

**“My Father and My Mother, Show Me Your Beauty”:  
Ritual Use of Ayahuasca in Rio de Janeiro**

by  
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**ABSTRACT**

This ethnographic study discusses the use of ayahuasca by contemporary urban Brazilians, in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Ayahuasca, a Peruvian Quechua word meaning “the vine of the spirits”, is one of the most powerful entheogens (formerly called hallucinogens) found on the planet. In the last twelve years there has been an enormous increase in the use of this brew among Brazilian urbanites.

This study investigates how ayahuasca affects the core religious beliefs and spirituality in every human; how contemporary Cariocas -- inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro city -- relate to the drink; how contemporary Cariocas are re-creating traditional shamanic ayahuasca rituals in their own environment, and how they interpret these rituals. For some, ayahuasca is a religion; and for all, a path toward self-knowledge.

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## 1. Purpose

This study focuses on the use of ayahuasca by urban contemporary Brazilians, in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Ayahuasca cults have existed in Brazil since the beginning of this century, but they came to the attention of social scientists and the general public only recently. All the cults originated in the north of Brazil, in the Amazon region, where they still persist. They apparently began because Brazilians, who worked at the border with Peru as rubber tappers, acquired the knowledge about this sacred drink of the Indians through contact with them. Many branches of these groups were then spread to other regions in Brazil.

The rapid propagation of ayahuasca cults in the last 10 years is due to mainly one group: the Santo Daime in Rio de Janeiro. When the Santo Daime was brought to Rio and the first church was founded (although other groups already existed in the city) it attracted a number of famous personalities who were immediately followed by the media; ayahuasca, then, burst into public view.

The first well-known book on the subject O Livro das Mirações by Alex Polari de Alverga, was published in 1984. By then I was already very curious to try this peculiar drink, which for hundreds and maybe thousands of years had served as the center of shamanic practices among diverse Indian tribes throughout South America. I felt initially challenged to experiment with ayahuasca, and then later to conduct this ethnographic research of the use of the drug by urban Brazilians.

That is the way it happened to me. I tried the brew, I had visions, I had hard passages. I experienced much of what Indians and non-Indians have described with ayahuasca. I wanted to know if, as it seemed, this beverage strikes the core of religious beliefs and spirituality in every human being -- of any time and location. I wanted to know if the visions and effects produced by it are the same for every culture. I wanted to ask and

hear from my friends and people like me how what their experience was like, and what this was bringing to their lives.

This study, then, has two aspects. One is the academically directed collection of material, during fieldwork and bibliographic research. The other is my previous involvement with the subject and with people and their life stories.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how contemporary *Cariocas* -- inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro city -- relate to ayahuasca. It could also be defined as how contemporary *Cariocas* are adapting traditional shamanic ayahuasca rituals to their own environment, and how they interpret this. For some, it is a religion; and for all, a means of self-knowledge. As a Brazilian anthropologist, I wanted to explore this authentic, originally-born Brazilian phenomenon.

As a Brazilian, I hope to contribute the body of knowledge in my country, concerning ayahuasca and the traditional and modern rituals surrounding its use. As a human being, I hope that this study proves the need to seriously research, value and help preserve existing shamanic traditions. As carriers of unique cultural and artistic expressions and healing wisdom, they still have a lot to teach us.

Presently the CONFEN, Conselho Federal de Entorpecentes (Federal Drug Administration of Brazil) is starting to revise its current classification of ayahuasca as a non-addictive, non-hallucinogenic drink. This could lead, once again, to the prohibition of the original, traditionally based religious practice for many groups. This would cut the freedom of expression which makes any society further its thinking and creativity. Like many other studies done by social scientists on this ancient sacred drink in Brazil, I hope that this study concretely supports the continuation of ayahuasca rituals as freely accessible to whoever wants to experiment with it, in Brazil and elsewhere.



## **2. Theoretical Overview and Literature Review**

### **2.1 Altering States of Consciousness: An Ancient World Tradition**

Many methods have been employed by humanity in order to penetrate into the dimensions of altered states of consciousness: meditation, fasting, flagellation, hypnosis, trance induced by rhythmic dance and chanting and ingestion of many kinds of natural and manmade drugs, among others. It is recognized that entering into trance to communicate with the gods is a practice as ancient as humanity.

An altered state of consciousness implies a qualitative shift in an individual's pattern in mental functioning. Tart defines a person's normal state of consciousness as “the one in which he/she spends the major part of his/her waking hours” (1969:1) Although, this state is assumed by some to be the same for all humans, it apparently is highly culturally variable (Tart 1969)

Western culture tends to have negative attitudes towards altered states: people are considered either in a normal or a pathological frame. There is, still, a great deal of scientific and clinical material associated with psycho pathological states, but altered states that could be considered positive are not as much known and researched, mostly still regarded with prejudice.

Different cultures have varied enormously in their endeavors to reach and utilize altered states. In many societies, an individual exhibiting an altered state is seen as possessed by a deity, or a spirit. In the Eastern cultures, we see the development of techniques such as yoga and meditation, seeking to reach transcendence through the expansion of consciousness. In Sanskrit, for example, we find 20 words that mean “consciousness” or “mind”. (Tart 1969)

In Western culture, common words to represent altered states are trance, hypnosis, dream, ecstasy and possession. Interest in altered states increased during the “hippie revolution” in the 60's and 70's, when psychedelic experiences were more common. This

period of history contributed to the expansion of drug use, both as a means of self-exploration and as an object of scientific research.

It is now more commonly known that throughout the human experience, plants which have been used through centuries as mind expanders. At the present moment, shamanism -- the tradition which utilizes these plants -- is gaining adepts and providing some answers in the medical field as well. Yet many techniques and cultural patterns in entering an altered state of consciousness are still unknown or undervalued.

Throughout history, altered states in the healing arts and practices have played a major role. As in shamanism, the production of such states was sometimes viewed as an essential prerequisite for healing. The early Egyptian and Greek practices of “incubation” in sleep temples, the faith cures at religious shrines, the healing through prayer and meditation, “healing touch”, laying of hands, spiritual healing and hypnotherapy are all instances of the role of altered states in treatment (Ludwig, 1964).

Healing through psychedelic substances is also as old as humanity. In ancient times, and still in many societies today, these substances would be only derived from nature; nowadays we also have substances made in laboratories. What could be misused as a drug by one person has, on the other hand, been used as therapeutic medicine in psychiatry, to “induce temporary dissociation and relieve repression” (Tart 1969:19). This is the case of amphetamines and LSD-25.

Worldwide, humanity has sought altered states of consciousness to obtain knowledge, inspiration or experience. Altered states have also been employed as a means of cultural catharsis for maintaining the balance of a cultural system -- helping to resolve conflicts and alleviate the hardship of life and threats to survival. (Tart 1969:19)

But altered states can be induced in other ways, too. Art and music can create instances of sudden illumination and creative insights. Also, altered states can generate art works -- for example, the embroidery of the Huichol Indians in Mexico, inspired in their peyote visions, or ayahuasca paintings by Peruvian *vegetalistas*.

## 2.2 Shamanism

The origins of shamanism are as ancient as humanity, and it is supposed that since human beings started to inhabit the planet healers were needed and found among them. Persons with special healing powers were very often shamans, but we can only speculate about the techniques of the earliest healers.

“In 1960, skeletons were discovered in the Shanidar cave in Iraq, which were estimated to be about sixty thousand years old and suggest the presence of the role of the curer” (Bean and Vane 1978:120).

Religions involving the use of hallucinogenic plants can be called shamanic religions - because they are lead by a shaman. This is a relatively new concept in anthropology and so we encounter incomplete definitions of the words shaman and shamanism.

Roger Walsh, in his book The Spirit of Shamanism, mentions that “practically every scholar forms his own opinion of what constitutes shamanism” (1990:8). However, most researchers agree on some of the points necessary for a person to be called a shaman. When going through the anthropological literature on the subject, two classic authors are always mentioned: Mircea Eliade (1972) and Michael Harner (1973). Mircea Eliade wrote about shamanism in a period when it was still viewed as weird and exotic, if not psychotic, by standard psychiatry. Michael Harner belongs to a contemporary generation of shamanism researchers and is largely responsible, at least in the United States, for a new comprehension of the subject as well as for its greater acceptance among scholars and the academy. These two professors are responsible for the main definitions of shamanism that circulate within Western schools. Some works were done in the native languages of the studied shamanic cultures, like Korean and Russian, and are not well known because are not yet translated into English, French or German - and this is the case of Portuguese too.

Other authors, like Ruth Inge-Heinz (1984), stay outside the mainstream, even with dozen of books written on the subject.

The term shaman comes from *saman*, a word from the Tungus people of Siberia which means “one who is excited, moved, raised” (Walsh 1990:8). The Tungus are reindeer herders and use the fly-agaric mushroom in their rituals. Walsh also tells that “shaman” could have its origins in an ancient Indian word meaning “to heat oneself or practice austerities” or yet from a Tungus verb meaning “to know”. Whatever its origins may be, this term has been widely used by anthropologists to label specific healers in diverse cultures, who have been variously called: medicine men and women, healers, folk healers, witches, wizards, sorcerers, magicians, seers, psychics, clairvoyants, diviners and so on. Forms of shamanism occur in North and South America, among the Australian Aborigines, in Indonesia, Southeast Asia, China, Tibet and Japan.

In many of the original indigenous cultures, the shaman has a central and complex role. He (it seems that most of the time the shaman is a man in these cultures) is the leader, priest and healer. He has to be highly qualified as an individual, possessing intelligence, strength and endurance, self control and mental equilibrium. Also, he has to have an extraordinary memory to command an incredible number of songs, myths and chants, and to demonstrate social sensitivity -- perform the roles of psychologist, judge and doctor, if not also of a skilled artist.

According to Walsh, a broad definition of shamanism would include any practitioner who enters controlled altered states of consciousness, no matter which particular altered states these may be. We should say here that these states may or may not be provoked by entheogens. I think that it would be more correct to say that shamanism is the tradition of those who use altered states of consciousness in religious practices. I disagree with Walsh's use of the word “controlled” in his definition, because when we review studies on ayahuasca, for example, we see that some of the healers go into complete uncontrolled states for a period of time during the trance.

Mircea Eliade speaks of “shamanism - technique of ecstasy”. He specifies that the ecstatic experience in which the shaman specializes is “a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld”, and that he is in control of, rather than possessed by, the demons, spirits, and ghosts of the dead with whom he is able to communicate (1972:5).

The shamanic flight is a classical feature of shamanism and can be verified in accounts from many cultures. In the Santo Daime doctrine, for example, Padrinho Sebastião, leader of Céu do Mapiá community, writes,

It was going, going, and I started to fly. Flying and seeing how the astral is, I entered the forests, the waters... I spent forty years without flying... I went to places of knowledge. Why am I going to be afraid of these plants, if I received things I never expected in life, and with them I obtained this knowledge? (de La Rocque 1989:200).

Eliade tells us that:

The shamans have an essential role in the defense of the physical integrity of the community. They are the anti-demoniac champions ..., combat the demons, the diseases and the black magic sorcerers... In general, we can say that the shaman defends life, fertility, and the world of light, against death, the diseases, sterility, disgrace and the world of darkness (Eliade, 1972:387).

Harner, on the other hand, defines shaman as “a man or a woman who is in direct contact with the spirit world through a trance state and has one or more spirits at his command to carry out his bidding for good or evil” (1973:xi)

So, most of the researchers who offer a definition say that the shaman is a person who is in intimate contact with the spirits, travels or journeys to encounter them and learn with/from them, and also commands them. Now, what “spirits” means, is another story. If a shaman has necessarily to connect with power animals and journey between the upper, middle and lower worlds, then this term could be applied, in Brazil, only to some Indian healers. But if a shaman is a person who contacts the spirits, then most of the Brazilian healers are shamans. Researchers of all kinds are slowly understanding that definitions of shamanism have to become at the same time broader and more specific. Certainly a

definition that can be better applied to Brazilian healers and religious leaders is the one by Walsh:

A family of traditions whose practitioners focus on voluntarily entering altered states of consciousness in which they experience themselves or their spirits, traveling to other realms at will, and interacting with other entities in order to serve their community. (1990:23)

The shaman is the instrument which allows the cultural group to deal with the gods as equals, talking to them, and benefiting the whole community through channeling the sacred forces. The shaman not only abstracts himself in the sacred force, but also turns it concrete, palpable. As Lewis says, in excellent synthesis: 'Both are inseparably linked: each one owns the other. (Augras 1983:96)

Although we see clearly the connection between shamanism and the religious through the supernatural, and its relationship with entheogens, one of its main functions was healing. The shamans were the doctors of ancient cultures, but their power was not only used for healing. The shaman was also the one who knew how to harm and kill through sorcery. This is why, Dobkin de Rios (1972) speculates, so many ancient traditions who utilized entheogens might have disappeared. Once it was perceived as threatening for the established power, they probably outlawed the use of such plants. The use of plants -- entheogens, for diagnostic and shamanic cure or harmful practice, and as medicines for healing -- is wide spread in many cultures around the world.

Eliade verified that the emergence of a shaman displays specific features in every culture:

One of the most current forms of designation of the future shaman is the encounter with a divine or semi-divine being who comes to him during a dream, an illness or some other circumstance and reveals that he was chosen. From then on, a new life starts (1972:14).

Techniques of shamanic healing are essentially linked to the lifestyle of ancient indigenous cultures, and it is sad that we have been losing touch with some of them through the centuries. For example, music with production of sounds, rhythm and songs are often an intrinsic part of shamanic prayers and healing practices. These continue along with hallucinogenic rituals, as is the case of ayahuasca in every culture. Modern medicine

separated these practices from healing. Yet, the use of sound in medicine is as old as humanity and could be better researched and explored.

Other techniques employed in healing were dance, ritual painting, and specific curing practices such as diagnosing the origin of illness with the help of hallucinogenic plants, and “sucking” out the agent which caused that illness. (A few years ago there was an amazing demonstration of this in Brazil: a famous ornithologist was poisoned while touching frogs inside a cave, and two Indian *pajés* (shamans) sucked out a green substance from his body, under the astonished eyes of the journalists.)

### **2.2.1 Shamanism in Brazil**

Indigenous shamanism in Brazil preserves the same aspects found in general shamanism. The shaman, called *pajé*, is the doctor, sorcerer and counselor of the tribe. Healing techniques include blowing and sucking out the illness, and some tribes employ the use of entheogens such as *epena*, *cannabis*, *jurema*, *ayahuasca* and even others we still can't identify. Tobacco was also employed as a magical plant by some tribes, such as the Carib and Tupinape.

Most of the Brazilian literature on the Indians takes the approach of structuralist anthropology, focusing on their cultural features, social organization kinship systems. Nowadays many anthropologists in Brazil study the social-economical and political problems involving indigenous land demarcation and governmental policies for indigenous populations.

Indigenous shamanism, thus, has not yet received among Brazilian scholars the attention it deserves. Publications on this subject are scarcely found in Brazil, and even more rare are accounts on native entheogens written by Brazilians. Gallois (1984) and Arnaud (1970) are two authors who wrote specifically about shamanism and Indigenous tribes.

There is much written on the Afro-Brazilian religions because of the Candomblé cults. The most famous authors include Roger Bastide (1971), Pierre Verger (1981), Juana Elbein dos Santos (1978), Yvonne Maggie (1989), Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (1977) and others.

In the Santo Daime, where everybody takes part with their bodies by dancing and singing, the involvement is bigger than in Barquinha or the União do Vegetal, where mostly the leaders sing. But in all of them there is a shamanic collective ritual of some sort, since all persons may have the same experience that the leader of the group has, as well as the same access to knowledge and healing.

It is my observation that shamanism in Brazil is so prevalent in the culture that it lies in the center of Brazilian life, for all classes, ethnicities and religions. Shamanism -- inherited mainly from the Indians, imported with the Black slaves and to a much lesser extent through pagan-inherited Portuguese Catholicism -- is manifested through small daily habits and thinking patterns in the psyche of Brazilians. The collective unconscious of the Brazilians is fully inhabited by shamanic symbols. (I will discuss this in detail later). Therefore, the resurgence of neo-urban-shamanic religions like ayahuasca cults aren't really a surprise.

The contemporary urban ayahuasca cults are a form of shamanism. De La Rocque talks about it:

Each new member suffers a transformation (symbolic death) and a reorientation of his/her social and symbolic existence. The members of this religious system are like shaman apprentices, or potential shamans. Even though there are the leaders of the work, the shamanic activity is not exclusive of few initiates like in indigenous societies in general...everybody has active participation in the ritual...through concentration and access to the hymns.(1989:197)



### **2.3 Plant Hallucinogens (Entheogens)**

Throughout this study I will employ sometimes the word “hallucinogen” to refer to ayahuasca. However, I would like to point out here that my position agrees with the one by anthropologist MacRae and others. “To hallucinate” means, originally, “to be confused, to lose the reason, the understanding of something, to become crazy” (1992:16). This doesn't include the real scope and meaning of the experience with psychoactive substances in shamanic practices, which imply other aspects such as transcendence, revelations, capacity to heal and others. MacRae utilizes the term “entheogenous”, from the Greek “entheos”, which literally means “god inside” and was applied to prophetic trances in Greece, and to erotic passion and the arts (1992:16). I consider the term entheogen far more adequate to identify such plants; its use has increasingly spread in anthropological literature recently.

Entheogens have existed since the beginning of humanity, but still very little is known about them - their curing properties, varieties, places of origin, usage and effects on diverse populations. A lot of them were classified by botanists, doctors and chemists throughout the world, but few anthropologists have researched them. Probably hundreds of species are still unknown or unclassified. Little can be said about the experienced “powers” of these plants. Divination, telepathy, and other phenomena are reported among users of entheogens, but up to now these experiences have not been widely researched by anthropologists.

Anthropological literature has mainly concentrated on the religious apparatus and rituals that involves the use of entheogens rather than their reported effects.

Hallucinogenic plants are seen by many cultures as the most powerful means of achieving communication between human beings and the gods or the divine, and they constitute an essential part of the history of shamanism. These plants have been used by

numerous indigenous populations all over the planet, and in South America. As Dobkin de Rios says:

Chemical substances used to alter states of consciousness have a long and hallowed use in human history, although many people are unaware the antiquity of hallucinogenic plants which have been tried in teas, drinks, brews, snuffs and also smoked to bring about mental and physical changes (1972:19).

In Hallucinogens and Shamanism, Harner states,

Undoubtedly one of the major reasons that anthropologists for so long underestimated the importance of hallucinogenic substances in shamanism and religious experience was that very few had partaken themselves of the native psychotropic materials (other than peyote)... Thus one can read entire books on shamanism or primitive religion without finding any reference to hallucinogens except for peyote. Yet by patient library research one can find overwhelming evidence of the use of such substances in connection with the supernatural in scores of cultures. (1973:xiv)

Anthropologists have long been interested in the function of the peyote cactus in North American Indian cultures, but have generally tended to neglect the ethnographic importance of other natural hallucinogens, as well as the theoretical importance of the subject as a whole. "Thus, the most significant contributions have been made not by anthropologists, but by pharmacists such as Lewis (1924), and botanists such as Schultes (1940,1955) and Wasson (1961, and Wasson and Wasson, 1967)" (Harner 1973:4).

From 1973 to the present anthropologists have been changing their fieldwork approaches, and many more now understand the fundamental need to personally experiment with the object of their study. From their involvement, other kinds of testimonies, more realistic and deeper in comprehension, have appeared in the literature -- for example, anthropological studies on the use of ayahuasca.

