. Although he considers the adhesion of members of the Brazilian urban middle class to Santo Daime in particular, and to an alternative, shifting mysticism in general, pointing to a persistence of modern values (and to the modern emphasis on subjectivity), the author also argues that the case of Santo Daime expresses a cultural critique of modernity. The attraction felt by members of the urban middle-class to a religion born in the remote Amazonian rainforest – the fringes of archaic Brazil – are seen to be a strong indication of this critique. According to Soares' argument, Santo Daime proposes a reinvention of Brazilian national identity in which Amazonia and the underdeveloped riverine peoples (*caboclos*) are valued as profound and essential. Although short and written in the journalistic genre, this article has been of great importance in influencing and stimulating a number of Brazilian researchers.

There are two articles in this collection dedicated to the religion that has come to be known as Barquinha. The first, by Wladimir Sena Araújo – author of a pioneering study of this religion (Araújo 1999) – provides a rich ethnography of the ritual spaces of one of the principal Barquinha groups, the *Centro Espírita e Culto de Oração 'Casa de Jesus – Fonte de Luz'* ['House of Jesus, Source of Light' Spiritist Center and Cult of Prayer]. Araújo elucidates key meanings in Barquinha cosmology by analyzing these different spaces. The author identifies an intense spatial mobility in this religious universe in a process whereby ritual performances dynamically activate cosmological elements. Thus Araujo considers the Barquinha cosmology to be mobile and open, a 'cosmology-in-the-making'

10. It is important to remember that the manner of classifying these groups varies considerably and there is no consensus regarding this. In other words, although some groups may define themselves as 'Alto Santo', others may not recognize them in the same way.

that is composed or dissolved through the constant movement of elements through the ritual spaces and performances. According to the author, this also makes the cosmology change continuously and with great speed.

The second article on the Barquinha is by Christian Frenopoulo. The author studies another Barquinha group, also located in Rio Branco, focusing on healing practices understood by followers as ‘charity works’ (*obras de caridade*). These activities are directed toward members of the local community who come to the center in search of treatment for diverse ills and who are attended by spirit-mediums, without necessarily consuming Daime. Frenopoulo provides a dense ethnographic description of the different kinds of ritual practised here, the corresponding trance forms elicited, such as ‘incorporation’ (*incorporação*) and ‘irradiation’ (*irradiação*), without leaving out a study of the participants themselves. In so doing, he outlines the intricate symbolic network that draws on elements from the Christian, Indian and Afro-Brazilian universes, including the *Encantaria* from Maranhão. The author places his analytical emphasis on the social interactions that occur between patients and healer spirits incorporated into spirit-mediums during healing encounters. These encounters are seen as patterned performances which, it is argued, are conveyed through idioms that thematically signal cultural alterity. The article concludes by suggesting that the healing services echo symbolic motifs associated with the historical experience of immigration into Acre and the unstable and changing life circumstances shared by the local community.

This collection also carries two articles on the União do Vegetal. Sandra Goulart’s article is a wide-ranging analysis of the UDV’s formative process and provides important details about its history and its founder. By examining narratives of early followers and the concepts, rituals, and mythology of the UDV, Goulart’s article reveals important relations between the UDV and other religious and cultural traditions, such as the universe of beliefs and practices of indigenous and mestizo peoples of Amazonia, Afro-Brazilian religions, Alan Kardec’s spiritism, and masonry, as well as the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition, in addition to Brazilian popular Catholicism. In this hefty contribution on this least-studied of the Brazilian ayahuasca religions, the reader is transported to a rich universe where there is an interaction of personages and elements stemming from the different belief systems, such as the notion of reincarnation alongside Christian prayers and *benditos* [a type of prayer – trans.], or simultaneous references to the Hebrew king Solomon and Jesus. The text allows for a reflection on not only the syncretic nature of Brazilian popular religiosity, but also, through the specific case of the UDV, on the possibility of articulating popular religious traditions with erudite ones.

The other article on the UDV, by Sérgio Brissac, analyses the religious experience of urban followers of this religion, specifically those of a UDV ‘nucleus’ located in the industrialized southeastern region of Brazil. Brissac describes these followers’ experience, considering aspects that range from the moment of their conversion to the process of adoption of doctrinal elements in their daily lives. Through the narratives and interpretations of followers, the author reveals the meanings and native exegesis of doctrinal values and concepts of the UDV religion, such as the notion of *mestre* (master or teacher), *memória* (memory), *merecimento* (merit), *evolução espiritual* (spiritual evolution), *peia* (punishment), and *luz* (light), among others. Brissac’s article is also an ethnography of the altered state of perception and embodiment induced by the ingestion of ayahuasca, called

burracheira in the UDV. By analyzing the meanings attributed to them, the author offers provocative analytical suggestions, such as the notion of *'englobamento na força da burracheira'* (encompassment in the force of the *burracheira*), which is also useful for thinking about the other ayahuasca religions, as well as shedding light on the pertinence of concepts frequently used in the general field of studies of Brazilian religiosity, such as 'syncretism'.

The next article is by the lawyer Domingos Bernardo Gialluisi da Silva Sá. Since the beginning, this author has played a fundamental role in the process that has led to the present legal regulation of the use of ayahuasca in Brazil. Sá recounts some episodes that led to the first initiatives of the Brazilian government to regulate the use of ayahuasca, revealing the main ideas, arguments and people involved in the debate from the mid-1980s until the end of that decade. As mentioned before, this was the period in which the ayahuasca religions began to spread to other regions of the country, becoming more widely known in the broader society and emerging as an issue that demanded the state's attention. Notions such as 'structured use' or 'ritual use' of psychoactives and concepts such as 'entheogen' appear in the documents discussed by the author, and are shown to become more consolidated with the advancement of state regulation. Thus Sá's article, originally published over a decade ago, is of inestimable historical value. The article describes the process of institutionalization of the use of ayahuasca in Brazil, which thenceforth became a model for such debates in other countries.

Next, MacRae, who has also played an important role in the processes of state regulation of the use of ayahuasca in Brazil, draws an analogy between the manner in which the Afro-Brazilian religions (such as Umbanda) and the ayahuasca religions have been classified and regulated for purposes of political control during the last century and the beginning of the present one. Albeit in different ways, both religious practices have been or continue to be seen with suspicion both by the ruling groups and by the bulk of the traditionally Christian and/or white population in Brazil. Reservations have often been expressed in medical terms, referring to alleged threats to mental health either posed by possession trances or by the psychoactive nature of ayahuasca. A number of similarities between both processes are highlighted, including the role played by anthropologists sympathetic to these religions. MacRae maintains that both processes were marked by an attempt to exercise 'scientific control' where 'science' was equated almost exclusively to biomedicine. However, he argues that at present anthropological perspectives have been receiving more attention and have been more successful in ensuring the official adoption of a broader approach which emphasizes the equal importance of the socio-cultural aspects alongside the medical considerations on the issue. The author concludes by analysing the 2006 report by the official multidisciplinary working team set up by the National Office for Policies on Drugs (SENAD) which was commissioned to regulate the now officially recognized right to religious use of ayahuasca in Brazil.

Finally, the collection closes with a last article by Beatriz Caiuby Labate, Rafael Guimarães dos Santos, Brian Anderson, Marcelo Mercante and Paulo Barbosa. In recognition of the complex nature of the effects of ayahuasca use, this text attempts an interdisciplinary dialogue, incorporating notions derived from anthropology, cultural psychology, medicine and pharmacology. It was included here with the intent of relating the ayahuasca religions to a broader body of knowledge about other ayahuasca-using contexts, as well as to the larger debates on the therapeutic uses of psychedelic substances and

harm reduction. The text examines evidence for the therapeutic value of using ayahuasca in ritual contexts to treat substance dependence – these ritual contexts include both the Brazilian ayahuasca religions as well as two psychotherapeutic centers located in South America. The medical focus of the authors' inquiry into this specific type of ayahuasca use is balanced out with a list of suggestions for methodological, ethical and political considerations that could be developed in future research on the therapeutic effects claimed by practically all ayahuasca-using groups.