According to Harner, the first description in detail in the ethnographic literature about enteogens and shamanism was the work of Jochelson (1905, 1908) on the tribes of Siberia who used the fly-agaric mushroom in their shamanic practices. Shultes (1965) discovered that there are over forty species of hallucinogenic plants in South America, in

his studies on the hallucinogenic flora of the continent. Gordon Wasson (1957) wrote a provocative account of the important role that widespread hallucinogenic mushrooms must have had in the development of supernatural beliefs in early man. Weston La Barre, (1970) an eminent anthropologist, devoted much of his academic life to the study of peyote use among North American Indians. Less well-known authors left some contribution in works on other kinds of power plants, like *Datura*, *Cactus San Pedro*, *Mescaline*, *Epena*, and *Jurema*.

### 2.3.1 Entheogens in Brazil

The work of Clarice Mota, (1987) a Brazilian ethnobotanist, on the use of the *Jurema* plant by the Kariri-Shoko Indians of the northeast of Brazil offers us one of the extremely rare empirical studies on the use of entheogens by a native population of that country. Despite the volume of anthropological work that can be found on Brazilian Indians it's difficult to find research done on the use of hallucinogenic plants related to shamanic practices among those populations. When inquiring about the reason for this gap in Brazilian anthropological studies, various renowned researchers told me that they cannot point out one single valid answer for that, but it would probably be the lack of interest in shamanic practices as a whole together with the obstacles in learning Indian languages in order to be allowed to observe and take part in secret ceremonies. Mota, mentioned above, told me that she was not allowed to observe the main ceremonies where the *pajé* (Indian shaman) employed the *Jurema* plant. Despite the destruction of the indigenous peoples, secret rituals continue well kept in these cultures, and thus it consists a point for further research.

The ayahuasca, however, has been increasingly studied to this time. Due to its contemporariness and its relation with intellectuals, artists and the media, discussed in this

thesis, it generated a search and a curiosity that goes beyond the little attention received by entheogens in Brazil, as I mentioned before.

## 2.4 Ayahuasca

Ayahuasca, the “The Vine of the Souls”, is a name derived from two Quechua (Peruvian Indians) words: *aya* (spirit, ancestor, dead person) and *huasca* (vine or rope). It is a specially prepared juice made from a vine native to the Western Amazon rainforest: the *Banisteriopsis caapi*. Ayahuasca is the general term that has been applied to several different species of *Banisteriopsis*, to which other “psychedelic” plants may occasionally be added, depending on the culture and the ceremonial purposes. The plant which is mainly mixed with the vine is the *Psychotria viridis* - a bush, from which the leaves are taken and cooked together with the vine to produce the brown juice.

Known by many other local names, including *yagé*, *caapi*, *natema*, *pindé*, *mihi*, *da'da*, *camampi*, and *dapa*, ayahuasca plays a central role in the religious and cultural traditions of the Indian and mestizo populations of the upper Amazon, Orinoco Plains, and Pacific Coast of Colombia and Ecuador. During the past few decades its shamanic and religious use has spread throughout urban areas of Colombia, Peru and particularly Brazil, where three religious groups -- Santo Daime, Barquinha and União do Vegetal -- use ayahuasca ritually under the names of Santo Daime, *oasca* and *vegetal*.

Ayahuasca intrigued and, most of all, frightened the Spanish and Portuguese missionaries who came to the South American continent in the 1500's. An early chronicler on the Cunam Indians of Venezuela and the Popay Indians of Colombia writes,

His guest, the demon, throws him to the ground, and the shaman falls into convulsions and gives signs of horrible suffering; through the mouth of the prostrated shaman answers the spirit that has invaded him...[They are] great drunkards and sorcerers, who conjure the devil and speak to him (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975:48).

For the White Man coming from “civilized” Western Europe, Indians were no more than beasts, poor souls without any vestige of human features. They were savages who needed to be taught everything, from how to speak to how to behave and believe in the “right” things -- the word of the Christ. What we see from then on is just the complete annihilation of their culture -- we should say that this is more remarkable in relation to South America than to the Indians of North America. In Brazil, only now, with the worldwide concern towards the devastation of Amazon forest, and ecology in general, people are beginning to pay attention to the Indians.

As Vera Fróes, a Brazilian historian, states, “The *yagé* (vine) is an element of great importance in the culture of these peoples, so much that the Creation myths are always related to its origin”(Fróes 1986:171).

Those early missionaries/conquerors were at the same time the ones who preserved early accounts of indigenous lifestyles and who started the process which led to Indian extinction. Hallucinogenic plants were viewed as demon-like things, through which the Indians acquired incredible powers taught by the Devil himself. White men were scared; but the Indian shamans could also cure the invaders would look to them for help, in remote tropical regions where doctors didn't exist:

Fascinated by the abomination, the captain went on to write, almost as an afterthought, perhaps in belated self-consciousness, that faith in the healing power of the medicine man is not confined to the tribesman (Taussig 1987:81).

Indian knowledge could heal people of any race, color and belief; thus some healing practices continued to exist, despite persecutions suffered by the Indians. Hallucinogenic plants like ayahuasca were also used for medicinal purposes, and I believe that this is the main reason why shamanic practices which utilize entheogens survived, although much weakened, throughout the centuries. Dobkin the Rios (1972), Luna (1986) and Taussig

(1987) comment on ayahuasca use by urban healers (shamans) in Peru and Colombia nowadays.

“*Yagé* is our school, *yagé* is our study”, they may say, and *yagé* is conceived as something akin to the origin of knowledge and their society. It was *yagé* that thought Indians good and evil, the properties of animals, medicines, and food plants (Taussig 1987:140).

“*Yagé* has a spirit. *Yagé* is the king of plants. *Yagé* is the owner of the plants ...It opens a person’s spirit”, he would say, “and gives mental force” (Taussig 1987:265).

By now, ayahuasca has been researched somewhat -- mostly in Peru and Colombia, less in Brazil, rarely in urban settings in general. The jungles of western South America are an area of the world where anthropologists have commented on the use of ayahuasca as a hallucinogenic drink used by indigenous horticultural societies. Richard Spruce was the first person to identify the *yajé* or *caapi* of the Vaupés Colombian Indians as *Banisteria caapi*. This naturalist was among the first who, after 1850, began to value the life of the forest peoples and their incredible knowledge of the flora. In 1859, he found *caapi* under the name of ayahuasca, among the Zaparo Indians of Ecuador (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975:28).

Ayahuasca has been used through the centuries for many purposes. Dobkin de Rios classified ayahuasca usage, based on anthropological research, according to three categories:

1 - Ayahuasca and the Supernatural: for magic and religious ritual (to receive divine guidance and communication with the spirits animating the plants; to receive a special protective spirit), in divination (to tell if strangers were coming; to learn the whereabouts of enemies and to discover their plans; to see if wives were unfaithful; to prophesy the future clearly) and in witchcraft (to cause illness to another through psychic means; to use as a preventative agent against the malice of others).

2 - Ayahuasca and the treatment of disease: to determine the cause and/or to effect a cure for disease.

3 - Ayahuasca, pleasure and social interaction: to effect pleasurable or aphrodisical states, enhancement of sexual activity, to achieve ecstasy or an intoxicated state; to facilitate social interaction among men. (1972:45)

Definitive contributions to this field of literature by anthropologists include: *Vegetalismo* - Shamanism among the Mestizo Population of the Peruvian Amazon, by Luna (1986); Harner (1972), with his work on the Jivaro Indians of Ecuador; Taussig (1987), on the Colombian urban healers; Siskind (1970), on the Sharanahua of Peru.

Two authors should be highlighted here: Marlene Dobkin de Rios (1972) and Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975). Dolmatoff put together an extensive bibliography on hallucinogens and ayahuasca for his research on the narcotic drugs among the Indians of Colombia.

The work of Dobkin de Rios (1972) is very interesting and detailed and serves as a relevant source for my own research - she and Luna are the only anthropologists who worked on the use of ayahuasca in an urban setting. Both worked in Peru, in Iquitos and Pucallpa respectively. Michael Taussig also did research in Colombia, but his book concentrates on the history of commercialization and exploitation of Indians, rather than the ayahuasca usage.

#### **2.4.1 History of Scientific Discoveries concerning Ayahuasca**

*Banisteriopsis caapi*, the ayahuasca vine, has a limited area of distribution. The Amazon forest is its focus center. Other species can be found in Mexico, southern United States, northern Argentina, southern Chile and also in Asia and Africa -- there are 800 species, 400 of those in Brazil.

The vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* belongs to the family of the malpighiaceae and was identified for the first time by the botanist Richard Spruce in 1852. He was one of the first persons to acknowledge the value of the indigenous wisdom; at that time, before 1850 -- when he was traveling along the Vaupés river, near the frontier between Brazil and

Colombia -- Indians were regarded as a bunch of miserable souls, less than animals. Spruce took part in a ritual party and witnessed that the Indians were drinking a bitter brown-greenish juice. He picked some of the vine to analyze it and verified for science that it was a new species. He elaborated its description and called it *Banisteria Caapi*. This discovery was published in a study on the malpighiaceae by the German botanist Grisebach, who correctly called it *Banisteriopsis Caapi*. The complete botanical and anthropological observations of Spruce were published in detail in 1873.

Spruce explored the Rio Negro valley from Brazil up to the Ecuadorian Andes. He discovered, in 1857, that the Zaparo Indians of Ecuadorian Amazon employed a drink called ayahuasca and concluded that it was the same species used by the Vaupés Indians under a different name.

Definite steps in the research on the malpighiaceae were given by Manuel Villavicencio (1858), governor of the Rio Napo province, in Ecuador, who published a book mentioning ayahuasca use among the Zaparos, Anguteros, Mazanes and other tribes of the Alto Napo, with the purpose of divining the future and performing sorcery. We can't tell if he collected any sample of the plant, but again Spruce identified it as the same species used by the Vaupés Indians.

Various non-scientific reports caused a lot of confusion and many years were necessary to state that *yajé* and ayahuasca were the same plant; they were confused with other entheogens, like *datura*, for example.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, new contributions were given to the study of this hallucinogenic vine by the German ethnologist Theodor Koch Grunberg, who distinguished two classes of vine used by the Tucano Indians: *Banisteriopsis caapi* and another one, that he didn't name but the Karijonas call *yajé*.

An important discovery was made by the French anthropologist Reinburg (1921) when he was researching the Indians of Peruvian Amazon. He noticed that actually two plants formed the drink: one was ayahuasca vine, and the other was made of *yajé* leaves.



These leaves were used as a strong additive, mainly in the Brazilian, Peruvian and Ecuadorian Amazon, and were later classified as *Psychotria viridis*. Amazonian Indians also use the leaves of *Psychotria cartaginensis* ((Pinkley 1969; Shultes & Hoffmann 1980, mentioned in Fróes, 1986).

Studies continued and in 1922 when the American pharmacist and botanist Rusby wrote on the physiological effects of ayahuasca and confirmed that it really originated from *Banisteriopsis*. Based on the material collected by him which is kept in the Botanical Museum of Harvard University chemists isolated three alkaloids of a fine powder in 1924 (Fróes 1986).

In the beginning of this century, Fisher isolated a crystalline alkaloid from *Banisteriopsis Caapi* which he called telepathine, thinking that it was responsible for the telepathic effects of the brew. Later, in 1928, Elger called it harmine, because its effects were the same as the harmine alkaloid that was known since antiquity and isolated from the oriental plant *Peganum harmala* (Fróes 1986).

The first complete taxonomic study was published in 1973 by the American botanist Morton, who discovered a new species of *Banisteriopsis caapi*, the *Banisteriopsis inebrians*. In this study he revealed that in the Colombian region of the Putumayo at least three species of the plant were used. From this moment on, many researchers like Reichel-Dolmatoff, Naranjo, Sangirardi Jr., Kensinger, Schultes & Hoffman, among others, agreed that various different species of *Banisteriopsis* are used for preparing ayahuasca in Western Amazon -- the *B.caapi* being the main one (Fróes 1986).

The main alkaloids found in ayahuasca brew are DMT, harmine, harmaline and tetrahydroharmine. "Ayahuasca is one of the lesser-known mind expanders, as powerful in its effects as LSD and mescaline" (Dobkin de Rios 1972:21).

Rivier and Lindgren evaluated that the amount of alkaloids present in the juice vary from 0,005% to 0,0064%. Works of Pennes and Hockman (1957) and Naranjo (1967)

showed that it is necessary to ingest between 300 and 500 milligrams of harmine to obtain the effects of the drink (Fróes 1986:83).

Dennis McKenna confirmed the biochemical function of the mixture of the vine and the leaves: the alkaloid substances of the vine (B-Carboline alkaloids) inhibit an enzyme called MAO which destroys the DMT, which, by its turn, is the active principle that causes the visions. It is amazing to see how the Indians, without any chemical or pharmacological knowledge, were able to utilize the right plants together. Botanists are still astonished about how the Indians could easily recognize the different species of plants, especially in the case of Banisteriopsis, which is considered impossible by the specialists. The Indians can identify at least thirty classes of Banisteriopsis, by their name, even without ever having touched or tasted them (Fróes 1986:83).

#### **2.4.2 Ayahuasca in Brazil - Urban Contemporary Shamanism**

Brazil is the only place that we can find a new phenomenon in the history of shamanism: big groups of hundreds of people taking ayahuasca in religious ceremonies. In the other countries where the juice is known, only small groups of people can take it for healing purposes under the supervision of a healer, who is, most of the times, not easily accessible. Through the three groups mentioned above, Santo Daime, Barquinha and União do Vegetal, urban (and also rural) populations of Brazil have free access -- free from any payment as well -- to this entheogen which is becoming insufficient to serve all who want to experiment with it.

Researchers and leaders of these groups are currently aware of the relevance of this subject for Brazilian culture, the ecology and the preservation of indigenous knowledge through shamanic traditions. Ayahuasca cults in Brazil, as this study points out, is an authentic Brazilian phenomenon, syncretized from many Brazilian religions whose characteristics vary from region to region.

The ayahuasca cults are a tradition based on the forest, whose natural components come from the forest, and which have helped place Brazil once more in the center of worldwide ecological matters. Foreigners, mainly Americans, started to travel in groups to Brazil to experience ayahuasca. Perceiving this, some people are already exporting their rituals and the drink to the US. Some of them are charging large amounts of money per person to join one ayahuasca session. Ayahuasca was already forbidden by CONFEN six times and afterwards liberated. At this very moment the Confen is investigating the exportation of the brew and it is threatening to forbid it again. This would certainly constitute a terrible form of annihilation of a traditional religion.

Over the last ten years important (mainly anthropological) works have been circulating on the sprouting of ayahuasca cults throughout Brazil. The first of them to achieve popularity was the book by the ex-political prisoner and poet, founder of the Santo Daime church in Rio de Janeiro, Alex Polari, which serves as an introduction to the Santo Daime through his own experience (called *O Livro das Mirações* - The Book of Visions). Published in 1984, this book was largely responsible for the propagation of ayahuasca in the country. Curiously, it didn't contain any indication on how to find any group: the mystery started to be cleared only a few years later, with the solidification of the Santo Daime church in Rio.

Next came *Santo Daime, Cultura Amazônica: História do Povo Juramidam* (Santo Daime, Amazonian Culture: History of Juramidam People), by historian Vera Fróes in 1986. Her book describes the history of the Santo Daime cult in Acre, Amazon, within the historic context of the rubber extraction and forest devastation in Brazil. She also adds legends by Indians on the origin of ayahuasca and evidences of its curative properties. Her book is essential since it contains unpublished information collected directly in that region by an author who belongs to the same culture of that people. *Guiado pela Lua* (Guided by the Moon) by anthropologist Edward MacRae (1992), is the latest book on the subject. All

these books describe the rituals of the Santo Daime; as far as I know, there is no book written on the other ayahuasca groups in the country.

The same pattern is seen with anthropological theses. Two of them -- by Clodomir Monteiro da Silva (1983) and Fernando de La Rocque Couto (1989) focus on the community of Céu do Mapiá, the Santo Daime headquarters in Acre. Monteiro da Silva is a northeastern long time researcher on the subject, very respected and de La Rocque presents some interesting analysis on healing and the Daime. In the south of Brazil, in Santa Catarina state, another anthropological thesis, called *Eu Venho da Floresta* (I come from the forest), on the Santo Daime of that region, was written by Alberto Groisman (1993) . In Rio de Janeiro we find the thesis by Maria Beatriz Monteiro, “A Lua Branca do Mestre Tupinambá” (The White Moon of Master Tupinambá) (1992), which talks about ayahuasca use in an Umbanda center but doesn't focus on ayahuasca alone.

Anthropologist Luiz Eduardo Soares wrote many articles (1990) which are definitely a very important contribution to the anthropological analysis of the Santo Daime in Brazil and in Rio de Janeiro, its categories and symbols, that I used as a reference many times in this study. Another anthropologist, Mirian Goldenberg (1990), wrote a paper which provides good insight on the issue in Rio as well as good interview material.

Finally, numerous articles and some TV programs were also featured in the Brazilian media. As MacRae points out, “mostly in a partial and sensationalist manner” (1992:15). These started to pop out after many famous personalities of the artistic and intellectual milieu joined the Santo Daime cult in Rio de Janeiro, adding new aspects to the southern anthropological scene of this north-based doctrine (This is further analyzed in chapter 4).

### **3. Brazil and Rio de Janeiro - Historical and Religious Context**

#### **3.1 General History**

Brazil occupies nearly half of South America, an area of 8 and a half million square kilometers and a population of one hundred and forty seven million. The country is divided into four regions: North, Northeast, Southeast, Central and South, all with a different history, economy and cultural formation. It is indeed a country of contrasts: extremely rich land (more than a hundred types of minerals), exuberant vegetation, the tenth largest economy in the world, the seventh largest producer of steel, the sixth largest computer market, and also a champion in the production of grains and cars. Socially, though, Brazil is now internationally known for its human misery, abandoned children, high mortality rates, crime, violence, lack of education and health care. Its history is a passionate, uncontrolled mixture of peoples, exploitation, violence, hard work and progress.

The economy of the country developed through cycles: sugar cane, mining, coffee, rubber and finally the industrial cycle. Slaves were the main workforce up to the nineteenth century. Sugar cane occupied the East coast from Rio de Janeiro upwards. Blacks were imported, sugar was exported. At the end of 1600, this business decayed and the mining of gold and precious stones became the big focus. At the end of the eighteenth century, coffee replaced gold as the main product of the country. Coffee plantations were concentrated in big farms, mainly between Rio and São Paulo.

The rubber cycle is especially relevant in the history of ayahuasca. In the beginning of the century, rubber became fundamental in the expansion of the international automobile industry. Acre state, in the Amazon region, became one of the main producers of latex -- the material which rubber is made from. Both Master Irineu and Padrinho Sebastião, founders of the main Santo Daime churches in Brazil, were rubber tappers who migrated from the Amazon to Acre following the economic consequences of the rubber extraction in different periods. Thus, it is important to understand that the formation of communities around the

use of ayahuasca, in the northern region of Brazil, follow primarily a survival necessity. In the 1970s, international companies acquired vast extensions of land in the north, intensely promoting land devastation which ultimately led to the end of many rubber and nut extraction camps. Says Fróes:

It is in this context extremely adverse for the majority of local population that the inhabitants of the 25 settlements, known as Colônia Cinco Mil, get together to fo the Centro Eclético Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra, starting to live communally, utilizing the Santo Daime. (Fróes 1986:154) (see also Monteiro da Silva 1983)

Brazil has always been a religiously rich and diverse society, as a direct consequence of its cultural and social constitution -- a mixture of the White colonizer, e.g. the Portuguese, the African Black slaves brought by these and the Indians (the native Brazilians), who were already living there and have suffered a holocaust.