Some reflection on central concepts that permeate this collection is necessary. One of them is the term, 'ayahuasca religions' (*religiões ayahuasqueiras*). This expression should not be naturalized. Historically, we observe that some researchers have used the term 'sect' to refer to these groups, such as Andrade (1995), Gentil and Gentil (2004); Brito (2004), Grob *et al.* (1996), Sá (this volume), among others. As this term has increasingly acquired pejorative connotations, the expression 'ayahuasca religions', has been gaining increasingly more currency, and is now widely adopted in the specialized anthropological literature. According to Labate *et al.* (2009), the expression seems to have first appeared in Portuguese as '*religiões ayahuasqueiras*' in the book *O uso ritual da ayahuasca* [The Ritual Use of Ayahuasca] (Labate and Araújo 2002, 2004; see esp. Labate *et al.* 2004). Although the authors have not justified their choice of terminology, it seems possible to suggest that the term is an adaptation from the Spanish '*vegetalismo ayahuasquero*' used by Luis Eduardo Luna (1986) to refer to a form of folk medicine based on the use of plant hallucinogens, chants and diets. *Vegetalistas*, according to Luna, are *curandeiros* (folk healers) from popular rural parts of Peru and Colombia who maintain elements of the old indigenous knowledge of plants, simultaneous to their absorption of influences from European esotericism and the urban milieu.

Two issues have to be highlighted regarding the expression 'ayahuasca religions': firstly, it can be questioned for its excessive emphasis on the pharmacological dimension, since religious experience cannot be reduced to mere contact with the active principles present in ayahuasca. To what extent is the consumption of ayahuasca central to the activity of these groups? Frenopoulo, in this collection, for instance, shows us how certain ceremonies in one of the Barquinha groups forgo the use of Daime for some types of participants. Analogously, it is common to hear *Daimistas* assert that, according to Mestre Irineu, 'his Doctrine is independent of Daime' (*à Doutrina dele prescindido do Daime*), that is, the religion goes beyond the consumption of Daime *per se* and cannot be reduced to a substance. Further, it is interesting to remember that during the long period in which the UDV practices were prohibited in the USA, while the juridical process was ongoing, followers continued to carry out their sessions drinking water instead of Vegetal (see below).¹¹ Secondly, to what extent are the different religious groups drawn together simply by the fact that they consume the same psychoactive substance? As is known, several of these groups see themselves as manifestations of independent origins that should not necessarily be linked.

While acknowledging its possible limitations, we affirm the pertinence of the term 'ayahuasca religions.' As authors such as Labate (2004) and Goulart (2004) have shown,

11. Some people allegedly even vomited from drinking just water.

there are several similarities and continuities among these groups; in fact, their points of dissension and rupture indicate a shared semantic field. We argue that the practice of the consumption of Daime or Vegetal is foundational to these groups – which does not imply an equation of their activities or their religious ethos with the consumption of this psycho-active. The idea that Daime and Vegetal are central to the religions is not only a product of intellectual representation of the phenomenon, but is also supported by empirical reality. From the emic perspective, there is an important valorization of the spiritual, divinatory, therapeutic, pedagogical, and other properties of the brew. The consumption of ayahuasca also appears to function as a form of diacritical sign of the identity for these groups *vis-à-vis* its other religious manifestations (such as Catholicism, Protestantism, Umbanda, Spiritism, religions of Oriental orientation, etc.). At the same time, despite the ruptures and rivalries among the groups, the consumption of ayahuasca marks their collective identity, ‘us’ as opposed to ‘them’ – in this case the broader social milieu of non-users of the substance. Indeed, historically, strategic political needs have at certain moments drawn these groups closer to one another at certain moments, especially during the process of legalization.¹²

In our view, it is also valid to conceive of the existence of a field of research on the ayahuasca religions. The idea of a field assumes that it is difficult to speak about any of these groups without somehow considering the others, given the process of continual exchanges and dialogues among them – that is, a system of differences in which the identity of each is constructed in a large part in opposition to the others (see Goulart 2004). We hope with this collection, then, to contribute to the consolidation of this emergent field of research.

Another aspect of the expression ‘ayahuasca religions’ that deserves attention is the notion of ‘religion’. Should these groups be characterized as ‘religious’? We have observed that, while a large part of the anthropological literature has referred to the Santo Daime, Barquinha and UDV as ‘religious’ organizations, in the realm of media and public debate – and even in the internal discourse of the groups – it is common to refer to them as ‘sects’. According to a widespread commonsense understanding, ‘religions’ are established institutions in a society, while ‘sects’ are numerically small voluntary associations that have generally separated from ‘official churches’. Further, especially in Europe and the US, the notion of ‘sect’ frequently evokes a pejorative image, related to fanatical behaviors that border on madness, and which should be prohibited by the state in the interest of the common good. From the sociological point of view, however, we know that the limits between ‘sect’ and ‘religion’ are unstable, and that their definition depends on criteria of power, based on an ethnocentric tendency to confer higher status to one’s own religion, while the *other’s* is, as a rule, considered inferior or less legitimate. Thus, although it is true that the major monotheistic religions – such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism – vie among themselves for space and may circumstantially be questioned, it can generally be affirmed that they have