The Indigenous -- six million, now reduced to 300,000 -- were scattered over the land through hundreds of different tribes, diverse in their language and culture. The biggest group is the Tupi-Guarani, whose religion is centered in the belief of one great spirit, Tupa, the creator. They also adored the sun (Guaraci) and the moon (Ceci). Their main contribution to contemporary religious forms are the use of plants, ritual dance, and the pantheon of nature deities -- very prevalent, for example, in the Umbanda religion. In the Brazilian culture as a whole, we find thousands of words of Indigenous origin in contemporary vocabulary, as well as culinary habits.

The Portuguese arrived in Brazil in 1500 and found the Indians to be very friendly and gentle people. Initially the “pacific” Indians accepted with awe and curiosity the gifts brought by the colonizer as well as their clothes and their religion. When it proved that the Indians were not so good as slaves, though -- they would refuse to work for the Portuguese and could easily escape through the forests, their natural habitat -- the Portuguese started to import Black slaves from Africa. Besides, the Indians were susceptible to the diseases brought with the invaders, such as the flu and syphilis. In Brazil there is a common saying that the Portuguese didn't civilize the country, they “siphilized” it.

The Africans began to arrive in Brazil in the seventeenth century. Roughly 12 million Africans were captured and taken to Brazil, including the many who died while crossing the oceans. Their many tribes were mixed on purpose in the ships and scattered upon their arrival. They didn't have a common language, nor common religion. Tribes, nobility, shamans and regular individuals who couldn't speak the same language were mixed, in order to prevent their communication. That's why anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro considers that the Blacks are the ones who really colonized Brazil -- they spread the Portuguese language in order to be able to communicate.

Therefore, although the Portuguese wanted to dominate the country, in reality what they did was to mingle intensely with the dominated. Portuguese men would relate to Indian women and African female slaves as they pleased, resulting in a nation that is today a real mixture of these three ethnicities. In Brazil there isn't only White or Black people: there are all ranges of skin colors and traits, so that we say that the people of Brazil are *morenos* -- a word which means mixture.

Some few Europeans, by their turn, multiplied here into millions -- through the Indigenous women. I count around 200 thousand of these women. So, the Indian woman is the belly where the Brazilian people is conceived. This woman, pregnant by a White man, has a child who doesn't identify with her, but who speaks her language. This child wants to identify with his father, but the father considers him a nobody, something impure. These were the *mamelucos*, the ones who are not the Indian or the European and who start to be the Brazilians. The other line is the Black one. Mainly in the northeast, because of the sugar cane, and in Minas Gerais state, because of the gold, the Blacks are implanted by millions. But again, the children of a Black woman with a White man -- the mulatto -- is also a nobody, who, looking for his identity, becomes the Brazilian. And these two, mixed, form the people of this country (Ribeiro, in *Nosso País*' video, 1994).

After the colonial times, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Europeans started to play another central role in the constitution of the Brazilian people. It is calculated that 8 million immigrated to Brazil - Italians (who substituted for the slaves in the coffee plantations, then followed by the Japanese), Germans, and Spanish. When they arrived, the population of Brazil was 14 million, so again they mixed in but didn't predominate. Arabs and Asians came after 1900. Many of these immigrants were specialized in their training

and helped to implant industry in Brazil.

### 3.2 Religion

The same general mixture happened with religion as with ethnicity -- what, in my opinion, (despite the effort of some branches of the Catholic church to impose the contrary) constitutes one of the beautiful and unique singularities of the Brazilian culture. Brazil is one of the biggest Catholic countries in the world -- a Catholicism which, nowadays, is definitely not much more than a facade. Following their socially and culturally diversified backgrounds, Brazilians believe in and practice a number of religions, either migrating from one to another or at the same time. Many of these religions have a Catholic base, as we will see, while others do not. Studies have shown that Catholicism as a major religion is decreasing rapidly in the country, so much so that many Catholic associations have commissioned anthropological research in order to better understand the reasons for this process (Lnadim 1990).

Historically, there was always a resistance to the Indian and Black matrix. The Indian, when he goes hunting, doesn't forget his equipment; but he asks the shaman, or *pajé*, to know if something will happen. The Blacks were forbidden to speak their language, to eat what they used to eat in Africa, therefore could keep their identity only through praying, singing, keeping their religiosity. The Church calendar became Brazil's calendar -- the samba, and Carnival are linked to religious festivals. The Brazilian guarantees a Catholic procession for the day of his death, but also goes to his Candomblé, to his Umbanda, to his Spiritist table, and sometimes to Protestant cults. (Ribeiro, in *Nosso País* video, 1994)

Theories on why and how this intense process of religious mixing occurred is offered by sociologists, theologians and anthropologists, and abounds in the literature (Bastide 1971; Elbein dos Santos 1978; Maggie 1989).

I was always intrigued by the reasons why Catholicism was able to survive together with Indigenous and African features, and how this was made possible by the Portuguese



invader, seen as a very traditional Catholic people. An explanation is offered by Paul Williams (1979) in his book *Primitive Religion and Healing*. He showed that Catholicism in Portugal preserved in its core strong features of paganism, such as: blessing with herbs, hands-on-healing combined with prayers (from where the *rezadeiras*, so common in Brazil, come), and others. Thus, the Portuguese Catholic himself believed in aspects and practices which derived either from pre-Christian paganism in Europe or early Christianity. They brought these habits and beliefs with them, which were also intersected with superstitions and the fear of and belief in magic in general.

Therefore, somehow the Portuguese were not so Catholic and somehow they could identify with indigenous and African shamanism. Either by writing about it and being horrified by it (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975) or else being treated by its wisdom to cure their illnesses (Taussig 1987), the Portuguese were in contact with a domain which, although exotic, was not totally unfamiliar. They both feared and revered the shamanic knowledge in the jungle, from the Indians, and in the <sup>1</sup>*senzalas*, from the Black shamans. Throughout history, many times the White colonizer officially forbade these practices, and in secret the privileged-dominant elite would seek them out to treat their health and their hearts.

We can say, then, that the Brazilian religions have aspects of shamanism in their core. Due to colonization, many times these shamanic features were despised, marginalized, seen as inferior, denied; but they were always strong, always evident underneath, always present, and are finally emerging in their importance in the current formation of Brazilian society. The ecstatic experience -- trance possession, incorporation, psychic writing, communication with the spirits of the dead and other kinds of “magic” -- is at the core of many Brazilian religious and folklore beliefs, and more -- at the core of Brazilian life. These features, together with a knowledge and regular utilization of plants by all segments of the population, a religious connection to nature and special prayers for everything (*simpatias*) form and surround every aspect of daily life in Brazil, no matter the

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<sup>1</sup>Senzalas were the slaves communal houses in the farms.

geographical region.

### **3.2.1 The National Census on Religion**

Despite the national census being considered to be a joke by Brazilians, in the sense that it is so inaccurate and rarely conducted, I will utilize it here in order to show its disparity compared with the reality of the country. First, it is important to understand the process in which the national census in Brazil is conducted: by minimally paid unprepared, interviewers who sometimes have to go to the interviews by canoe, or on the top of a donkey. If this is unimaginable when we think of the big cities, it is a common reality for the remote, hidden villages in the North and Northeast of the country.

At the present moment the most recent available national census on religion dates from 1980. Or, from nothing less than 14 years ago. The latest census taken was in 1991; however, its results will not be published until later this year (1995). The census is done by IBGE, Instituto Brasileiro de Geographia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics). The only data available from 1991 is the population of the country: 146, 917,459 individuals.

If we take a look at censuses from 1960, 1970 and 1980 we can see how biased these results are, as well as the initial category selection. By this I mean, to start, the complete absence of the Afro-Brazilian religions as categories -- as if they never existed in Brazil.

In the 1960 census, for example, we have: Roman Catholics, Protestants, Spiritists, Buddhists, Jews, Orthodox, Maometans, Other Religions, Without religion, Didn't declare. It is amazing how minority categories, such as the Buddhists and the Jews, are counted, and the major Afro-Brazilian religions are not represented. It is not clear whether Afro-Brazilian religions are suggested under the category "Spiritists" -- but if this is the case, it is an innaccuracy. Spiritists, Umbandists and Candomblé followers present basic differences as groups, despite their common points.

In 1970, at the time of census, Brazil was already under a fierce and bloody dictatorship. Most official information from this period was grossly manipulated to serve the military government and its regime of terror and force, and can hardly be considered reliable. One of the first areas to suffer an annihilation under any dictatorship is the social sciences and researchers themselves (e.g., freedom of thought and experimentation), and in Brazil this was also the case. What we see in this census then is even more simplified than the previous counting: Roman Catholics, Evangelics, Spiritists, Others, Without religion, Didn't declare. The minorities taken into consideration in the previous census disappeared entirely from this one.

In 1980 we find the country “breathing” again, free from the military dictatorship. With the progress of social sciences, communication, mass media, etc., this census was more detailed than the previous. However, it is still far from the reality of the religious picture in the country. We have, as categories: Roman Catholics, Traditional Protestants, Pentecostal Protestants, Kardecist Spiritists, Afro-Brazilian Spiritist, Orientals, Jews, Others, Without religion, Didn't declare. It is relevant to note the division of Protestants into Traditional and Pentecostal. Pentecostal Protestants, with their ecstatic ceremonies, are becoming increasingly bigger in the country and “stealing” followers from Catholicism. In spite of being a big religion now, they (I suppose, like almost any other religion in Brazil) are still regarded as a “sect” by the Catholic church, as well as the Afro-Brazilian religions. (Antoniuzzi, 1989; Gouvêa Mendonça, 1989; Landim, 1989) Again we encounter a strange category labeled as “Spiritist Afro-Brazilian”. Does this mean Spiritist and Afro-Brazilian, put together?

### **3.2.2 Catholicism**

Catholicism was installed in Brazil by the Portuguese, through the action of missionaries (the Jesuits) who catechized the Indians, utilizing various coercive techniques.

The Jesuits taught the Indians not only their religion and beliefs, but also the Portuguese language and their cultural habits -- using clothes, for example.

In all the censuses mentioned above, Roman Catholics were -- and probably will always be -- the major religious group. In 1980, from the total population of 119, 011, 052 people, 105, 861,113 belonged to that group. However, the number of people who call themselves "Catholic" has been decreasing decade after decade. Diverse reasons contribute to this fact and I won't analyze them here. (For a detailed explanation on the subject, see Antoniazzi, 1989.)

Catholicism is not, nowadays, in its total, a religion in expansion in Brazil. As we saw, the percentage of those who declare themselves Catholics has constantly diminished over the last century ... In its whole, it seems that sometimes the Catholic church in Brazil didn't realize that it has gone out of the situation of monopoly, which it retained for four centuries, and that it should be best prepared to confront a situation of pluralism, if not of competition. (Antoniazzi, 1989: 23)

And Soares tells us:

The Catholic church (and not only it), a historical presence in our society, experiences a truly bitter internal Diaspora, leaving exposed deep contradictions (Soares 1989:123).

If you ask a person in Brazil what is his or her religion, probably the answer will be "Catholic." This doesn't mean this person doesn't take part in other religions as well. It means simply that the person probably received Catholic teachings at home and/or at school. We definitely have main concentration areas of Catholicism, in diverse parts of the country, but in the North, Northeast and Southeast regions other religions such as the Afro-Brazilian ones (Candomblé, Umbanda, Quimbanda, Xangô, Jurema), Spiritist and even Evangelic or Protestant (which derive from Catholicism) have a solid representation.

Although some authors don't like the word "syncretism" (Verger 1981) -- meaning that many religions were not exactly mingled in the country's ground, but actually became like new ones -- I like to use this word to express the intersection of influences between religions. And most of them, in Brazil, are built either beside or upon Catholicism.

Ayahuasca cults, as we will see, have their main pantheon taken from Catholicism.

Catholicism in Brazil recently suffered a very unique, profound and interesting shift -- from religion into politics, with the creation of the Theology of Liberation, whose most internationally famous author is Father Leonardo Boff. This is a movement inside the Brazilian church created in the 1970's to help and defend the poor, who, through action nuclei (CEBs - *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base*, Base Ecclesiastic Communities) all over the country, have been changing the political and social scene. This movement is mainly a reaction against the ongoing exploitation of the poor in Brazilian society, emphasized even more terribly by the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1978, through corruption, torture and every kind of denial of citizens' rights. The CEBs clearly follow a political line and its priests have many times been accused by other sections of the Catholic church of being "communists". Antoniazzi (1989) calculates that in quantitative terms, the CEBs don't represent even 5 per cent of the Catholic population. But, together with other strong political Catholic movements, such as: CIMI - Indigenous Missionary Council, CPT - Earth Pastoral, CPO - Workers' Pastoral Commission, their presence is fundamental in the process of transformation of Brazilian politics (and society) over the last 20 years.

Continuously growing in Brazil are a few other religions of Christian origin, which are considered by the Catholic church as "sects" (Landim 1989) and which nevertheless already count followers by the millions. These are the Pentecostal Protestants (Assembly of God, Christian Congregation of Brazil and others) and the Evangelists (the "electronic" churches). The Catholic church has been threatened by continual loss of its followers.

Most of these new religions offer very dynamic sessions of prayers and rituals, which may make them much more attractive than the old Catholic church. People can shout, dance, express themselves more freely and sometimes even go into light ecstatic trance. Interestingly, these features are reminders of shamanic and pagan religions.

The symbolic element, important in all religions, is practically lost by the traditional churches of missionary origin. The symbolic factor is more significant in the mass religions,

little attached to the ethical-theological discourse (Gouvêa Mendonça 1989:84-85).

Maybe, in the established churches, the sacred is not absent, but domesticated, dominated. Because, exactly, the power displaced itself from the sacred to the institution. Then the people who look for the solution of their problems don't have access to the sacred, because somebody else owns this access. So these people move to some place where the sacred is free, having access to it, because there the sacred has the power and not the institution (anonymous, in "Sinais dos Tempos" 1989:65).

Other significant religions in Brazil that need to be discussed are Afro-Brazilian Candomblé and Umbanda, and Spiritism.

### **3.2.3 Afro-Brazilian Religions**

The most well-known Afro-Brazilian religions in the country are Candomblé and Umbanda, and local variations (but not less important) can also be found, such as Xangô, Quimbanda, Batuque and Tambor de Mina.

Afro-Brazilian religions are so called because they originated in the African religions brought with the slaves. They are shamanic traditions whose rituals are centered in trance possession, music, dance, colorful offerings and festivals.

Despite having been marginalized and persecuted by the White elite (as I mentioned before), these religions have a unique, central position in the constitution of Brazilian culture. Many expressions taken from their context, such as *fazer a cabeça*, *baixar o santo*, *axé* and others, have become part of the regular vocabulary of Brazilians from all social strata, geographical origin and ethnicities.

There is some speculation by anthropologists and historians on how these religions survived. Initially the Portuguese would consent to their practice as a means of enhancing the diversity between tribes, which couldn't communicate and had different rituals (Pereira Barreto 1989: 87).

The Catholic church is viewed both as “flexible” and “repressive” during different periods in history. What is obvious, though, is that the slaves felt the need to syncretize their deities with the deities of the Catholic pantheon. This continues nowadays: every Orixá (African god or goddess) is also venerated under the name of a Catholic saint, with variations according to each cult and locality. The most plausible explanation for this is that the slaves would pretend to venerate Catholic saints, but in their own manner, e.g., with drums and dance -- and probably this is how they managed to keep their cultures and identities.

The concept of syncretism is discussed by many Brazilian anthropologists. Some think that there was a real mixture of deities, others view it as just a superficial “overlay” of Catholic saints covering African deities. At the same time that some Brazilian anthropologists defend the “authenticity” of certain cults -- in the sense of being “pure” and preserving their original traditions entirely, even speaking the African languages -- others think that all Afro-Brazilian religions became simply new religions on Brazilian ground, although originating from the former ones.

The Afro-Brazilian religions are nowadays a synthesis, elaborated from the reality confronted by the Black slaves: Catholicism, Indigenous religions and ancestral memory. Thus, the incorporated elements acquired new significance and generated new interpretations (Pereira Barreto 1989:93).

Roger Bastide had already noticed it: a religion can be simultaneously the object of a strategy of oppression and dominance, and a support for protest and revolt (Goldman, 1990).

The cosmology, mythologies and ceremonies of these religions are extremely rich and highly sophisticated. Basically the Orixás -- Gods and Goddesses - rule over each individual on Earth, and each element of nature. Everything originated from the unique essence, or great creator Olorum. Every center (*terreiro*, in Portuguese) is directed by a

Father-of-Saint or a Mother-of-Saint.

### **3.2.3.1 The Candomblé**

The Candomblé is considered the pure, authentic African religion, and some of its centers are more original and traditional than others. The very traditional centers are difficult to find and are mostly located in Bahia state, in the northeast of Brazil. The main aspects of the Candomblé rituals are animal sacrifices and trance possession.

### **3.2.3.2 The Umbanda**

Umbanda centers are more easily found throughout the country. They carry lighter forms of ritual (no animal sacrifices, alcoholic drinks or strong tobaccos) and lighter requirements for becoming a member; therefore they tend to be the first source of contact with Afro-Brazilian religions, for most people.

“We can tell for sure that the Umbanda grows with the establishment of cities and the acceleration of industry” (Montero 1990:120). The denomination Umbanda was employed for the first time perhaps in the 1940s. It has grown amazingly in the last twenty years, São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul and Rio de Janeiro being the three most important Umbandist states.

In Rio de Janeiro, Umbanda is the most common Afro-Brazilian religion. I myself have been to numerous Umbanda centers since I was born, despite coming from a Jewish family. As I said before, these centers attract people from all social classes, cultural backgrounds and financial situations. These people behave as a “floating clientele” and migrate from one center to another.

The variety of ritual forms is immense. Each cult house is shaped under the tradition and life history of the father-of-saint or the mother-of-saint who founded it. Each follower can then choose the house that pleases him or her



most. The constant fluctuation of customers, going from one *terreiro* to another, is a very common phenomenon (Montero 1990:122).

Therefore, Umbanda can be a very plastic religion, able to be shaped and develop in various ways, much like ayahuasca cults. It is not surprising, then, to observe the progressive influence of Umbanda in those ones. As political scientist and anthropologist Luiz Eduardo Soares (1990) points out, plastic religions suit the character and personality of certain segments of the population of Rio de Janeiro.

The Umbanda is seen by Black movements as a White appropriation of the African traditions (Pereira Barreto 1989). For author D. Brown (1977), middle class individuals (liberal professional, businessmen, high militaries and federal workers) had, since the beginning, strong influence over the development of this religion, acting as intense participants and theorists and not only as passive followers. In a general sense Umbanda is considered a “whiter”, middle-class version of the Candomblé.

Umbanda gods and goddesses are different from the Candomblé ones. They represent the marginalized in Brazilian history: the *caboclos* are the ancient Indians who confronted the White invader (they possess great knowledge in dealing with herbs); the “Old Blacks” (*Pretos-Velhos*) are the slaves and the *exús* (a combination of Devil and Trickster) correspond to the impoverished working class, at the bottom of the Brazilian economic pyramid (Montero, 1990). Trance possession and cure with prayers and herbs are the central part of the rituals. Invocation of deities is performed with clapping hands instead of drums. People come seeking relief and advice through consultation with an incorporated deity, often free of charges.

It is interesting to observe that Umbanda ends up taking over traditional forms of popular medicine. The knowledge of the rural healer is little by little displaced by the 'spiritist healer' (Montero 1990:120).

The Umbanda can also be called Spiritist Umbanda, and its syncretism with

Catholicism and Spiritism varies from center to center.

### **3.2.4 Spiritism**

Spiritism was introduced in Brazil in the second half of the nineteenth century, soon after its codification by the Frenchman Allan Kardec. Since then it has successfully penetrated the whole country, mainly inside the middle classes, becoming extremely popular for many Brazilians.

Its doctrinaire basis is composed by Alan Kardec's five books, elaborated from dialogues with superior spirits. Its central point is “mediumity” or mediumship -- the communication between spirits and people. According to Spiritism, every individual is a medium. This communication can be done in different ways: listening to the spirits and/or seeing them (clairaudience/ clairvoyance), incorporating them or through automatic writing. Charity is also emphasized in this religion, as well as disciplinary study of its aspects of science and philosophy.

For the Spiritists, there are the invisible and the visible worlds. The invisible is where the spirits converge, after successive reincarnations; it is the world of perfection. The visible is where beings incarnate, and this occurs on Earth as well as other dimensions not visible for us. The relations between the two worlds are performed through the laws of evolution, reincarnation, karma and mediumship (Castro Cavalcanti 1990:150).

Spiritism is above all a Christian religion, where Jesus Christ is seen as a superior spirit with a mission on Earth. This religion is, at the same time, a great mediator between the Christian and Afro traditions. Historically, the homes have been the main settings of Spiritist activities, and so it continues nowadays, despite the foundation of public centers.

### **3.3 Rio de Janeiro**

Rio de Janeiro, or simply Rio, is a megalopolis of approximately 13 million

inhabitants (IBGE census 1991), spread throughout gorgeous natural scenery composed of beaches, forests and high mountains.

Its first recorded tourists arrived in Guanabara Bay on January, 1st, 1502. Amerigo Vespucci made the first of a series of trips after Pedro Alvares Cabral discovered the country, in 1500. The city witnessed many battles among invaders, mainly the French, who were defeated by the Portuguese in 1567, when the city of Rio was founded. By the end of the 16th century, Rio became one of the four main population centers in Brazil. When the Portuguese royal family fled from Napoleon in 1808, Rio became the capital of the Portuguese empire, changing again in 1889 to the capital of Brazil. It was replaced in 1960 by Brasilia as the Brazilian capital..

A city of beautiful natural contrasts, so much chanted in popular music that became famous worldwide, through the Bossa Nova and Samba. A city so cruel in its social contrasts, now a permanent war between the rich and the poor. Slums used to house the poor, but nowadays fantastically rich drug squad managers build mansions in them. The public health system is ruined, the public educational system also, the traffic jams are omnipresent, but even though the *Cariocas* (Rio's inhabitants) can still sing at the bars, play football watching the sunset and dance in free concerts at the beach.

Life will always be beautiful and enjoyable in Rio de Janeiro, no matter how hard the challenges of violence, crime, inflation and unemployment might be. That's how the *Cariocas* seem to think. *Carioca* is an indigenous Tamoio word meaning "house of the White Men". (*Oca*=house, *Cari*=White men.)

The population of Rio is markedly young, we can see it in the streets. One of the main characteristics of this city is its love of fads in clothes and behavior. There is the feeling of a beach-culture, (Los Angeles is similar, at Venice Beach): much hedonism, exhibitionism, and individualism. New fashions come and go in a matter of weeks. All novelties from abroad, the USA and Europe, are continuously absorbed, copied and re-created. This confers to the city a character of strong experimentalism and open-

mindfulness. Rio is a multicultural, avant-garde center for anything that's new. If it is going to happen in Brazil, it happens in Rio first.

Right now the city is experiencing a deep, bitter and (it seems) lasting tarnish to its bright image: violence has reached unimaginable levels, and the typical behavior of the *Cariocas* is changing. Not every night out anymore, not laughing so much in bands on the streets. The *Carioca* have become afraid, cautious, mistrustful.

The city is divided between the North Zone and the South Zone. The North Zone comprises the suburbs. It used to be the poor part of the city, but presently it has developed a lot commercially, because of growing financial power of many of its inhabitants. There we can find big shopping centers, factories and clubs and at the same time many parts of it still preserve the flavor of an old, ancient Rio, with little villas and neighbors who socialize. The suburbs have a culture of their own.

The North Zone, however, lacks almost every kind of cultural entertainment, which is concentrated in the South Zone. This is because the South Zone developed around the beaches, and is the most beautiful area, and the focus of tourism. This region concentrates the “cultural” life of the city -- cinemas, discos, theaters, concerts, fancy bars, trendy restaurants and boutiques -- as well as the most elegant districts (Ipanema and Leblon) and professional offices, and the best schools. This is where famous artists and intellectuals live, and from where intellectual productions are generated and distributed.

Nevertheless, such a division, which used to be a clear line between the two zones, is becoming more subtle. Copacabana, for example, the famous district-beach in the South Zone, is now a major crime area. All around the sophisticated apartments of the South Zone lost bullets mark the walls, coming from the hundreds of surrounding slums. People complain that their properties are increasingly devalued because of the violence. Herds of street children walk everywhere, in their long T-shirts and no shoes, sleeping where they can.

### 3.3.1 Religion in Rio de Janeiro

The presence of the Umbanda and Spiritism in Rio is pervasive. *Macumbas*, the offerings to the Orixás -- candles, corn flour, money and sometimes some dead birds (chicken or pigeon) -- are frequently seen in the crossroads, mainly on Fridays. People frequent the Catholic church, Umbanda centers and Spiritist centers and houses with freedom, usually with a friend. Some go only to “receive some herb baths and passes.” “Passes” are aura cleansings done with the hands over the body, while reciting some special prayer. Others consult regularly with some deity. I have never met one person in my whole life, from Rio, who had never been to any of these places. Actually, Umbanda and Spiritist features are so well-known that people sometimes simply go to a specialized shop (by the way, in the North Zone there is a whole shopping center specializing only in religious articles for Afro-Brazilian followers) and buy the teas, baths, salts, candles and whatever is needed for a personal ritual or treatment.

The 1980 census on religions in Rio de Janeiro place the majority of the population as Catholics (nine million), while Spiritists together with Afro-Brazilian followers don't reach half a million. But, again, these statistics cannot be considered reliable. My opinion is that it doesn't correspond to reality at all, but further research needs to be conducted to give an accurate picture.

Possessing this elastic personality, full of curiosity for what is different and new, it is not surprising that Rio is a diffusion base for new movements and sects. Ayahuasca groups fit in this context. I would say that almost any religious group, from all backgrounds, can be found in the city, from Oriental philosophies to Western magic groups. Some of them persist despite the small number of serious adepts; others flourish rapidly, are intensely mentioned in the media and disappear as suddenly as they started. But the “sect scene” in Rio is, most definitely, being constantly renovated.

Who are the people that go after these groups, and how do they behave? Does this non-stop search for new religious/spiritual orientations constitute a pattern for a certain segment of the population?

### 3.3.2 The New Religious Consciousness

Interested in investigating this subject a bit more deeply, Rio-resident anthropologist and political scientist Luiz Eduardo Soares conducted a very instigating research in entitled *Religious by Nature: Alternative Culture and Ecological Mysticism in Brazil* (1989). The research focuses on the middle class in Rio de Janeiro, the same segment represented by the informants of this study. Many of my findings agree with his.

Basically he detected that there is a segment in the Brazilian culture, and in Rio de Janeiro, composed of young middle class men and women, who are nomadic seekers of spiritual movements. By movements I mean religions, sects and/or spiritual subjects such as occultism and healing in general.

He detected, first, “a lack of satisfaction with the religious experiences of childhood and adolescence, under pressure, familiar stimulus or identifications” (Soares 1989:122). As I point out in Chapter 7, this was also detected in this research as a common motivation for ayahuasca drinkers. For this Brazilian alternative individual, the devotion to beliefs and rituals is carried out as a form of experimentation. His/her devotion is performed and set into context by this continuous and inconstant search in itself. What was considered a religious crisis before is nowadays a natural state in the field of alternative mysticism.

[There is] a search for individual investigation and experimentation, through therapies, esoteric disciplines or alternative practices ... the moral and religious traditional model -- hypocrite, ashamed, authoritarian and machoist -- is exhausted (Soares 1989:122).

Soares also links this nomadic search to the consequences of the dictatorship -- which eliminated the chances of political involvement in society's changes for many

citizens -- and to Brazil's bad economic situation, which narrows employment and forces individuals to create their own jobs.

The matrix idea of 'alternative', as lifestyle and orientation, is also -- and many times, beforehand -- a means of survival, in most cases independent from the individual's free will (Soares 1989:123).

However, the institutions in Brazil are fragile, lacking solid boundaries or clear definitions. The people don't identify with the institutions (government, education, health system, etc.) as they do, for example, in the US. Therefore, says Soares, the profile of "alternative" becomes diluted, without crystallized conventions and rigid institutions to be criticized. "This phenomena favors ... a spirit of tolerance, of little sectarian ardor and an expressive variety" (Soares 1989:123).

As common themes for this segment of alternative, middle class "ecological mystics", as he calls them, Soares found the axis body-spirit-nature, and "energy" as the key-category, as well as "work". Work here means a spiritual work of trying to achieve development and/or perfection. This same meaning of work is used by the three main ayahuasca groups (Santo Daime, Barquinha and Boris').

In the Santo Daime, the relation between nature, humans and spirit is a fundamental notion for the cult's culture. This notion is as meaningful for other ayahuasca drinkers as well, but not for all of them (of those of whom I interviewed).

Health in the body, peace in the heart: spirit and matter in harmony and integrated to the community and ecology. In such elaborated ideal, most of the involved with the alternative world recognize themselves. 'Energy' and 'work' put together diverse groups and individuals, which, despite differences between their creeds, share the same worldview, with emphasis on care with the 'spirituality', with 'nature', 'harmony' between humans and the recovery of a lost physical, psychic and spiritual balance (Soares 1989:129).

Although not all informants here can be classified as "alternative", according to their professional lives, the statement above may be applied to most them in relation to mentality and lifestyle. That's why "healing" plays an important role in any religion or

spiritual group searched by these people. Other concepts like “primitive”, “root”, “origin”, “intuition”, “archaic” and “essence” are also relevant for this segment.

Finally, Soares concludes that: “we could say that the phenomenon of the 'new religious consciousness' represents the actualization, maybe more rigorous and radical, of the modern religious experience” (Soares 1989:143).



#### **4. History of Ayahuasca Groups under Study: Santo Daime, Barquinha and Boris' Group**

In Brazil there are currently three main cults of the users of ayahuasca: the Santo Daime, União do Vegetal (Union of the Vegetal) and Barquinha. Although they have existed for six decades (since 1920/30) in the north region, only recently ayahuasca has been brought to the elite, middle class populations of the big cities in the southeast and central regions of Brazil - mainly Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and the capital Brasília. We can say that perhaps this is the first time in history that the indigenous shamanic tradition of ayahuasca has spread among urban centers, freely, democratically and open to thousands of people interested in experiencing it.

The total number of Daimistas (those who drink ayahuasca) in Brazil was estimated, in 1992, between eight and 10,000 only<sup>2</sup> (at the present time it might be approximately 14,000). This is a very small number compared to the population of the country (more than 1,470,000), but ayahuasca drinkers have formed a qualitatively relevant phenomenon -- as we can see through this study.

##### **4.1 The Santo Daime Doctrine**

Many indigenous peoples have different legends about how the powers of ayahuasca were given to their people which allowed them to know the secrets of Nature and the Universe.

One of them tells the origin of Daime as a secret drink used by the Inca royal family, priests and famous warriors. The story goes that when the Spaniards arrived, there were two princes ruling the Inca empire: Atahualpa and Ayahuasca. Atahualpa

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<sup>2</sup> Communication by anthropologist Clodomir Monteiro da Silva during the Panel on Ayahuasca at the Rio Eco 92.

surrendered to the Spaniards, but Ayahuasca resisted the invasion and left, with many followers. Some of his followers went down to the Amazon forest and disseminated the use of this sacred brew among Indian tribes of the region. The tradition started to propagate throughout Peru and Bolivia, and thus the figure of the aiyasqueiro (shaman who uses ayahuasca) appeared (Camargo 1991).

Raimundo Irineu Serra, an amazingly tall Black Brazilian, the founder of the Santo Daime doctrine, was born in the state of Maranhão in 1892 and died in Rio Branco, capital of Acre state, in 1971. He came to Acre to work as a rubber tapper in the “golden period” of the rubber industry (around 1910). It is important to understand that the northeast region of Brazil, where Master Raimundo was born, always was and still is assaulted by constant and terrible droughts that forced its population to migrate to the southeast regions<sup>3</sup>. By this time, enrichment was at hand through the rubber settings in the Amazon region, where Acre state is located, for anyone who wished to try his fortune. Non-Indian populations first started to use ayahuasca through contact with Indians working in the rubber camps, when Brazil was the world's main supplier of latex (natural rubber).

As a young man, Master Irineu wanted to get rich. He joined the army and worked as a Border Guard, at the frontier of Brazil and Peru. Afterwards he went to Peru, where he worked for six years as a rubber tapper. There he met two brothers, also Black Brazilians, Antonio and Andre Costa. Some say Antonio Costa introduced ayahuasca to Master Irineu; others say the two brothers and Irineu got to

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<sup>3</sup> This has been an ongoing process in the history of Brazil. Successive governments have been doing nothing or very little to improve life conditions in the northeast -- on the other hand, most politicians only care for personal advantages and often deviate financial resources to their own pockets. Meanwhile, the droughts are still there, as well as one of the highest child mortality rates of the world, and outrageous rates of malnutrition and disease.

know it from the hands of Crescencio Bizango, a Peruvian *caboclo* (Brazilian term for a descendent of Blacks, Indians and Europeans mixed)

One day Irineu had a very impressive vision which changed his life. He saw a Divine Lady sitting inside the Moon - who later identified herself as Our Lady of Conception (*Nossa Senhora da Conceição*), the Queen of the Forest - and she told him to prepare himself because she would give him a world to govern. For eight days he went on a vision quest in the town of Brasileia with ayahuasca. At the end he was told to call the juice Daime, which means, in Portuguese, “give me” - give me love, light and strength. The three men - Antonio, André and Irineu - organized then the first ayahuasca cult in Brazil in the 1920's, in that same town. A short time later, Irineu Serra disconnected himself from this center, which would be closed some years later.

In 1940 he moved to the rural zone of Rio Branco, capital of Acre state, where he started the *Alto Santo* church in a big wooden house, with a small group of adepts. The center was called CICLU - Center for Christian Enlightenment Universal Light. This church was also an agrarian community, where forty families lived together and worked the land. Raimundo Irineu Serra became a great healer, acknowledged even nowadays in that region. “The concept of Alto Santo grew amazingly, attracting sick people from all the region and from beyond Brazilian borders” (Monteiro da Silva, 1983:96).

One of my informants who knew Master Irineu, writer and journalist Edilson Martins, recalls:

In my childhood, I was maybe twelve or thirteen years old, my attention was very much driven to the image of *Mestre* Irineu. I got to know him. He was extremely tall (more than two meters high), a monster! We would go to the farmers market to meet him, because he was a farmer. I was very curious, we would go to the market in the morning -- that was the greatest weekend event in the area -- and we would see *Mestre* Irineu surrounded by his disciples. He didn't put on a leader's attitude, though. The story of ayahuasca

was clandestine, by that time we wouldn't say Santo Daime, it was *oasca*. It was something a bit mysterious. But I remember talking to him, listening to his stories, really close...I was the height of his navel! His church already existed, but it was in the catacombs, it wasn't open because the police would persecute them. But at the same time, curiously, some politicians would show up there every now and then, important people. Whoever wanted to drink ayahuasca would have to come to his church, it was the only place at that time. He also had an agrarian community. I knew some of the workers there.

In 1971 Master Irineu died, leaving the structure of the Santo Daime Church, composed of hundreds of hymns and the hierarchy of the rituals. Master Irineu also contacted other prime entities of this drink, like King Ahhyusscar and Don Pizon (de La Rocque, 1988:44)<sup>4</sup>. The *Alto Santo* center still exists: Master Irineu's tomb is there, as well as a small sculpture representing him. His widow, Peregrina Gomes, still lives there together with other family members.

When I first took Daime, in 1984, I hand-copied the hymnal (*hinário*) of Master Irineu Serra. (Copying the hymns by hand was considered a sign of deep communion with the cult.) This is the story of Santo Daime in Brazil as it is told in Master Irineu's *hinário* (his first hymn was received in Peru, and the hymnal was built throughout his life):

Master Raimundo Irineu Serra was born in Maranhão state in 1892. In 1912, at twenty years of age, he went to Acre to work in the rubber tapper camps at the border with Bolivia.

During this time he met Antonio Costa, in Brasileia, who knew the beverage Hausca and gave him the Initiation.

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<sup>4</sup> I couldn't find any further information on these entities. It is a common feature of Santo Daime cult that members pray (sing hymns) to unknown entities. If someone important -- a Padrinho, or some important person in a community -- receives a hymn which talks of some entity, this song can be incorporated to the cult without further explanations. Then only close friends of that person will know who this being is. Some of these are indigenous beings such as Barum, Marum, Currupipiaíá, BMG and others.

We know that in his life as a rubber tapper, near the jungle, through this drink he received the Force and the Revelation to found the Doctrine of Santo Daime.

In 1930 he moved to Rio Branco, quitting the former profession. He was then 39 years old.

It was in Rio Branco that he found fertile ground to germinate his mission as a Master.

He gathered people around him and furthered his work.

In 1935 started to receive the hymns. These chants were received from the Astral, or the Spiritual Reality, who taught him and ordered him to teach his brothers and sisters.

The Crucifix Hymnal is this Revelation. A new word, beautiful and simple, of an old teaching. Is a fruit of Daime and his strong words. From this hymns other descend, honoring God and its creation. Loving them I totally embody my spiritual life.

Lucio

30/3 (extracted from the hymnal of Master Irineu)

From this hymnal, number 16 tells of the doctrine as a school where the

Virgin comes to teach:

My Mother is the Holy Virgin  
My mother is the Holy Virgin  
She is the one who comes to teach me  
I can't live without her  
I can be only where she is

Oh my Virgin Mother  
Oh Virgin of my heart  
I live in this school  
To teach my brothers

And they don't care about  
Learning with joy  
Because they think that these  
aren't Virgin Mary's teachings

Nobody wants to learn  
Everybody remains in illusion  
Right here in this world  
They are in the ocean of darkness

Hymn number 124, tells about the “unbelievable power” of the drink:

I take this drink  
I take this drink  
Which has unbelievable power  
It shows to us all  
Here inside this truth

I climbed up, climbed up and up  
Climbed up with joy  
When I reached the heights  
I met Virgin Mary

I climbed up, climbed up and up  
Climbed up with love  
I met the Eternal Father  
Jesus Christ the Redeemer

I climbed up, climbed up and up  
According to my teachings  
Hooray to the Eternal Father  
Hooray to all Eternal Beings

The hymns follow a mantric structure; rhythm and other characteristics either disappear or become poor when translated. In Portuguese, the second and fourth verses of each stanza always rhyme. Word stress produces the marked rhythm which is accompanied by the rattles during the ritual dance.