12. This process is rather complex, involving circumstantial approximations and distances between the various groups. Recently, for example, a certain polarization appears to have consolidated itself in the context of Acre state where Alto Santo, Barquinha, and the UDV have been in opposition to Cefluris, considered less legitimate by the former. From another perspective, Cefluris and UDV are drawn closer to each other due to their shared expansionist interests and the institutional challenges both must overcome in this process. This does not occur with Alto Santo and Barquinha, which basically remain regional phenomena and whose local legitimacy is being increasingly consolidated – even to the point of their becoming progressively incorporated as cultural and religious symbols of Acre by the state government.

achieved a certain degree of stable 'religious' legitimacy as 'transcendent' and 'institutionalized' religions. Other religious manifestations struggle to achieve the same. The groups that use ayahuasca are located in the lower echelons of this ranking, given their association with exotic practices, trances and the consumption of 'drugs' or 'hallucinogens'.

Given the limited scope of this book, it is not possible for us to conduct a detailed reflection on the concept of 'religion' – a central issue in anthropology, which has already been much discussed. For now, it suffices to stress that within a political context in which special rights are granted to particular groups involving the 'religious' use of certain 'drugs', formal state classification as a 'religion' is especially important. In such a situation, other groups with other consumption practices may claim a religious basis for their acts – as in the consumption of *Cannabis* by some groups in the US – but ultimately be denied legitimacy and labelled criminal because they have not been recognized as such by the state (see Meyer 2006). In this process we observe, for example, that even though many aspects of the União do Vegetal were questioned during the juridical process the group faced for years in the United States, they were able to satisfy the North American courts that they were a *bona fide* religion (ibid.).

In this sense, we see no problem in acknowledging that our decision to use the term 'religion' is also linked to an attempt to confer legitimate status to practices that otherwise would remain persecuted and stigmatized. On the other hand, by attributing to the activities of diverse ayahuasca-using groups an analogous status to that of Catholics, Spiritists, Umbanda practitioners, and others, we have the goal of making explicit that these manifestations effectively possess a series of shared elements with Brazilian religiosity, displaying continuities, and also ruptures and reinventions.

While not pretending to settle the issue, we suggest here that in their classificatory impulse, researchers sometimes forget to consider what natives themselves say or, conversely, may uncritically transport native categories to academic texts. Consequently, we should ask: how do the groups tend to think of themselves? In the UDV, a recurrent native term is 'religious society'. Official representatives of the UDV appear to adopt, occasionally, the term 'sect' in their public discourses – though more research is necessary to determine the extent of this.¹³ In case of the Santo Daime, followers appear to refer most frequently to the notion of 'doctrine', rather than 'religion' proper, to classify their spiritual affiliation. The notion of 'doctrine' can be used to refer to the dimension of beliefs themselves or, metonymically, to the Santo Daime.¹⁴

Simultaneously, followers of the different groups frequently appeal to the notion of 'religion' to classify their activities in a number of contexts and situations, especially when directing discourses or demands to people outside this religious universe. It is common, for example, to emphasize to a newcomer intending to participate in a ritual for the first time, that this is a 'religious' experience and not a 'trip', 'kick', or 'mere curiosity'. (In this,

13. Goulart (2004), for example, during her dissertation research, heard a member of one of the two groups that separated from CEBUDV, that the UDV 'is a sect, because it accepts all people' (*é uma seita, pois ela aceita todo mundo*) [Trans. – the word for 'sect' and 'accept' sound very similar in Portuguese]. This notion is somewhat consistent with the 'mystery of the word' (*mistério da palavra*) perspective that is current in the UDV, in which words carry certain intrinsic powers (see Goulart, this collection). However, we do not know to what extent this interpretation represents a homogeneous view within this ayahuasca religion.