#### **4.1.1 *Padrinho Sebastião and the Colônia Cinco Mil***

One of Serra's principal followers, the rubber tapper Sebastião Mota de Melo, continued his work after his death. *Padrinho Sebastião* (Godfather Sebastião) was a rubber tapper living in the Juruá river, in the Amazon region, who moved into Rio Branco vicinities. He used to hear voices and have visions from early childhood (de la Rocque 1988).

Vera Fróes (1986), Brazilian Daime researcher and historian, explains that *Padrinho Sebastião* was initiated by a shaman who taught him to perform spiritual

cures within the Spiritist traditional rituals (called in Brazil “rites of the White Table”, or White Table Kardecism. These traditions consist largely of incorporations/mediumship. The “vehicles” or “devices” sit around a table and incorporate the spirits of deceased doctors who come to help the living.

In 1959 he transferred himself with his family to a place nine kilometers away from Rio Branco, capital of Acre state. In 1965 he took Daime for the first time in the Alto Santo church, with Master Irineu, to get cured from a liver illness which had been resisting all kinds of treatment for years. When he drank the Daime, he fell and saw his own body on the ground, from above. He saw two angelical beings removing something like a tumor from his body. He was cured and was initiated then by Master Irineu into the rituals of Santo Daime.

When Master Irineu died, Padrinho Sebastião decided to leave and start another community, in 1973 (for a detailed history, see de La Rocque, 1988:92-96) - the *Colônia Cinco Mil*, with forty three families of rubber tappers. The community was called as such because they bought the land for five thousand *cruzeiros* (*cinco mil cruzeiros*), with a lot of effort. In the early 80's, according to what he was told in his visions, he decided to move the colony out of the city of Rio Branco, into the rainforest. His followers persevered through many difficulties (malaria, scarcity of tools and basic foodstuff) and now *Céu do Mapiá* colony is the home for approximately six hundred people. It is a very barren, hidden place, difficult to get to. Many different forms of transportation need to be taken, including boats along wild rivers and crossing intricate paths in the jungle. After Padrinho Sebastião's death, in 1990, his son Alfredo has continued the leadership.

Many consider Padrinho Sebastião a real shaman. He was a very charismatic figure, honored and respected by ayahuasca drinkers of various cults. He was a key person for the expansion of the doctrine towards the southeast of Brazil and other

countries. He also introduced Santa Maria (Saint Mary), the *Cannabis sativa*, in the Santo Daime rituals.

In the symbolic-spiritual plan, however, Santa Maria is the Mother, the Virgin and God's mother, consecrated when smoked in the rituals. It is the feminine energy that establishes a balance with the Father, which is the Santo Daime, or masculine energy (de La Rocque 1988:96).

However, ritual use of the Santa Maria was suspended in 1981 due to the Federal Police having found a Cannabis plantation in *Colonia Cinco Mil* -- a crime under Brazilian federal law.

#### **4.1.2 Legalization of Ayahuasca in Brazil**

Presently, after various periods of persecution, ayahuasca use is again legal in Brazil, according to the resolution of the CONFEN from the 31st of January, 1986. This group, formed by professors, doctors, psychologists, anthropologists and psychiatrists, analyzed for two years the activities of the Daime centers in Rio de Janeiro and Mauá (both Rio de Janeiro State)<sup>5</sup> and Acre state. The group experimented with the ayahuasca and concluded that it doesn't cause any social, physical or psychological harm; on the contrary, it enhances social and ethical aspects which are valued in our society (family life, religion, moral codes). As anthropologist de La Rocque (1989) explains in his thesis, the structure of the community in *Céu do Mapiá* tends to what Turner calls *communitas* -- the ayahuasca is a tool for ordination and organization. Therefore it was officially liberated for ritual use and excluded from the list of forbidden drugs. Later, in 1992, the Federal Drug Administration stated that ayahuasca is NOT a hallucinogenic

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<sup>5</sup> Rio de Janeiro city is located in Rio de Janeiro state.



substance -- the word “hallucinogen” meaning something which takes the individual out of reality.

As a result, in 1989 the National Forest of Mapiá-Inauini was created, with 311.000 hectares -- a reservation under the administration of the Santo Daime church in Acre, aimed to extract nut oil. This project gained the support of the Program for the Environment of the United Nations and is supposed to provide a model for rational occupation of that area.

However, at this very moment the CONFEN is threatening to fit ayahuasca under the category of forbidden drugs again. This is mainly due to news about illegal export of the drink to the US and utilization of Cannabis during the rituals -- both activities denounced as occurring in the Santo Daime church in Rio. Thus other ayahuasca groups are preparing their defense to stop this process, which would be, for all *Daimistas*, the end of their religious practice.

#### **4.1.3 Santo Daime in Rio de Janeiro**

Santo Daime in Rio de Janeiro was started by ex-political prisoner and poet Alex Polari. In 1982 he came into contact with ayahuasca for the first time, while making a video on the Céu do Mapiá community in Acre. Two years later he published the first well-known book on the subject, called “*O Livro das Mirações*” -- The Book of Visions. This book has brought hundreds, maybe thousands, of people to the Santo Daime groups throughout the whole country. Alex Polari became a *padrinho* and inaugurated a Daime church in the gorgeous hill town of Mauá, between the states of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais. Now he has lived mostly in the Céu do Mapiá colony.

I was probably one of the first persons to watch this video made by him in Acre. A teacher of mine (who is still in the Santo Daime) invited me and a few other students to see it first-hand. It was not even edited. This was in 1982. The video didn't show anything

really amazing -- it was not very explicit, mostly it showed people with their eyes gazing at some distant point while circulating around the Céu do Mapiá church, dressed in their *fardas*.

My teacher was Polari's close friend, and, like him, had been deeply involved with left-wing politics in Brazil. He was an atheist and Marxist. So I was really caught by surprise when one day his face had changed, after he had come back from a trip to Acre. He seemed to have met something quite transformational. Then he said to me, "I saw things I never thought that existed." Together with Alex Polari and Paulo Roberto Silva e Souza he helped to found the first Daime church in Rio.

The Santo Daime church in Rio de Janeiro, *Céu do Mar* ("Seaside Heaven") was created in 1982 by Paulo Roberto Silva e Souza, a bioenergetic therapist born in Rio. The church is registered as a religious, non-profit organization, of public utility, under the name CEFLURIS - *Centro Eclético de Fluente Luz Universal Sebastião Mota de Melo* (Eclectic Center of Fluent Universal Light Sebastião Mota de Melo). Souza used to live in a house inside the church area with his wife (who is Padrinho Sebastião's daughter) and their 14-year-old daughter. He moved to the headquarters in Acre some time ago.

Paulo Roberto used to have an office where the church is now located where he would do psychology work with groups, inside the urban forest.

He went to the Amazon for the first time in 1976, having been invited to do psychology work in the capital of Acre state, Rio Branco. One year before, in Peru, he heard about ayahuasca for the first time. He got to know afterwards that in Rio Branco some people were taking it on a farm. He went to this farm, and there he met Padrinho Sebastião, the leader of *Céu do Mapiá* colony. By then Paulo Roberto was imagining ayahuasca more like a drug, with some hippie-like people around it, something completely different than what he encountered. He was about 25 or 26 years old.

He drank the brew, a very tiny dosage, and didn't feel anything. He thought that it wasn't the real ayahuasca, probably only one more tonic beverage of the forest. Padrinho

Sebastião asked him then if he had had a *miração*, (a vision). He answered negatively, and then drank more of it - a whole jam-size glass. Padrinho told him, Boy, now you go straight to the hammock<sup>6</sup> because the Daime will shake you.” However, before getting to the hammock, he vomited like never before in his life -- he thought he would die. And then visions came: of light, of love, of things going out of his body. He was facing something awesomely powerful and having a lesson on humility and pride. He said, “I was touched deep down inside by the love of God, I say this consciously.” (Goldenberg 1990)

Before this experience he used to believe in God, but had never had something so strong, such a complete connection (Spiritism was his family-received religion). Since then, he said, he was transformed. He had had previous experiences with LSD and marijuana, also in his work environment (he used to work for a municipal psychiatric hospital). But nothing could compare to the Daime.

“Because it reveals itself as a master, it is not a drug, an impersonal thing. It is a master. A genius inside a bottle. Only that we take this genius and he opens up inside ourselves, enlightens us, clears up.” (Goldenberg, 1990)

One of the times when Paulo Roberto was drinking Daime in Céu do Mapiá, he had a vision which led him to follow his mission and bring the Santo Daime to Rio de Janeiro.

I had a strong *miração* there. I saw Saint John the Baptist and the Virgin of Conception turning round in the sky. From the waist upwards they were themselves, and downwards they were two mountains. Sort of mountains, cones with stripes and pictures. I felt touched by love. Then it appeared São Conrado (the district where the church in Rio is located) millions of years ago, as it was in the time of the dinosaurs. I was sort of seeing it from above. I could see the Gávea stone, rivers and birds. Life here was full of power. And right here there was a bonfire uniting sky and earth. This vision marked me profoundly. Three months later, in a session, I had other revelations; then I perceived that they were telling me to take care of the light which inhabits here. So I came here, everything was done under spiritual instruction. Padrinho Sebastião confirmed it all. (Goldenberg, 1990)

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<sup>6</sup> Hammocks are traditionally used in the north and northeast regions of Brazil. It is not only a cultural habit, but also an alternative to beds, which are in general more expensive and difficult to make.

Many of his patients were searching for some kind of spiritual guidance. He started to talk with them about the Daime and so the first nucleus was founded, still very secret, very enclosed, with about 20 people.

The first Daime work was held on November 2, 1982 -- the Day of the Dead in Brazil. The works were initially done with a cassette player, because there weren't enough people to rehearse the hymnals and sing them. Paulo Roberto then started to live in this office. He and a few others wanted to start a community in this place, but they needed to buy land other than that owned by Paulo Roberto. Three families started to live together, and then the Tatumim community was formed, first with two houses and later with six. These houses are located around the church, and they shelter four families: nine men (four married); five women and ten children (as of 1992). There is the Single Men house, with three men living in there, and the Single Women house, with four women. The population in these two houses is irregular.

“We are not offering ourselves, we don't publicize our doctrine, we don't invite anybody to take Daime, but at the same time we are here, like Christ the Redeemer (the statue) is...[there is a hymn that says]

He came from the forest like a hummingbird  
Stepped on the sea edge and expanded his love  
Showing to all the ways of the Lord  
Joining his children on the road of love  
...and I received another hymn, together with the mission:  
Following our true father we are struggling here in Rio de Janeiro  
With care and much attention, with truth in the heart  
Following the way that God gives us we make a chain from the forest to the  
sea  
This blessed chain is to be consecrated, it's time for the flowers to blossom  
The master is coming  
Let's wake up

Paulo Roberto tells that he already had visions about historic periods of the city:

“I already saw the Portuguese on Morro da Urca, the French on Morro da Viúva ... and San Sebastian [patron of the city] appearing in the middle of those battles and settling the destiny of this land. I know, in the astral, why this place is called San Sebastian of Rio de Janeiro”(Goldenberg 1990).

#### 4.1.4 Artists

Since approximately 1988, the Santo Daime in Rio de Janeiro has been a center of propagation of the drink throughout the country. This is due first to the characteristic of Rio being a pole for “spreading the news” to the rest of the country, and second to the number of famous personalities (artists, intellectuals and liberal professionals) who rapidly joined Santo Daime and even helped in its foundation. Since some of these people work in television, they began doing stories on Santo Daime. It is important to understand the peculiarity of the profession of TV actor/actress -- which in Brazil is a very powerful one. Actors and actresses, and whoever appears on the screen on a regular basis, are mythical and create mythology. Everything related to their lives is transformed into news. Popular musicians are also very much venerated in Brazilian society. This helped the Santo Daime to become discovered by the whole country at once -- through TV artists and the Céu do Mar church in Rio de Janeiro -- though many of them refused to give interviews, to the media or to anthropologists and psychologists.

However, one of them, a TV artist who is also a strong activist in ecological issues, said,

When I searched the Santo Daime, I was after the same as everyone else in life, which we find here. We spend a long time in search of an integration between ourselves and the universal nature of things, with God. Each one has his own way, Buddhism, Christianity, Spiritism. I have been doing meditation for many years, but I found in the Daime a fulfillment, which is love in the heart. Because the Daime puts you in the way of light, and it is a way of suffering, of surrender and humility ... I found here what I didn't know: a great love, from every one, and I've already changed a lot. ... My whole life I've heard about Jesus and the Virgin Mary, but only now I started

to really see who they are (Céu da Montanha Bulletin, in the town of Mauá, 1988; Goldenberg, 1990).

In the same manner, politicians and other well-known individuals have given their testimonies and retold their experience with the Santo Daime.

Anthropologist L.E. Soares adds that it is not surprising that famous artists look for the Daime, since it contains essentially the idea of *liberation of the imaginary*. “There is a dialogue”, he says, “with our generation who had the experience of altered states produced by the ingestion of drugs. In this case it isn't a drug, but there is a dialogue with this experience which is well-known by many followers. It is part of a generational culture.” (Goldenberg, 1990)

In the years 1960 to 1970 the generation who was experimenting with altered states of consciousness focused on the idea that we have an inner depot of images and experiences, which can be liberated only if consciousness blockages are destroyed. The drug was seen to liberate the dream-like inner realm, the unconscious, the imaginary. This “trip” was not necessarily associated with pleasure or self-knowledge, but with a search for liberation. That's why Soares thinks that “the Daime performs the marriage between the experience with altered states of consciousness and the experience of psychological therapy... The Brazilian culture is marked by, it assimilated, a *psychoanalytical language*... The idea of personal search, of self-knowledge, is associated to the development of a certain kind of modern individualism.” (Goldenberg, 1990)

#### **4.1.5 Individualism/Collectivism**

Many followers of the Santo Daime doctrine and also other ayahuasca groups showed, in this study, a taste for being in a shared ceremony, in a collective ritual. It gives people a sense of belonging and fraternity, of being equal. Soares points out that this search is, curiously, at the same time individualistic and communitarian. Individuals end up dissolved in the cosmos, in order to meet its essence. This essence conducts to the original

source which is collective. It is a recognition of belonging to a community, to the cosmos. So, at the same time, the Daime emphasizes the individuality, but saying that this individuality is not aware of its essence.

#### **4.1.6 Levels of Syncretism**

The Santo Daime is also performing, in Rio de Janeiro, another very important phenomenon in Brazilian culture: a syncretism of social classes and values. It brings together not only social classes, but antagonistic social classes. There are well-known artists and intellectual personalities associated with rubber tappers in the same doctrine. Also, despite the middle and upper-middle classes being predominant in the rituals, we can clearly observe an increasing mixture of social classes in them.

Another syncretism is the one of values. The people who are now dancing with long skirts and suits, honoring celibacy and virginity and following the military-based aspects dictated by the doctrine are the same who were in the guerrillas against the military dictatorship and fought for the rights of sexual minorities, feminism, sexual liberation.

“The Daime, besides providing the conversion of those who wouldn't convert to any religion, is also able to convert sexual values, exactly in those who seemed inconvertible. The Daime has this extraordinary mobilization potential.” (Goldenberg 1990)

We can say then that the Santo Daime doctrine in Rio de Janeiro has social effects and characteristics very different than those of its headquarters in Mapiá. It turns inside out, for a specific generation, structures which were thought as firmly established in the present time; Sexual identity, familiar relationships and altered states experiments translated as psychological therapy; are reshaped in the context of this doctrine.

#### 4.2 *União do Vegetal* in Brazil

Another major ayahuasca cult in Brazil is called *União do Vegetal*, or Union of the Vegetal. This cult is radically different from the Santo Daime, even in its vocabulary. First, the drink is not called Daime, but *Vegetal* (Plant) or even *Oasca*, the Brazilian name for ayahuasca. Whereas Santo Daime raises hot debate in the media and among people in general, *União do Vegetal* (UDV) has been quietly and firmly standing in rural as well as urban areas. This is due, in my opinion, to the quietness of the rituals (as opposed to the “noise” and intense movement of Santo Daime) and its leaders. Also, as we saw above, Santo Daime has attracted a large number of famous people. For UDV, the vine is *Mariri* (Mah-reeh-reeh) and the leaf is the *Chacrona* (Shah-kroh-nah). The brew resulting from the concoction of both is the ayahuasca.<sup>7</sup>

*União do Vegetal* was created in 1962 also in the Amazon region, in another state called Rondônia - which by that time was considered only a territory, not a state. Its founder is Master Gabriel - José Gabriel da Costa, a simple semi-literate rubber tapper, born in 1922 in Bahia state (northeast of Brazil) who died in 1971. He drank ayahuasca for the first time in 1961, at the age of 39, in the jungle while working in his profession.

Eleven other people at that time were seeking knowledge at the border of Brazil and Bolivia through ayahuasca. This group called itself Masters of Curiosity. One day, in 1964, Master Gabriel decided to organize this group for an ayahuasca session, in order to pick who was to be the chief, the only Master. After drinking the

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<sup>7</sup> Ayahuasca is originally the name of the vine, but nowadays it means the drink itself. The drink is known in Brazil by all names mentioned in this study. I opted for the term ayahuasca because this is the most well-known name for this drink in the US.



sacred brew, and feeling its power coming through, one person then got a message, “You, who had the idea of promoting this meeting”, he said to Master Gabriel, “did so because you are the Master” (anonymous paper on the UDV)

During the next three years, in secret, Master Gabriel drank the magical juice, recalling his past lives and becoming enlightened for his mission in the present life.

The plant has the spiritual dimension of making the individual recognize the divine truths of Nature -- where the human being came from. It also has the capacity of showing how things are in spiritual reality, far beyond the limits of material science., and the so-called Christian culture of the Western Hemisphere. (anonymous paper on the UDV).

However, Master Gabriel is seen not as the creator, but the re-creator of UDV. In other times, other incarnations, he also drank it. King Solomon is said to have given him the first key to the Union of the Vegetal.

UDV headquarters are located in Brasília, in the suburb town of Planaltina, with nuclei in more than ten centers, including Rio, São Paulo and Salvador. Its registration name is *Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal-UDV* (Beneficent Spiritist Center Union of the Vegetal).

#### **4.2.1 Boris' Group**

I will relate the history of the UDV in Rio de Janeiro, because my object of study is Boris' group in that city. This group has consisted of many different groups, who joined Boris in various locations year after year. Boris is an independent ayahuasquero who follows UDV's ayahuasca ritual. He was introduced to ayahuasca inside the UDV cult, and later on started to gather his own group of drinkers, under

the guidance of UDV command. Many *Cariocas* were initiated into ayahuasca knowledge by his hands -- including myself.

Boris Z., 33 years-old, and for nine years has worked as an independent ayahuasquero, has his own small trade-mark company. He was born in Sao Paulo, but was living in Brasilia -- where the main headquarters of UDV is situated -- when he heard about the drink for the first time, in 1982. Despite being so close to the headquarters of UDV, he couldn't find it; at that time UDV was a very secret group, and members wouldn't talk about it or reveal their meeting address. Therefore Boris traveled to Porto Velho, capital of Rondônia state, in the north of Brazil. At 21 years of age, in 1983, Boris had his first glass of Vegetal.

After returning to Brasilia for six months, he decided to move to Porto Velho, in 1983, in order to obtain knowledge in depth on the juice and its making. During the next two years Boris worked in multiple jobs: grocery salesman, rubber tapper, logger, prospector. He told me,

I attained my aim -- get to know the plants inside the forest. If I enter in the forest nowadays, I know: here I may find the vine, here I won't find it for sure. I was interested in the spiritual growth, in the evolution that the drink was bringing to me. I learned how to prepare ayahuasca, which has a magic, a criteria of its own.