14. For a discussion on the concept of 'doctrine' (*doutrina*) in the Santo Daime, see Groisman and Sell (1996).

members appear to echo Durkeim's (1996) distinction between the 'religious' and that which is merely 'magical'; the first being something involving 'collective' and 'social' meaning, and the latter being 'individual', and less subordinated to controls, and thus less legitimate). This view is linked to the historical expansion of the groups beyond the borders of Amazonia, where these religions are often bracketed alongside latter-day manifestations of the counter culture and its psychedelic experiences involving the free use of various 'drugs', such as LSD, mushrooms, *Cannabis*, and others. Finally, the definition of these groups as 'religious' is probably related, to a considerable degree, to the process of legalization of ayahuasca use in Brazil (understood to be religious) which involved the interaction of a variety of agents and discourse types.

Another native concept deserving our attention is that of 'sacrament'. It may have been intellectuals from the Santo Daime, such as Alex Polari de Alverga (1984, 1992) or academics, such as Edward MacRae (1992), among others, who first adopted this term, now widely used by the anthropological literature, as well as by followers of some of these groups to refer to the Daime or the Vegetal. While in the Santo Daime it is common to speak of 'our sacrament' (the Daime), in the União do Vegetal the expression 'communion of the Vegetal' is regularly used. The notion of 'sacrament' has been used by several researchers of the religious use of psychoactive substances (for a history see Baker 2005).¹⁵ The term has an explicit relationship with practices and concepts of Christianity, especially the Holy Communion of the Roman Catholic Church, the largest religion in Brazil. It is also consistent with the idea of a structured and ritualized use of 'sacred' substances, ideologically deserving legal protection, as opposed to the profane and unregulated use of 'drugs'. Consequently, in this far from neutral domain, the notion of 'religion' is politicized and a distinction is drawn between substances that are 'sacred' from those that are 'drugs', according to the inscription given by moral discourse. It is necessary, therefore, to investigate the genesis of certain concepts, making explicit how they are constructed, how they migrate and how they mutually affect one another, in an intense dynamics of cultural creation where religion, politics and academic research interact.

There are several other expressions and concepts that have migrated between the academy and the field that should also be reconsidered. Some authors, for example, refer to ayahuasca as 'the tea' (*chá*), an expression that should not be naturalized since, although it is abundantly used in the UDV milieu, it is not frequently heard in the context of the Santo Daime or the Barquinha. Given that the nature of the preparation of ayahuasca is much more complex than the simple infusions that normally go under the name of teas, some authors, like MacRae, believe a different name is needed and so he proposes that in English, for instance, the expression 'brew' might be more appropriate. Similarly, the designation 'psychoactive substance' has occasionally been used in native discourses oriented to outsiders, but we must not forget that – despite being preferable to the pejorative term

15. An exploration of the concept of 'sacrament' in the context of these religious groups is still needed. We know that among Roman Catholics the Christian Eucharist is conceived of as implying the 'transubstantiation of the body and blood of Christ, an act that leads to a sort of sacred banquet'. Note that the word 'Host' derives from a Latin term that designates 'a victim offered to the deities' (see Sztutman 2005). Can we speak of transubstantiation in the case of the ayahuasca religions? And, in what sense does the idea of transubstantiation reflect the encounter between Christian and Amerindian religions? These are questions that merit investigation.

'drug' – it is also not a native expression, as it is has a pharmacological-scientific origin and is, consequently, foreign to certain regional contexts of ayahuasca consumption. Additionally, these reflections should not lead us to the reductionism of particularizing or singularizing all the dimensions of the experience, falling into immobility when designating and classifying the phenomena we study.

The collection has some gaps that need to be mentioned. One of these concerns the absence of an article about the groups of users that Labate (2004) has labelled 'urban neo-ayahuasqueiros' – an important development of the arrival of the ayahuasca religions to the central and southern regions of Brazil – which are undergoing outright expansion, although the groups are still restricted in terms of followers.¹⁶ Neo-ayahuasqueiros oblige us to reconsider the limits between 'ritual' or 'religious' uses and 'therapeutic', 'artistic' and other uses, generating interesting questions about the juridical status of 'drug' consumption. Additionally, these subjects, as well as urban members of the Santo Daime and UDV, exemplify that which Giddens (1991) has called the 'quest for a reflexive project of the self'. Ayahuasca use has become progressively linked with a project of 'self-knowledge' (which is different, for instance, from the orientation that it acquires among diverse Indian and mestizo contexts, or even among other followers of the Santo Daime and UDV), consistent with the contemporary – almost obsessive – emphasis on the 'search for one's self' and 'self-realization' that has been identified by various thinkers. More needs to be known about the contemporary therapeutization of ayahuasca use, which involves its own mechanisms of legitimacy.

Another process that is underway in several parts of Brazil – though still quite incipient – and which has not been much explored in this collection, refers to the diverse groups of indigenous and mestizo peoples who have been becoming increasingly influenced through exchanges with the União do Vegetal and especially with the Santo Daime, such as the case of the rubber tappers of the Upper Juruá region discussed by Franco and Conceição in this collection, and also the Kaxinawá (Cashinahua) Indians of the Jordão river (in Acre state). In some cases, groups have begun to consume ayahuasca as a result of their contact with the ayahuasca religions, as has occurred, for instance, with the Apurinã Indians of the Boca do Acre region (Amazonas state) and the Guarani Indians from the coast of Santa Catarina state, among others.¹⁷ Contemplating the phenomenon of the 'Brazilian ayahuasca

16. These are groups that splintered off from the three major religions, inaugurating new urban modalities of ayahuasca consumption, related to the New Age movement, holistic therapies, various orientalisms, different fields of the arts (painting, theatre, music) and even drug treatment for homeless street-dwellers, composing what the author has called an 'urban ayahuasca network'. These groups usually have an ambiguous relationship with the historical matrices from whence they derive: the Santo Daime and the União do Vegetal. On the one hand, they claim a historical and symbolic link with them – a connection which evidently provides them with legitimacy, as it implies an uninterrupted continuity which spans from what is represented as the 'ancestral indigenous use of ayahuasca', to 'traditional religious use' and new urban uses. On the other hand, these groups tend to be critical and reject the religious models of the use of ayahuasca, labelled as 'traditional'. Thus they develop new rituals and sets of doctrinal references, affirming their difference and striving, simultaneously, to avoid falling into what is represented as 'profane' use of 'drugs' (Labate 2004).

17. In this regard, Isabel Santana de Rose (2007) is carrying out research on a movement known as the Alliance of the Medicines (*Aliança das Medicinas*) headquartered in Florianópolis (state of Santa Catarina, in the southernmost part of Brazil), which mainly articulates three groups: the Santo Daime community Céu do Patriarca (Cefluris line), the Sacred Fire of Itzachilatlan (*Fogo Sagrado de Itzachilatlan*) – also known as the Red Path (*Caminho Vermelho*) – and the Guarani village *Yynn Moroti Wherá*, located in the Biguaçu municipality, on

religions' implies recognizing these mutual connections, these multiple rural and urban ramifications. Once again, what is at play here is the migration of people and symbols on a local and global scale, the transit among diverse religious practices, and the construction of hybrid religiosities and identities in a post-colonial context.

Another dimension that has not received attention in this collection refers to the expansion of the UDV and the Santo Daime abroad from Brazil, which began in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to a preliminary survey conducted by Beatriz Caiuby Labate in 2005 (www.neip.info/simposio_audio), CEFLURIS has centres in the United States, Canada, Mexico, one in Central America, three in South America, 14 in Europe (the groups in Holland and Spain being the largest), two in Asia and two in Africa, totalling at least 23 countries in which there are fully operative centres. The UDV, on the other hand, has 'nuclei' in the American states of New Mexico, California, Colorado, Washington, Texas and Florida, with a total of around 140 members. It also has a nucleus in Madrid and nuclei in formation in Italy, Portugal, Switzerland and England (Labate *et al.* 2009). The most important of the very few works on the expansion of these groups abroad is an ethnography of Santo Daime groups in Holland carried out by Groisman (2000).

The Santo Daime and the UDV have essayed diverse political strategies to survive within the contemporary global prohibitionist regime. The legal status of these groups varies from country to country. Holland appears to be the place where the legality of the religious use of ayahuasca appears to be most well-established. The United States has recently taken a favourable position in regards the UDV, though the legal process has not yet been concluded. In Spain, the Santo Daime is included in the Ministry of the Interior's (Home Office/Department of Justice) registry of religions. However, despite its being tolerated, the consumption of ayahuasca is not officially legal. In France, French and Brazilian Santo Daime followers were absolved from the charges of drug use and trafficking after a pharmacological-juridical-political dispute that lasted more than five years (1999–2005). They obtained the right to free religious practice only to see, in the same year (2005), a commission of the Ministry of Health schedule the principal components of ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*) in the list of prohibited products. Juridical processes are still underway in Canada, Australia, Germany, Italy, and other countries.