In 1985 Boris decided to come back to Rio, where he was raised. His happiness with the drink was tremendously fulfilling and he wanted his friends to be able to try it too. He began to do ayahuasca sessions in a house which belonged to a Hindu community, every Saturday, for three and a half hours. "It was the same ritual of the UDV. I would go to Porto Velho and bring 40 gallons in the plane. This amount would last for six months", he told me.

However, in 1989 he left the UDV. Boris was not satisfied with the progress of his group, and he attributed this to the low strength of the drink from Porto Velho

center. “They would send me a very weak one, and people were not getting visions. I would then collect more vine and leaves, here in Rio, and reinforce the brew.”

From 1991 on he has conducted a group in a house in Botafogo district, with approximately twenty people. “A lot of people come and go, I see some from my group going to the Daimé now. For me, what matters is that they continue their journey - this is my joy: each time that a brother pursues his work.”

I found through the interviews that the people in Boris’ group are very much at ease in talking about their relationship with ayahuasca and their visions. This can, in my opinion, be attributed to Boris’ easy-going, simple personality. He is a *oasqueiro*, but not exactly a healer. He doesn’t consider himself a guru and thus people who drink with him don’t see him as such. The people in his group are not exactly connected to each other and don’t express themselves in terms of a brotherhood. There aren’t any external objectives to perform or extra-meeting activities. All this leaves the members of the group free to come and feel whatever they do, and leaves the interpretation of their experiences only to themselves.

### **4.3 Barquinha**

Barquinha's history in Brazil is still pretty much unknown. Currently the leaders/founders of this center in Rio received a grant to research and write its history. They are currently working on it.

This ayahuasca cult was founded by a Catholic priest, Frei Daniel Pereira de Matos, in 1949, also in Rio Branco, capital of Acre state. The Spiritism, a Brazilian religion centered on psychic communication with the spirits of the dead, and also on practicing charity, is the basis for this ayahuasca doctrine. It has two centers in Rio Branco, and both of them are called spiritist centers. One is the Centro Espírita Daniel Pereira de Matos, founded by Antonio Geraldo da Silva in 1979. The other one is the original, to which Phillippe M., Barquinha’s founder in Rio, is connected.

It is called *Centro Espírita e Culto de Oração Casa de Jesus Fonte de Luz* (Spiritist Center and Prayer Cult House of Jesus Source of Light), directed by Manuel Hipólito de Araujo since 1967.

#### 4.3.1 Barquinha in Rio de Janeiro

When this research was conducted, Barquinha had barely started in the city of Rio de Janeiro, led by Phillippe M. and his wife Marília, both well-known Jungian psychologists, both previous adepts of the Santo Daime. Phillippe is presently the Director of a famous psychiatric institute, founded by a legendary psychologist, Dr. Nise da Silveira, who worked under the supervision of Carl Jung himself. Barquinha is located at their private office, in Laranjeiras district, on a residential street. In 1992 Barquinha had only one *fardado* (initiate), and it was attracting many people from the Santo Daime church. Despite having started as a branch from Santo Daime in Acre, Barquinha's rituals are radically different from its original source. I will explain these differences in the next section.

Phillippe M., born in Rio in 1956, is primarily a mystic. His family is very well-known in Brazil; his grandfather was the first person to introduce television in the country. From an early age, books were his profound passion, mainly spiritualist books. He began his mystical education early, at seventeen years old, when he enrolled in a fraternity of Oriental philosophy. Also, since age eleven he had been under the influence of his mother, who frequented an Umbanda center.

In 1983 he became a consecrated priest in an obscure mystical order. In 1986, approximately, he was introduced to the Santo Daime by a friend; five months later he was a *fardado*. Right after that he felt the need to verify in person the origins of the drink that was causing a revolution in his life. So he went to the headquarters in the Mapia, where he had the opportunity to get to know Padrinho Sebastião.

However, he was not satisfied with the Santo Daime and wanted something new. He decided to go to Acre a second time, and this time he encountered Barquinha's church by accident. Taking ayahuasca there (or Daime, as they call the drink in Barquinha too) was a revelatory experience. He also visited the original Daime church, the Alto Santo, still under the guidance of Mr. Luis Mendes, a companion of Master Irineu. From these two churches he brought ayahuasca to Rio, and began his own little *ponto* (a point, a meeting place). He had started to drink a bit of ayahuasca everyday. He told me,

There in the hotel, in Rio Branco, I received two hymns -- very strange thing. I am not musical at all, never did anything related to music. And suddenly the whole lyrics came ready to me, in blocks. I started singing in the recorder, and they came, two hymns. And the curious thing is that one was pretty much in *Mestre* Irineu's line; the other was called The Mysteries of Barquinha.

In another office in the Flamengo district, Phillippe and Marilia started the "works" (ritual sessions -- Santo Daime rituals are also called works) on the 15th of July, in 1986 or 1987. Initially both of them, plus two or three people, would perform a mixed ritual: first following Santo Daime's features, and then Barquinha's. Phillippe continued to visit Rio Branco, taking Daime and bringing it to Rio with him, until such a time he felt the need to decide between the two cults. He chose Barquinha.

One week before starting his center, during a small Daime session, Phillippe incorporated an entity called the Lion of Fire. This being (whom he discovered, later, to be a god in the Hindu mythology) has since been guiding and inspiring him in his work with the sacred brew. He told me,

This being sounds like a child, an animal, a human and a god at the same time. He is a god, a trickster, and encompasses everything, from the lowest material form to the highest spiritual. After he came to me, everything in my life unfolded and progressed. He brought me a hymn, the biggest Daime hymn that I know, it takes 25 minutes - it's called The Hymn of the Lion of Fire. He told me to call this center The Blue Mountain Ark -- a place

analogous to Noah's Ark, where we could join all the good works of Daime, from any line, any religion. I think that my function is to keep, attract, bring in, collect these seeds from everywhere.

Barquinha's philosophy puts charity in the core of their objective. This is not only physical charity, i.e., helping people with medical assistance and material donations, but also helping "lost" spirits to find their way and progress. For Spiritism, the spirits of dead people can harm or help the living humans. If they are in a low scale of development, they need assistance by those who are alive. They need to be helped to find light, to recognize where they are and to advance, so that they will stop either wishing to keep living among us, or harming us. This is done through means of indoctrination, utilizing various communication techniques such as trance channeling and trance writing (automatic writing).

Barquinha's ideology is opposed to the Santo Daime's in the sense that members are encouraged to live, work and stay where they are. The mythic place for Barquinha's members in Rio is not displaced towards its headquarters in Rio Branco, as it happens with the Santo Daime with the *Céu do Mapiá* colony. Followers are encouraged to investigate their own spiritual progress through ayahuasca, to be good individuals and help their fellow humans. All this should be pursued together with a balanced professional and material life. In other words, the Santo Daime can be considered messianic in its contents, whereas Barquinha is not.

## 5. Methodology

I have conducted ethnographic research among three communities who utilize ayahuasca in religious rituals: Santo Daime, Barquinha and Boris' group. These communities vary in their site, the members' degree of commitment to their minister, and their underlying philosophy.

“The social research style that emphasizes encountering alien worlds and making sense of them is called ethnography, or 'folk description.' Ethnographers set out to show how social action in one world makes sense from the point of view of another” (Agar 1990:12). Agar further goes on to say that fieldwork “requires an intensive personal involvement, an abandonment of traditional scientific control, an improvisational style to meet situations not of the researcher's making, and an ability to learn from a long series of mistakes”(Ibid:12).

The basic approach employed in an ethnographic study is called qualitative research -- defined by Kirk and Miller as “a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms” (1990:9).

Ethnographic data in qualitative research is collected through participant observation. Participant observation means basically interacting with informants in their daily lives, observing the informants' activities, the “physical characteristics of the social situation, and what it feels like to be part of the scene” (Spradley 1980:33). When we think of participant observation we may question the real possibility of engaging completely in a chosen group's cultural and social routine. It is a controversial topic in anthropology, whether or not an observer of a different culture is able to put aside his/her biases and join in another culture, to the point not only of describing it, but even interpreting it. Spradley (1980) divides this process into various degrees of involvement, from non participation to complete

participation. However, other anthropologists like Nadel suggest that participant observation “is possible only when the observer works within his/her own society, when he can totally identify with the group under study, and can conduct his investigations without being noticed as an observer” (1956:64).

When I thought of doing a Master's Degree in Anthropology (in 1980 approximately) I always wanted to do research on some Brazilian issue. This is because I think of my own country and culture(s) as being such a rich source for anthropological studies yet still largely unexplored. As a professional journalist I also continuously came across stories which emphasized this point of view. However, I wanted to be able to explore the account on ayahuasca in all its amazing aspects -- I truly longed for a place like CIIS, where shamanic wisdom and mystery are seriously and respectfully taken into consideration. I longed for a place where I could explore my research subject with discipline and freedom. I started to consider then the possibility of doing this study in the United States, more specifically in California. From the beginning I knew I would go back to Rio for my fieldwork.

Following Spradley's classification of participatory involvement, what I did in this study was complete participation -- when an ethnographer studies a situation in which she is already an ordinary participant (Spradley 1980:62). I was already a member of two of ayahuasca groups, Santo Daime and Boris' group, although infrequently attending both of them. Clifford defines the ethnographer in this case as an “indigenous ethnographer”, an insider looking deeply at his/her own culture (1986:9).

In fact, I can solidly identify with Park's contribution to Anthropology -- as Kirk and Miller point out, his background as a newspaper reporter and city editor brought to the Chicago School “a passionate concern for the mystique of the city as a dense, heterogeneous, conflictful, and very exciting place” (1991:39).

If we substitute the words “the city” above instead of “Brazil” we have the



exact translation of the feelings which led me, a Brazilian journalist, to pursue a research on the religious use of ayahuasca in my own native town. Reporters very rarely become ethnographers, but ethnographers have to become reporters while in the field. Both are attracted by social phenomena; both aim for objectivity and employ similar tools (localization of sources, interviews, transcription of data, data analysis, search for synthesis) to reach it. What differs is the process, or the method. The ethnographer's is much deeper and longer and complements the reporter's. (This position is very fortunate concerning collection of data, but it poses intricate ethical questions concerning the use of an entheogen within fieldwork. I will discuss this later.)

The advantageous side of being an indigenous researcher, for me, was that I was able to cut through all the initial phases of the ethnographic process -- when the researcher attempts to step inside the cultural group under study, begins to know the people and the environment, and starts using the native language. I didn't need to learn another language, but I did learn the specific vocabulary employed by ayahuasca users in various cults. As I witnessed the formation of *Céu do Mar* church of Santo Daime in Rio, I knew key-people in the story. This greatly facilitated easy contact for interviews. I had also met with Boris, the independent ayahuasquero, in many people's houses, so contact with his group was also easy. In some way or another I already knew many of the individuals I interviewed. Therefore I had already two initial advantages: being a Brazilian, from Rio, I am part of that city's culture, and so it is easier to understand its meanings and symbols; and having taken ayahuasca many times in diverse locations I was part of ayahuasca scene.

Fascinated by the mystique and complexity of the Brazilian religious culture, I decided to investigate the ritual use of ayahuasca drink among urban middle-class *Cariocas* (inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro city) -- like myself. I first had the experience

with this amazing beverage in 1984, six years before coming to the US. The very first time wasn't much of a happening, and it occurred at a friend's gathering, under the supervision of Boris. However, the second time (at the Santo Daime church, in Rio) was very powerful and it made me strongly sense that I should learn more about it in a more scientific way. Since then I've been taking it in a variety of places, not following any regularity.

My initial interest which led me to pursue this issue in a research study was to understand how the drink works. I felt compelled to research the differences between visions held by the Indians and those by contemporary urban users. I also wanted to know to what extent these visions were collective, and, above all, if they were shaped by cultural patterns even more than by psychological features.

Initially I wanted to select a group of committed and frequent users -- the Santo Daime followers -- and contrast their experiences with infrequent users who don't follow any specific cult. However, this proved to be impossible, as ayahuasca is distributed in Brazil mostly through some kind of religious group. My intention was to compare these two groups and analyze the different aspects of the usage of this drink by the same kind of population (which I will describe below). But as fieldwork progressed I realized that individuals who often take ayahuasca alone are indeed very rare, if they exist at all. In Rio de Janeiro I didn't find any who took the drink alone.

For nine months (November 1991 to July 1992) I conducted this ethnography in Rio de Janeiro, at the Santo Daime church and at two other groups: Barquinha, which has a similar ritual to the Santo Daime, and a group gathered around the independent *oasqueiro* (*ayahuasquero*) Boris. Barquinha is an incipient group in Rio, at that time with only one *fardado* and few followers. Boris is a *oasqueiro* (as he calls himself) who separated from Uniao do Vegetal and still uses that group's ceremony design in his gatherings. During those nine months, grounded

with anthropological theory and acting as a participant observer, I took part in many hours of rituals. I interacted informally with many followers and non-followers of all those communities, and interviewed 26 people.

I attended the greatest number of rituals at the Santo Daime church in Rio (*Céu do Mar* church). I participated in more than 15 rituals, and sometimes I would also go to the “prayers” on Sunday evenings (when Daime is not served). Many times I gathered with some other informants and friends at one informant's house before going to the ritual. This was a wonderful way of getting information, as well as getting rides on the way back from rituals with different people (and talking about it). A historical, unique and fascinating opportunity I had during this research was to watch people inside the Santo Daime tent during Eco-92, the international ecological event that happened in Rio and featured rituals of all religions in Brazil. I didn't take part in this ritual myself because I decided to stay outside the tent and watch people's reactions and commentaries about it. That night Daime was available for individuals who had never heard about it -- it was a real anthropological event with Daime followers, adepts, the general population and the media together.

I also attended five rituals at Barquinha's center, and drank Daime there sometimes. I only attended two rituals in Boris' group because I had already been to so many of them before doing the research, in many different houses. But at the same time I had a lot of contact with many members of that group (many of them are personal friends).

The formal interviews I did were conducted only once for each informant. Follow-up interviews were done in the form of participant observations with informants during rituals and later informal conversations with many of them either individually or in small groups. These helped me to separate themes and analyze some of the data. My familiarity with the subject facilitated the process of

perceiving common themes and patterns as well as the differences between the groups. The fieldwork experience, then, was an intuitive process, largely helped in its non-intuitive aspect by my previous reporter skills and anthropological literature. What was really wonderful was to be able to collect the descriptions of informants' visions and sensations with so many details -- the sort of data that comes only through this kind of research.

### **5.1 Fieldwork Hallucinations**

The role of indigenous ethnographer brought some specific obstacles regarding my effective participation in the ritual activities of the various groups. It was not always possible to drink ayahuasca and take notes at the same time; thus, for the sake of my research, I had to avoid the brew many times. This was not an easy attitude, however. Inside the Santo Daime church, for example, it is mandatory to drink when it is offered, and people don't control the amount that they are served. In Barquinha and Boris' groups one can drink as much as one feels like.

Dealing with an entheogen raises some discussion about methodological and involvement issues. When drawing upon other researchers who have been through the same situation, like Harner (1973), Dobkin de Rios (1972) and Donner (1982), I see that my position is different than theirs from the start. They came across the hallucinogens after starting the research, the opposite of my case.

The fact that I myself had already experienced ayahuasca enables me to understand and connect deeply to the communities' expressed ideas and symbolic vocabulary when describing their experiences. This also helped me to penetrate meaningfully into the literature. I figured out that it is more useful to the anthropologist who will research a specific entheogen to have the experience themselves, before getting into any piece of literature. This opens a world of fresh

meanings for the ethnographer from their own observation, which can be further contrasted with those of other researchers. An experience with a powerful entheogen like ayahuasca in general shakes our inner values and codes -- thus reaching our beliefs towards culture, religion, society and other notions that are of core interest to anthropology. So I think that, ideally, the first contact with the entheogen should be free of concepts and explanations from other people -- even if these people are professional colleagues.

Harner couldn't get ayahuasca outside the Jivaro Indian region, and Dobkin de Rios outside Peru -- so they had to experience it while in the field. This is relevant because the relationship of the ethnographer with this kind of entheogen is a separate research project in itself. Fieldwork and personal investigations under the effects of a power plant are both strong, deep, intensive and long processes which, in my opinion, are hard to be conducted together. I felt that having had extensive experience already with ayahuasca -- with its fascination, awe and physical hardship -- I was prepared to engage in the present study as a participant observer with a research objective.

Anthropologists have been recently disclosing their own experiences with hallucinogens, but it wasn't always like that. Nowadays there is greater acceptance and even encouragement for ethnographers to more deeply immerse themselves in the cultures they study. All the Brazilian anthropologists who wrote strictly about ayahuasca (Monteiro da Silva (1983), McRae (1992), de La Rocque (1988)) are *fardados* in the Santo Daime. I didn't become a *fardada* because my commitment to this group isn't that strong, however most of the group's members whom I interviewed strongly advised me to do so. According to them, I would never be able to write about the Santo Daime if I didn't become an initiate. "Because you will never understand what Daime is, unless you become *fardada*", I was told. De La Rocque, like myself, first got in touch with the drink and then chose it as a research

topic. He says about his initiation in the Santo Daime, “We don't think that this fact brought methodological obstacles to the development of this research. On the contrary, ingesting the drink and taking part in the rituals largely facilitated our access, and the consequent data collection, definitely improving its quality” (1988:6). Dobkin de Rios states that, until she took ayahuasca after some months doing fieldwork, she “felt entirely like an objective observer who was at best only able to record the vaguest outlines of a phenomenon which defies description” (1972:8).

## 5.2 Informants

By the time of this research the Santo Daime church in Rio had approximately 250 *fardados* -- there wasn't an exact number available, because all the time new people were continually becoming adepts. In days of important ritual festivals the church would shelter as much as 400 people. The Santo Daime is the most well-known ayahuasca religious group, even abroad, at the moment, and my largest sample of interviewees comes from there (13 people, seven men and six women). The church that I focused on is located at Estrada das Canoas, a scenic road in Sao Conrado district.

Barquinha started only recently in the city, in 1986<sup>8</sup> in Laranjeiras district. There was only one person, a man, soon to become a *fardado* in the cult. The number of followers was very irregular, varying enormously at each meeting or festival, but averaged 35 people. From Barquinha I interviewed five people, three men and two women.

From Boris' group, I interviewed one man and three women. In total (not all

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<sup>8</sup> Barquinha's founder in Rio, Phillippe M., is not sure if he started Barquinha's sessions in 1986 or 1987. In the beginning his rituals had mixed features of both Santo Daime and Barquinha cults.

of them come to every session) there were approximately twenty people in this group.

Four additional people whom I interviewed - two men and two women - don't belong to any group now. The woman took part in a UDV group, but doesn't go there anymore; the men never belonged to any group, despite having taken the brew in diverse settings.

All the interviewees range in age between 23 and 50 years old, live Rio de Janeiro city and belong to what can be defined as either the Brazilian middle or upper-middle class. This term means more than the financial power of these two population segments, it also includes the educational degree attained and/or cultural milieu in which the individual circulates. This milieu corresponds here to the South Zone of the city, the area where one finds most of the “fashionable” places (expensive boutiques, shopping centers), the entertainment scene (movies, theaters, sophisticated restaurants and bars) and elegant districts. Most ayahuasca groups are located in this area.

Professional classification of my informants is as follows: 11 psychologists, 4 college teachers, 4 journalists/writers, 2 actors, 2 designers/artists, 1 bank cashier, 1 lawyer and 1 businessman. The large number of therapists taking ayahuasca wasn't really a surprise. Actually, taking ayahuasca is considered professionally helpful and also trendy by *Carioca* therapists. In 1992 there was already a Daime church exclusively for health professionals, on the outskirts of Rio. One of the main findings of this study is that people in general go for ayahuasca in order to discover more about themselves; it's a sort of self-therapy. Naturally, psychologists are curious to investigate it too. Therapy is very popular among this segment of the population, the intellectual middle class. I myself went through some years of therapeutic process, both individual and group, before coming to San Francisco - and most of my Brazilian friends have been in therapy.

### 5.3 Interview Guidelines

Informal interviews were selected as a main method for eliciting data, besides participant observation. An informal interview is defined by Agar as one in which “everything is negotiable” (1980:90). In the interviews I used an open-ended basic questionnaire. Each interview was done on a one-to-one format. In general I would go to people's houses and this was very interesting - it enabled me to grasp a bit more about them. Interviews would flow easily when people knew they were not talking to a stranger, but to a person who knew ayahuasca and had taken it many times. People opened up more easily as I shared my own experiences related to the drink. Previous skills acquired as a reporter, such as: contacting the “sources” (informants), interview techniques (using recorders, knowing what questions should be asked and how to address them), transcriptions of interviews and editing (selection of relevant data) helped tremendously in various stages. All conversations were recorded, and transcribed afterwards.

Questions were designed to elicit what Agar (1980) calls “life histories”. Again the “indigenous ethnographer” role played a central part -- knowing the religious scene of my native city, I was able to understand the implications of the diverse religious contexts mentioned to me. The first part of the questionnaire talked about personal biographic identification (name, age, place of birth, marital status, number of children, upbringing and received religion). Interviewees were asked to comment on their received religion -- the one they were taught at home and/or school - and their religious commitments, or attitudes, henceforth. I also asked them to explain why and how they chose their professions.

The second part of the interview guide focused on experiences with drugs in general and ayahuasca discovery: How did they hear about it? How was the first



time? Did they ever take it by themselves?

The third part inquired into interviewees' interpretations of what they do and feel during the rituals and afterwards: What do they see/feel? What is ayahuasca - is it a guide? why? What do they learn with it? How does it influence other aspects of life (profession/marriage/relationships/ relation with nature/the planet/the rest of humanity)? What is their opinion about the ritual format? Why do they continue or not to take ayahuasca?

The fourth aspect I focused on was their interpretation of their own selves and of religion itself: Who are they? What is God? What is religion? What is this doctrine/belief that they are presently embracing?

Another set of questions involved the role of ayahuasca in relation to the planet now. Can it cure? Does everybody need it? Does it influence people's relationship to nature?

Despite having been organized in this format, questions were not employed exactly in this order. As I said, interviews were informal.

Following these steps I believe I was able to collect valid and reliable data on what constitutes the ritual use of ayahuasca in Rio de Janeiro.

## 6. Settings and Rituals

### 6.1 Santo Daime

Santo Daime church in Rio is located at Estrada das Canoas, an idyllic address. Up the road, coming from the main South Zone districts, the Atlantic ocean spreads shines under the sun and the permanent blue sky. Up the hill, in the middle of the Atlantica urban tropical forest, we see from the entrance of the church the majestic Gavea rock -- a rocky mountain with ancient Phoenician inscriptions. We feel immediately transported to another atmosphere, so different than the chaotic traffic and buzz of Rio de Janeiro. The air is fresh, contrasted to the heat all over the city down below. Silence and breeze help *daimistas* to get prepared for the works.

After climbing a small slope we arrive at a big rectangular saloon, where the “works” are held. On the left wall, four small windows, aligned side by side, are used for serving Daime. In each one a *fardado* pours a glass for the people lined up, one person at a time. Hanging from the cement roof, and on the walls, portraits of Master Irineu, *Padrinho* Sebastião, Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary inspire and guide the prayers. The Brazilian flag hangs below the Virgin Mary. In the center, on the wooden floor, a long rectangular table displays a two-armed cross adorned with bead rosaries, two candlesticks, and a jar of water. The *Santo Cruzeiro* (Holy Crucifix), as it is called in the doctrine, has two arms; the second one “represents the second return of Christ to the earth, when a new age of justice and fraternity will be installed” (De La Rocque 1988:113). During ceremonies crystals of many colors and shapes are also placed on the table. A few people hold crystals in their hands.

To the right out of the main door, we find the reception desk with a key-phone, files and a little mural. Beside is the CURE ROOM, reserved for those who feel bad, or “crossing a bad passage”, during the works. People who fall on the ground, faint, don't stop crying or seem to be undergoing a deep suffering are taken to this room. They are assisted

by more experienced adepts who, through specific hymns and prayers, try to make them feel better and go back to the works.

A few steps down is the women's restroom and changing room. The men's restroom is located opposite the cure room. Few people arrive to the rituals already dressed in their *fardas*; most carry their outfits on a hanger, protected by a plastic cover, and change when they get there. It is considered that clothes carry the pollution (spiritual and material) from the city down below, therefore once we pass the entrance of the church we should leave all that behind and become clean, or new. It is also a metaphor for preparing (cleansing) the soul for spiritual work. Changing is a ritual in itself; it is a moment of social gathering, women help each other combing hair and adjusting skirts. There is a lot of talk and a joyful atmosphere. If it is a special festival, when the *fardas* require crowns and stripes, changing can take much longer.

Around the area of the church, but outside of it, six houses form the Tarumim community -- a group of adepts and their families deeply committed to the cult. There are four families; nine men (four married), five women and ten children. Apart from these, some people live in the area of the Tarumim and the church occasionally, exchanging residence for work. Some seek to be closer to the church, others are construction workers who are doing paid work and may or may not take Daime. Community members hold regular jobs outside, and work voluntarily within the church schedule.

### **6.1.1 Rituals**

Apart from the drink, music is in the core of Santo Daime rituals including: hymns (which will be explained later), movement of the rattles (maracas), and dance.

As de La Rocque (1988) shows, the rituals of the Santo Daime are ordering ones, directed to reinforce structure and not to subvert it. The individual is encouraged to achieve a good performance in maintaining the ritual's order. If he/she dances in the right place, in the right rhythm, concentrating and aware of what he/she is doing, they will be helping

others to achieve internal order as well (internal purification), e.g., progress. It is essential to work for the strengthening of the chain. As anthropologist Beatriz Monteiro (1992) showed in her thesis, the concept of energy becomes a value within this type of cult. People work to get energy for themselves and be able to give energy to others, the ayahuasca its main source.

This order is expressed in the military organization of the rite, the use of *fardas* (military uniforms), and the calling of members as soldiers of the Santo Daime and the Forest Queen. The community is a regiment (De La Rocque 1988:134).

In its beginnings, a hierarchy was set with stars representing the different positions. These stars were worn on the *fardas*, but soon Master Irineu gave up this system, because it was causing too much conflict within members. One of the hymns states, “Right here I am warning that we shall be equal”.

Some expressions used in the rituals (“In form! Out of form!”) are also military vocabulary, and order is also obeyed in the positioning of men and women in the room.

The works in the Santo Daime doctrine are divided as follows: Official Festivals (or Hymnal Festivals), Concentration Works, Mass, and Healing Works (Fróes 1986:39). The Céu do Mar church, however, has a slight different schedule.

Official Festivals follow the Christian calendar in Brazil. The New Year starts on January 6th, “Day of Kings”, in honor of the Three Magic Kings who witnessed the birth of the Christ. Easter Friday, Saint John the Baptist day (June 24th), Day of the Dead (November 2nd), Our Lady of Conception day (December 8th), Master Irineu's Birth (December 15th) and Christmas are the most important dates. Of special significance for the people of Rio de Janeiro is the city's patron day, January 20th - day of San Sebastian. Rio de Janeiro's complete name is actually City of San Sebastian of Rio de Janeiro (*Rio*=river, *Janeiro*=January). The Atlantic ocean was taken for a river, and, as the place was “discovered” by the French on that date, the city received this name.

On these festivals, or Hymnal Works, the clothes are the *Farda Branca* (White

uniform). The women wear a pleated white dress with a green short skirt over it and a green stripe crossing the chest. On the right side of this stripe there is the Star of Solomon, and on the left side a rose for the ladies and a palm for the maidens. Hanging stripes of many colors are attached to the left shoulder. On the head, a crown embroidered with white sequins. For the feet, runners and white socks. The men wear white shirt and suit, white shoes and socks, a black tie and the Solomon symbol.

On Concentration Works and other works, such as Star Works, the clothes are the *Farda Azul* (Blue Uniform). This is more simple than the former and looks very much like a school uniform. For the women, blue pleated skirt, white blouse with the initials of the center applied to the pocket, blue tie, blue runners and white socks. For the men, blue pants, white shirt, black tie, blue runners and white socks, with Solomon's Star on the right side of chest (Fróes 1986:43).

Non-adepts can wear any light colored clothes, being that men should wear pants and women skirts, which can't be too short.

Three forms of ritual are the main ones performed in Céu do Mar church: hymnal works, concentration works and “stars”. Additionally, on Sundays we have the Prayers, when Daime is not taken.

Hymnal works can be used with the white or blue *fardas*, depending on its importance. All the festivities mentioned above require the white *farda*. On some occasions, though, the color of the clothes is decided almost on the spot. These works start at 6 p.m. and finish only at 6 a.m. the next day. During the twelve hours, the *bailado* (dance) goes on, to the left and the right, marked by the rhythm of the maracas. At midnight a one-hour break is taken. Many times, between the hymns, we hear hoorays to the Divine father, the Queen of the Forest, Jesus Christ, Saint Joseph, all divine beings, all the brotherhood, and the Holy Crucifix. To each everybody answers “Hooray!” The works are closed by praying three times [Our Father and Our Mother each, and once Save the Queen.]

Daime is served about five times, at approximately regular intervals of between an

hour and a half to two hours. The amount cannot, most of the time, be controlled by the drinkers; rather it is decided by the *fardados* who serve it.

If the server knows the person, he (women in general don't perform this job) judges the amount of drink according to this individual's problems. For instance, if he is an alcoholic, the server might drop a little amount of the brew, because the individual likes to drink, no matter what, and this is not the attitude to be pursued towards the Daime. In the same way, if he knows that the individual boasts of not surrendering easily to any substance, he might fill him big glasses.

When people keep asking for bigger glasses they might end up getting them, because it is a sign that the person hasn't been able to get into trance.

At the entrance people receive green or yellow pieces of carton, which must be given to the Daime servers at the first serving round. The green means that the person already knows the drink; the yellow is for first timers. This information is collected by phone when participants register for the next work. *Fardados* who work as receptionists, before the work starts, have this data displayed on paper in front of them. First timers usually receive a small amount.

*Fardados* are supposed to drink the brew every time it is offered. Non-adepts can do as they please. It is a general rule, though, that everybody queues up for each round.

The arrangement of *daimistas* is organized within four categories: married males, married females, single males and single females. It doesn't matter if they are young or old. What matters is their relation to sexual activity and marital relationships. As Alexander told me, "I dance in the married men, because, although I'm not married, I had a very strong and long relationship with a woman. I started dancing in the single men, but then I changed." It depends pretty much on a personal decision, but sometimes others suggest the individual's position in the dance. Boys dance together with the single men and girls together with the single women.

The human picture inside the ritual room forms a rectangle around the table.

Clockwise, then, we have: married men, single men and boys, married women, single women and girls. People are aligned according to height as well -- therefore it is extremely important to keep track of who is in front of us, and beside. The functioning of the dance depends on this structure. That's why the *fiscals* exist: to help hold the alignment as it started.

The *fiscals* (watchers, guards) are *fardados* who take care of the whole organization and attitudes during the ritual. They move around and take turns all the time. Their placement obeys esoteric and structural strategic points. Two people stay at the entrance (gate) of the church. Two more are at the door and one person on each corner of the room. Others move around, without a fixed position.

They are responsible for helping those who need assistance and making sure that they won't disturb the rest of the group. If somebody is having a hard time, they take the person to the cure room and take care of them. It is very important that nobody stay alone outside the house, in the forest. If anybody needs to go to the restroom, the *fiscal* at the door must be sure that this person is well enough to go alone. This is done by asking, "Are you O.K.?", and taking into account the general state of that person. Whether or not, for example, if the person can speak well, can walk well, or looks straight. *Fardados* in general take care of other people, even if they are not scheduled as watchers for that particular work.

During some time the beginner seeks his place inside the hymnal alignment, and this corresponds to finding his place inside the community itself. With time, maturity and learning, the person becomes *fardado*; sets up a position in the ritual, firms a point in the chain (De La Rocque, mentioning Alex Polari, 1988:136).

*Fiscals*, then, pay attention if people are crossing their legs, talking during the ceremony or being disrespectful in any way. Therefore they interfere a lot, and not rarely people complain about them. Some of the informants left the Santo Daime also because of the *fiscals*. It is a common experience that a person feels a strong inner call to stay in the

forest -- and there comes the prohibition. This kind of attitude contributes to *daimistas* leaving the cult, who going to seek less controlled ayahuasca experiments.

Concentration works at Céu do Mar church start at 6 p.m. and finish at midnight. In these the *Farda Azul* (Blue *farda*) is used. Less amount of Daime is served. It is called this because this work is devoted to each one's concentration; there is little *bailado* (dance). Mostly people sit down, quiet, with the eyes closed, in silence. It is in general performed every two weeks.

Star works (*Trabalhos de Estrela*) are in general reserved for those invited, and are scheduled for a specific reason which may or may not be decided on the spot (like a day before or in the same day). It can be done for a sick person, or to help someone's problems, or just to celebrate an occasion (like a birthday). Star works are very sought after because a good amount of special, strong Daime is served in them. It lasts between four to six hours and can be done with only a few people. A specific feature of Star works is that only in them mediumistic phenomena and trance possession are allowed to occur. This is the same as saying that the Star works provide the intersection between Umbanda religion and the Santo Daime. In general the oldest members take part in it. Only very familiar new members are invited.

The symbols of the Santo Daime doctrine are: the double-arm Crucifix, and the Solomon's Star (two triangles, forming a six-point star) with an eagle on a moon. The star represents Balance and wisdom. It could also be a symbol of Christ's ancestral family. The eagle is the bird which sees more light and flies higher, and the moon is Our Lady of Conception.

## 6.2 Barquinha

Barquinha is located in a pleasant residential district called Laranjeiras, once highly aristocratic in the 1800's. Nowadays we see the remains of many important historical mansions.



Barquinha's headquarters are actually Phillippe and Marilia's two-story psychology office. The room where the works are performed are situated downstairs, in the back, next to the backyard. There we see an altar with many images -- of Saint Francis, the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and other Catholic saints. On the right, on the wall, there is the picture of the Lion of Fire, the deity who is the patron of this very new cult in Rio. The room is not very big. An average of 30 people attend each session, held every Saturday during four hours, from 8 p.m. to midnight. Sometimes the works are done during daytime hours. More sessions can be scheduled for special dates and events. A marked atmosphere of joy is shared in Barquinha's meetings, so in general people stay in the house for many hours after the session is finished.

Everybody dresses as is convenient for themselves, and many prefer to wear white clothes. There is a *farda* also for Barquinha members, but since nobody was still a *fardado* by the time this study was done, nobody was wearing it other than Phillippe, the leader. The *farda* is composed of white pants (for men and women) with colorful stripes and a blue blazer with golden stripes and red letters on it.

The hymns of Barquinha are called *salmos* (Psalms), taken from the bible. They talk mainly about Jesus' history and the Virgin Mary. There are specific psalms for specific occasions, and some of personal hymns received by *Frei* Daniel, the founder, or Phillippe, can also be added to the works.

There is no rigid control over the amount of Daime that people choose to take, or over their whereabouts. They can circulate in the room or go outside, while others are sitting down, as long as it is not terribly disturbing. Phillippe offers the first glass of Daime, in the beginning, and whoever wants to have more just has to ask for it.

If a person is having a "hard passage", e.g., vomiting, having diarrhea, crying too much, Phillippe has specific psalms of cure (*Salmos de Cura*) through which powerful supernatural beings are called to help.

### 6.3 Boris' Group

Boris and his group have been meeting in various places since the group's beginning, because he himself doesn't have a house or many material resources to get one. The groups formed by him, then, used to depend on personal offers for meeting places. Recently, since 1991, they have been meeting at a house called Lotus, in Botafogo district. This is a very pleasant and cozy house in an old villa, hidden right in the middle of one of the noisiest and most chaotic, busy streets of Rio. From inside the house, however, we hear only the birds on the top of the old trees. This house functions as a healing arts center. There, the group, an average of twenty people, meets every Saturday for three and a half hours, from 8:30 p.m. to midnight. There are no *fardas*, no special clothes; people should wear what feels comfortable to them, and usually wear light colors.

At the beginning of the meeting, Boris sings some specific ayahuasca songs from the Union of the Vegetal. These are callings (*chamadas*) for diverse beings to protect the place and the work that is just starting. Nobody knows these deities except for Boris, and sometimes he doesn't know them completely either. These callings are very old chants from Union of the Vegetal.

Everybody sits in a circle, and he proceeds to distribute the drink. Then everybody closes their eyes and remains silent, while Boris plays a tape (in general some sort of calm, meditative, new-age music). After approximately half an hour Boris goes to each person asking, "Brother (or Sister), do you feel the *borracheira*?" "*Borracheira*" is the power of ayahuasca, a sensation of a strong force that hits us suddenly. This is the sure sign that the power of the plants really came to us and will assure us a strong, meaningful experience -- with or without visions. This is a way of controlling the group's experience and getting to know if somebody needs more of the drink. Every now and then Boris stops the tape and sings some songs. At the end of the session people leave the meeting place.

Although being mirrored in the UDV's structure, Boris' group is different because it doesn't have a hierarchy, with degrees to be advanced. Boris is not a chief, or a leader, and

the people in his group don't consider themselves his disciples, only friends.

If somebody is going through a "hard passage", the group tries to provide support by holding the person, while Boris chants specific cure callings.

## 7. The Meaning of the Search

Ayahuasca drinkers in these three groups showed certain similarities in their experiences, or common themes. The common themes found in this study can be grouped as follows:

1. Antecedents and motivations: What draws people to this experience?
2. Ceremonies and group activities: What are the common ritual structures?
3. Meaning and content: What is the nature of ayahuasca experience?
4. Results and consequences: How do people change as the result of the experience?

### 7.1. Antecedents and Motivations

#### 7.1.1 Religious Background of Ayahuasca Drinkers

It is important to understand the reasons why people feel attracted to experiment with the ayahuasca. As we saw in Chapter 3, despite most of the *Carioca* individuals calling themselves Catholics or stating that they come from Catholic families, this label is in fact a superficial identification with Brazil's official religion. Catholicism in Brazil and in Rio is, in fact, strongly intermingled with the African religion Candomblé, its Afro-Brazilian branch Umbanda and European-Brazilian Spiritism.