The expansion of these groups carries important implications, not only in Brazil, but also abroad. In the case of Santo Daime, international expansion has had a significant impact on Vila Céu do Mapiá, CEFLURIS' flagship community in Amazonia. In general, CEFLURIS churches in foreign countries customarily receive periodic visits by 'entourages' (*comitivas*), which are groups of senior members, musicians and singers who conduct spiritual works and teach the ritual performance to the locals. Generally, the entourage members receive favours, and even money, in exchange for their visit. This has generated opportunities both for members native of Amazonia and for Mapiá residents who come originally from the intellectualized urban middle class of other parts of the country. It has contributed to generating income and decreasing a series of hardships which are common

the coast of Santa Catarina. According to Rose, the Red Path is a group that carries out original rituals from several indigenous ethnic groups of the Americas, chiefly North American indigenous groups, frequently involving the consumption of psychoactive substances, such as tobacco, peyote, ayahuasca, mushrooms and others.

among the deprived Amazonian communities. Paradoxically, this also leads to accentuating local social inequalities. Santo Daime members who are able to communicate in English tend to acquire a fundamental role in this expansion and may ascend within the group's internal hierarchy. A new social category emerges: the Santo Daime follower who goes away to live abroad, or who returns to Mapiá after spending a period outside.

With the expansion of the line of Padrinho Sebastião to the rest of Brazil and abroad, the socialization process of Mapiá's youth, in turn, begins to suffer the influence of these new references. Knowledge that was previously an integral and naturalized part of 'being a *Daimista*' (singing, dancing, playing instruments, knowing the hymns by heart) is increasingly valued as a 'specialized knowledge', a type of expertise. In other words, the 'foreigner Other's' interest in everyday Santo Daime practices influences the natives' perception of these practices, as well as their way of carrying them out. New methods of teaching and performing religious activities begin to be developed, such as 'classes' or 'workshops' to learn to make Daime and to incorporate spirit entities;¹⁸ the hymnals are translated into other languages, and with these appear new exegeses of the hymns and leaders' teachings (*preleções* – types of patterned discourses with diverse esoteric teachings), and so on. Service and religion are thus interlinked, in an equation characteristic of the urban religiosity of the contemporary New Age style.

However, it is rather limiting to adopt a perspective that reduces the expansion of the Santo Daime to a merely economical dimension or to the promotion of 'religious tourism' or 'drug tourism' – an accusation frequently levelled against CEFLURIS in the ayahuasca arena, or even by not fully informed researchers. It is quite common to come across episodes of religious conversion to the ayahuasca religions occurring at present in many parts of the world, and these may at times cause radical transformations in the lives of the new converts. Foreigners commonly move to Mapiá, or build houses in Juruá (the new community in the middle of the forest founded by the current president of CEFLURIS, Alfredo Gregório de Melo, or Padrinho Alfredo). They learn to speak Portuguese, or begin to receive hymns in their own languages. Some foreign leaders of the Santo Daime have even achieved recognition within Mapiá itself. A series of transnational, inter-ethnic and inter-class marriages seal these new relationships and spiritual and political hierarchies. In addition, this international expansion is a product, and further inspires, a certain 'salvationist' or 'millenarian' mission or vocation of CEFLURIS, marking its identity *vis-à-vis* the other ayahuasca groups.

Alongside the valorisation of native knowledge, stemming from Indian and mestizo traditions – which in the context of broader Brazilian society are usually held in little regard – the topic of ecology has also achieved a central position in the expansion of the Santo Daime and UDV abroad, in the same way as it did during their process of expansion into the large metropolises of Brazil (see Soares, this collection; MacRae 1992; Goulart 1996). For some foreigners, adherence to Santo Daime or the UDV is a form of support for the Amazonia forest and for the preservation of 'nature'. Both groups come to represent themselves more and more as 'ecological religions'. Groisman (2000) suggests that

18. It is worth remembering that some Cefluris groups have a set of rituals characterized by the ostensible influence of the beliefs of Afro-Brazilian religions, such as Umbanda. During these rituals, spirit entities may manifest themselves through possession or incorporation trance.

some Dutch Santo Daime members join in part to sustain a kind of nostalgia or idealization of pre-industrial communities. Adherence to Santo Daime is also considered, at times, as a means of reparation for colonialism. Little research has been conducted on the interests of North Americans and Spaniards in the UDV, though it is known that part of the expansion of this religion abroad is related to a conservationist appeal. According to informal accounts by some UDV members, North American members of the group have been responsible for exporting part of the ecological movement of 'permaculture' from the USA to Brazil and, additionally, have enthusiastically joined a conservationist Brazilian NGO founded and composed mainly of UDV members: the New Enchantment Ecological Development Association (*Associação de Desenvolvimento Ecológico Novo Encanto*).

In the case of the Santo Daime abroad, alongside the quest for 'untamed nature' and for knowledge that is deemed ancestral, there is also a valorization of the integration of new forms of therapy and diverse cultural, esoteric and philosophical tendencies, such as New Age neo-shamanic movements, holistic and psychedelic therapies, and the *sannyasin* movement (followers of the guru Rajneesh or Osho), among others. CEFLURIS, above all, dynamically incorporates local differences, composing infinite combinations that do not cease to multiply and diversify in a process of continual reinvention. All this remains largely unknown by the broader public, and is barely documented.

Finally, another matter that has not yet received much national and international attention, and which is also absent from this collection, is the juridical process of the UDV in the United States. For seven years the União do Vegetal maintained a scheme whereby ayahuasca was shipped from Brazil to Los Angeles to be distributed among its chapters in the United States. However, in May, 1999, the US Customs Office finally decided to examine the substance and when the lab tests detected dimethyltryptamine (DMT) a long judicial confrontation began between the US Government and the local UDV religious leaders. Their first reaction was to cease their ceremonial use of ayahuasca, substituting it for water and engaging in a fight for their constitutionally guaranteed rights to religious freedom. In the lengthy court battles that ensued the UDV focused much of its arguments on demanding the same treatment accorded to the Native American Church and its ceremonial use of peyote. Another line of argument was developed questioning whether or not ayahuasca could be included among the substances forbidden by the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

A federal district court issued a preliminary injunction in 2002 allowing the UDV to resume importing and using ayahuasca, but this was blocked on appeal by the US Government until November, 2004, when the UDV was finally able to resume its rituals in the United States. Subsequently the federal government took its case to the US Supreme Court, which concluded in February, 2006 that the government had failed to present enough evidence that the use made of ayahuasca by the UDV was dangerous enough to merit legal repression. This means that the UDV is free to perform its rituals in the USA, pending conclusion of the case in the district court. Some optimistic psychedelic activists consider this decision to be a watershed in the campaign for the liberation of entheogen use. It also marked a moment of unusual solidarity between a wide range of different religious groups (including Christian Fundamentalists) who were willing to give their collective support on the grounds of the protection of religious freedom, though maintaining strong doctrinal objections to the sacramental use of entheogens.

Other ayahuasca religions, like the CEFLURIS branch of Santo Daime, which is also active in the USA, were not covered by the Supreme Court's decision, which was specific for the UDV. More recently, in March 2009, district court Judge Owen Panner set out the terms of a permanent injunction allowing the Oregon-based Santo Daime group Church of the Holy Light of the Queen to import and use Daime in its religious rituals. Even though the government can still appeal, and the terms of the injunction are to be negotiated, this represents an important step in the discussion about the legalization of the uses of ayahuasca around the world. Thus, it seems likely that the precedent will lead to a lessening of the American cultural and political resistances against the religious use of psychoactive substances.

Among the topics that deserve further examination within the analysis of the expansion movement of these groups to the Old World is the way in which scientific knowledge, produced by ethnographers on the ayahuasca religions, has been incorporated into ongoing juridical processes against these groups in several countries. It would also be interesting to learn more about the influence that the state may exert in the configuration of religious practices in the context of such litigation (Groisman and Dobkin de Rios 2007). We hope that this book may awaken interest in these and other issues, as well as stimulate more research on Santo Daime, Barquinha and União do Vegetal, and their multiple strands, contributing to the broadening of our knowledge about this fascinating cultural phenomenon.

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