From my 26 informants, 21 were raised as Catholics and 17 experienced other religions. Here are a few accounts:

I was raised up in a nuns' school, and all the knowledge on Catholic religion, but none of that gave me answers. ... it was only words ... I believed in it, but the experience was not there, I was reading other people's books, but I wanted to read my own book. Then I went after all the religions in Rio de Janeiro: Buddhism, Hinduism, all kinds of yoga, Sufism,, Umbanda, Quimbanda...I counted an average of twenty-five places. But nothing was worth it, it was only intellectual knowledge. (Z, Boris' group)

Before drinking the *oasca* I was already working with other things, mostly the Indian line -- Hinduism, transcendental meditation, I believed in reincarnation and was truly seeking something that could become food for the soul, the same way that I eat rice and beans to feed the body. Even today I see it (ayahuasca) as a foodstuff, or as a counselor. (Boris)

I (was raised in a nuns' school) had many conflicts, I wouldn't accept very much the forms, the religious practice, the discipline of the school. ... since I was very small I use to question that, but at the same time I recognized in myself a deep need for religiosity -- even not knowing how to name it. (V, no group)

I was baptized, did the first communion, and after twelve, thirteen years old I didn't have a religious practice, only much older. In the seventies I started to be interested in oriental philosophy, yoga and hallucinogens. And I increased my interest in the Brazilian things, Spiritism, Umbanda. I used to go to an Umbanda center, consult with a *cabocla*.<sup>9</sup> She would indicate me some herbs, and things to do. ... I looked for Paulo Coelho<sup>10</sup> and he told me something important: we are in a moment of construction of the temple. The temple was destroyed and no tradition remained. So the construction of the temple is each one's job. (M, no group)

Then I suffered so much, so young still, because of a love delusion, that I became totally revolted with God. So I went after all the other things: Umbanda, cowry shells divination, fortune tellers. And I arrived to the Messianic church. I broke that relationship with the Catholic church. Even today, I become part of the belief I look for -- anywhere I go, I feel at home. (AC, Santo Daime)

Then I started to search for everything that comes from the Orient, to keep away from anything Catholic. ... Then I sought Rajneesh, I attended parapsychology classes, a lot of these things, I also read Castaneda, but nothing satisfied me...I wanted something beyond, I wanted to see...to see the magic. (JR., Santo Daime)

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<sup>9</sup> *Cabocla* is an entity consulted for divination in Umbanda and Candomblé rituals. She (or a *caboclo*, if it is a man) speaks through the person who incorporates her (the “vehicle”) , gives blessings (“passes”) and indicates herb treatments, or other ritual steps to be followed by the patient (such as abstinence or ingestion of certain foods, behavior to be practiced under specific timetables, etc.)

<sup>10</sup> Internationally known Brazilian writer of esoteric best-sellers (novels)

One thing I owe a lot to, in my life, is my education at a priests' school. After 14 years of age I came to Rio de Janeiro with this base -- a base of religion, fear of God, respect. I was always a Christian, used to go to mass. ...There was a phase when I abandoned it all ... Above all, I always searched for something with which I could get intensely involved. I always studied occultism, esoterism, all that stuff. I joined the Rosacrucian Order and spiritist centers. But I never felt fulfilled. I was like the peregrine who keeps falling and standing up again. (G, Barquinha)

Catholicism, then, according to my informants, is a religion without shamanic features and where communication with God cannot be concretely felt as direct and immediate. On the other hand, Candomblé, Umbanda and Spiritism were, up to a short time ago, not considered proper religions for the upper-middle classes in Rio -- no matter how many followers they attracted. Candomblé was always considered a "Negro" religion and many times in history forbidden by White authorities. The answer to the White desire of joining Candomblé was to create Umbanda, which is a smoother version of the first. Spiritism came to Brazil through the teachings of Alan Kardec after 1850 and here mixed its European origins with Afro-Brazilian religions. None of these, though, was considered the ideal religion for upper-middle class families in Rio.

As a result, despite having been exposed in varying degrees to either of these religions through their families, the informants of this research were not encouraged to become deeply involved with them, in most cases. In this sense I believe that this sample of interviewees reflects the picture concerning the urban upper-middle class attitude towards Afro-Brazilian religions and Spiritism. Of course this would have to be further researched, but my point is that, inside a shamanic inherited religious context, these individuals are not culturally encouraged to explore direct communication with supernatural beings. We experience, then, in Brazil, a schizophrenic religious behavior: the same religious behavior that forms the national religious tissue is condemned in many levels by the dominant elite, which, nevertheless, is involved in these practices.

Compared to Catholicism and the prevalent dull, repressive and mechanic ways in

which it is taught at homes and schools in Rio, these newer religions definitely have an exciting appeal. Their rituals, their colors, the way the whole body is involved (as in Candomblé), and above all the opportunity of communicating directly with Gods, Goddesses and even the deceased make Catholicism look to many like a bunch of rules and doubtful stories. On the other hand, many of the informants, due to age and cultural environment, were exposed similarly to Oriental doctrines (Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Rosacrucianism).

This constitutes one of the main reasons why this population segment in Rio to seeks the ayahuasca, and it can be analyzed through anthropologist Wallace's (1966) theory of Revitalization Movements. Ayahuasca cults in Rio definitely revitalize Catholic religion, as we will see below, giving to its followers new meanings and new means of relating to their family-received (and afterwards denied) religion.

From the statements below, taken from members' interviews of these three cults, we can see how important ayahuasca was in providing a reconnection with the family-received Catholic religion. Despite Catholicism being the religion of most Brazilians, officially, let's say, other branches like Protestantism and the Baptist Church are also present in these statements. This is why I assume that ayahuasca cults are revitalizing Catholicism -- placed here as the predominant branch of Christian religions. These other branches, however, also provided a religious reconnection for some individuals.

In the beginning I didn't accept certain things, more cultural things, like the Virgin Mary, the central place of Christ, it is a Christian doctrine. There are esoteric doctrines where Christ doesn't have a central place, but for me this is wrong, for me he occupies a unique position. (CM, Santo Daime.)

Everything that the Daime tells in the hymns I already found in the astral...Our Lady of Conception, Saint John the Baptist...I've been already in many religions, but never saw anything real. When I arrived to the Daime (MM, Santo Daime).

It was a big change, because I started to have a religion, I broke some pre-conceptions that originated in my Catholic upbringing - that thing of repression. Daime helped me to break with this prejudice and understand the

spiritual life from another position, from an adult's place, let's say. Daime is a Christian religion, I feel that it reclaims important aspects of primitive Christianity. It helped me so much to get in touch with Christ, in the sense of God's son. In the sense of the word of the two-thousand year old Evangelic bible, which is so modern and so simple at the same time, so difficult to be understood and practiced. Daime helps me to put my Christian self into practice (JA, Santo Daime).

I come from the Catholic religion, there was a lot of prejudice, hypocrisy, a lot of things I didn't believe in. Then I started to search for everything that comes from the Orient, everything that wouldn't remind me at all of the Catholic church. I used to have the greatest prejudice against Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, all the saints, all these dogmas. ... It was a lot of light (the first vision). It was as if I had been welcome, by all beings, saints and angels, who were like saying "dear son, how good that you're back" (JR, Santo Daime).

Another thing that was always very important to me, since I was little in the Presbyterian church, the thing I loved most, that enchanted me most, were the songs. I love the hymns, the ritual. Taking Daime is like taking Christ's body, a way of reconnecting with the greatest Christ (R, Barquinha).

A lot of things in this religion (Catholic) used to bother me. I really discovered what is the belief in the saints and in God through ayahuasca -- it was a real rediscovery. I already saw Our Lady of Conception many times (P, Boris' group).

You will become enlightened anyway. And, if sooner or later people study a little and manage to be free from this big contemporary prejudice against Christianity in general -- because of misuse of Christ, with these electronic churches, and also because of the Church's past, the Inquisition...even myself, before the Daime any form of Christian religion was totally unacceptable to me (AL, Santo Daime).

And for us, Christians, what appears is our spiritual guide, Saint John the Baptist; the angels of Our Lady of Conception; Saint Gabriel, Saint Raphael, Saint Michael (Paulo Roberto, Santo Daime founder).

### **7.1.2 Seeking a Spiritual (Supernatural) Experience**

Another reason why people seek out ayahuasca is to be able to experience a concrete, direct communication with the divine. In this sense we can say that ayahuasca



experience, like the Afro-Brazilian and Spiritist cults, is shamanic. People wish for a meaningful experience with the Divine, or the spiritual realm, which can be remembered and kept afterwards. People seek ayahuasca as a self-controlled, direct experience of the divine and of religious practice. By self-controlled I mean being in communication with the supernatural realm, or the collective unconscious, (or whatever we want to call the extraordinary, the non-ordinary reality), without completely losing self-consciousness. In Afro-Brazilian Candomblé and Umbanda people lose self-consciousness when they undergo a trance possession: they are possessed by a spirit, another being different than themselves. When they come back, if it was a trance possession, they won't remember anything. In some kinds of incorporation, if it is not a total one (e.g., if the person is not completely taken by a spirit until the point of losing consciousness), the individual might be able to recall some passages of his/her trance.

Paulo Roberto, founder of the Santo Daime doctrine in Rio, explains,

Here there is no guru. There isn't this business of 'I know God, do you want to talk to him? Speak out, I'll tell him what you want and I'll come back and tell you what he told me to tell you to do.' We don't believe in that. If you don't go yourself, how can you know? ... This for us is very important, for not to fall in the other religions' mousetrap -- of the monopoly, of the dogma ... For me to believe for real it has to be presencing, only experiencing directly the mystical contact, the mystical revelation (Goldenberg 1990).

Ayahuasca is a chance for these individuals to enter the extraordinary without having to submit to an external authority and its rules, whether this authority be a person or a spiritual entity. Santo Daime followers who have many rules to remember don't see them as authoritarian: they feel they are, above all, under the loving guidance of a compassionate spiritual being, ayahuasca.

Ayahuasca represents a whole new concept. Something which can be experienced in a rigid religious context (Santo Daime), a more flexible one (Barquinha) or without a religious frame (Boris' group). Something that has a history, like the old religions, but is totally new at the same time. It is psychedelic, but it isn't toxic. It offers a spiritual journey,

an opportunity to get deeply in touch with one's real personality, story and values. It is something in which people can believe through their own, vivid, personal and direct experience, with the possibility of performing religion in a total participatory way and not only as a passive observer.

The search for ayahuasca is a search for wholeness, for God, for faith and wisdom. It is a search for spiritual progress in a non-traditional way, able at the same time to include themes which are precious for these two generations (25-45 years old): old people's knowledge, Orientalism, nature, counterculture, psychedelics. These themes that outline the profile of the "new religious consciousness" as discussed in Chapter 3.

As part of the search for a spiritual experience, we should also consider those who seek other psychedelic experiments. Among informants, 18 had experiences with drugs in general, entheogens or hallucinogenic drugs, prior to ayahuasca.

However, the drive for psychedelic experience was pointed out directly by only three informants as one of the main reasons for initially seeking ayahuasca. What drove most of the informants to it was spiritual thirst, and mystical curiosity. The reasons why they stayed with it, or not, will be analyzed later. It is clear that, besides a natural human quest for spiritual matters, there is a sensation of emptiness concerning deep social values. This can be verified through the answers about what ayahuasca brings to informants' lives (discussed later).

Jung (1953) already pointed out that, when religion doesn't provide meaningful symbols for a society, people reach to the collective unconscious for new meaningful symbols (and values) from other times and religions. In certain ways this is what ayahuasca does. It floods the self with images and symbols from the collective unconscious, from other times and religions, and with sensations of love and care. It provides new values people are asking for - new spiritual values.

Another factor that leads many people to ayahuasca is a concrete example or involvement from a friend. As we saw before, 11 informants were introduced to it by a

friend. In some cases this friend was the personification of a miraculous transformation process, and in other cases they were just a close person going through exotic and exciting experience. Friends are a bridge between new drinkers and ayahuasca, but of course they are not the reason for seeking to experience it.

I arrived to the Santo Daime through a friend, an actor like me. He joined the Santo Daime and anyone, even not being a spiritualist, could see that he was very sick, addicted to cocaine, alcohol, smoked a lot, everything really, a person at the edge. Then he joined the Santo Daime and started to...heal himself, stopped smoking and drinking, changed his face, his attitude, his mind, his way of dressing, thinking...all this impressed me very much, because he is an old guy. He would talk to me about the Daime but I took one year to go. Then when I went it was very strong (M, Santo Daime).

Then in '88 or '89 we went to drink Daime for the first time, there at Céu do Mar. Because a lot of friends of ours were already going there, and always talking about, I got very curious (R, Santo Daime).

## **7.2 Ceremonies and Group Activities**

### **7.2.1 Collective Shamanism**

Ayahuasca has been utilized in all cultures, and urban Brazil is not an exception, in rituals which involve music and dance. Hallucinogenic plants are employed in this manner in many societies.

The ceremonies of the three groups in this study constitute what is called collective shamanism. This is opposed to the ayahuasca use in indigenous cultures, when mostly the shaman would prepare the drink by himself, perform the ritual, control it, sing songs (prayers, invocations) and sometimes drink the brew alone. The tribe could join him in an ayahuasca session, or not. In healing ceremonies he would act alone. Festive ceremonies could gather all men for drinking ayahuasca and celebrating together. In most cases women would not be allowed to drink the brew.

In the three groups researched here, the ceremonies are collective rituals, where every person ingests the drink and participates actively in the session. This active participation also varies between the groups. The preparation of the drink -- collection of

the vine and leaves, smashing the vines, cleaning the leaves and cooking them together -- may or may not be collective as well.

The members of this religious system are like shaman apprentices, or potential shamans...The shamanic activity isn't exclusive of few initiates like in the indigenous societies in general, and the ritual practice is the learning part of this art of ecstasy (de La Rocque 1988:197).

Active participation in the ceremonies involves, besides just drinking the ayahuasca and staying together, (1) singing ritual songs (2) dancing and (3) concentrating.

### **7.2.2 The Ritual Songs**

Ritual songs are chanted prayers and invocations fundamental in any shamanic practice, whether or not entheogens are used.

The three groups contain songs specifically for cure, which are utilized if someone needs special assistance.

#### **7.2.2.1 The Santo Daime Hymnals**

The Santo Daime culture is strongly based in its ritual songs or hymns. The hymns show, during a ritual, the direction to be followed by the individual (as a personal journey) and the group (as a moral and ethic code). Sometimes participants have collective journeys, i.e., share the same visions. This is supposed to be induced by the hymns (Dobkin de Rios 1972; Siskind 1983; MacRae 1992). The shaman would have the ability to direct a person's experience with ayahuasca through his songs. In the Santo Daime cult, this is performed through the hymns, which are learned and chanted by all together.

The hymns are grouped in hymnals. A hymnal is a set of hymns received by one individual, which becomes the scripture of the doctrine. All the time, new hymns are received by different individuals, and they may or not become part of the doctrine. Mostly, hymns are personal messages -- a private song that teaches something very relevant for the present time to the person who received it. However, this message if shared, can be recognized as extremely valid for the other members of the group as well, and then incorporated into the hymnals. All the leaders of Santo Daime groups have their own

hymnals, which are chanted in their entirety in one session, according to each festivity (we should remember that Daime rituals, or works, take twelve hours). Some hymnals, like the ones by Master Irineu and Padrinho Sebastião, contain more than one hundred hymns.

Hymns are received “ready”, meaning lyrics and music at once, during an ayahuasca trance. Once received, the person doesn’t forget than later on. It is really an amazing phenomenon, different from just listening to a new song. For those who don’t receive hymns, but only sing them, the same might happen. Some hymns just stick in their minds instantaneously, and are remembered without effort. The mechanisms on how this happens in our brains need to be further investigated.

Paulo Roberto, leader of the Santo Daime in Rio, tells:

I receive hymns when I drink the Daime and also outside the works. This has to do with Spirits in the mediumistic sense. Hymns are revelations which come from above. In some of them that I received I saw the people singing up there. I even saw some women, they seemed like ancient Greek, on a stone. They were singing with a mermaid-like voice, and that voice enchanted me. And it is such a strong thing that I start to sing at the spot. And then it comes. So much that I never wrote any hymn I received. They come and they are in me. Otherwise, it isn't a hymn. They are in me, and I never forget any hymn I receive. Any. I am able to sing my whole hymnal without reading any piece of paper (more than 80 hymns)...A hymn is like a spirit, as long as you don't act upon it, it doesn't leave you alone. It stays 24 hours in your mind.

And it is in the hymns all the theoretical body of our doctrine. The hymns are exactly the product of our mystic experience. Through the passages, contacts and meetings we have, when we get back we don't come with empty hands. We come back with a hymn telling what we are going through. They always have a correlation with the reality down here. It is so much like this, that in a work, you are going through something, you listen to a hymn and the hymn is saying exactly what you are going through, there, at the very time. (Goldenberg 1990 )

Santo Daime adepts are always talking about the hymns and singing them, using them as a reference for everyday life and as a guide for spiritual development. In this sense, their relationship to the hymnals is the same as any religious group to its sacred text.

The content of the hymns bring messages of discipline, hope and honor to the beings that form the pantheon of this spiritual line. They are also of combat, discernment and cure,

referring to categories such as power, knowledge and time. They bring to the members a deep sense of ethics.

The perfection in the hymns is an aim for moral development and cure, and should be understood both in terms of performance and of ethical model for social relationships -- which, if put into practice in real life, brings cure, truth and perfection (de La Rocque 1988:88).

The hymn is the materialization of music inspired by the Santo Daime. They are rhymed verses, mainly the second and fourth verses of each stanza. The verses are chanted twice. "This fact can be related to the indigenous origin of the ritual ,once that Indian ayahuasca songs have this characteristic of repetition (mantras)" (Fróes 1986:98).

In Rio de Janeiro and, I assume, in other big cities, the hymns are also a great point of resistance to the ritual, for newcomers. This is because their language is the Portuguese from the north, from uneducated people; not sophisticated, not traveled. The opposite of the people from the southeast. Grammatically speaking, it is a "wrong" Portuguese, many times without numerical agreement (plurals) and/or verses terminated in the way the words are spoken in the north, but not in the southeast. It is funny indeed, to see all the educated people of the southeast (Rio) having to pronounce the words incorrectly to follow the hymns. It feels very uncomfortable initially; it is like going to school backwards. This poses much resistance to people, who end up interpreting this process also as an initiatory one -- if you are able to detach from your ego, from external and superficial attachment, you are then able to understand and sing the hymns the way they are.

This problem has been minimized since urban individuals like Paulo Roberto started to have their own hymnals, not only with an adaptation in the language (to "educated" Portuguese), but also including themes familiar to the people of the southeast.

In the beginning I felt a lot of resistance, especially the hymns seemed very simple, as if they had come from a very humble person and talking always about the same things, with a very restricted vocabulary. Therefore there was always the critical attitude, but afterwards, with time, I began to comprehend them in another way -- they are like mantras, and we repeat the same phrase thousands of times -- and it's not the phrase itself, it is the vibration, the reverberation that it creates in our apparatus (V, no group).

### 7.2.2.2 Barquinha

The ritual songs in Barquinha are called psalms. They are the same psalms of the Holy Bible. Mostly they are chanted by Barquinha's leaders, Phillippe and Marilia, during the sessions. They are difficult to memorize and therefore the members in general don't know them. Hymns can also be received by Barquinha's followers, however this is not so much part of this group's culture. In every session -- which lasts four hours -- a specific set of psalms is chanted. This set is selected by the leaders according to instructions from Barquinha's headquarters and also from Phillippe's spirit guide, the Lion of Fire.

### 7.2.2.3 Boris' Group

Boris works with his group more in the manner of ancient shamans. He sings the songs himself, at intervals, and most of the time the group listens to recorded music (sometimes just instrumental). Boris' songs are very old ayahuasca songs of the UDV, and most of the people don't know what deities he's talking about. People in this group can also receive hymns, but, like in Barquinha, it is not a cultural feature of the group.

### 7.2.3 Dance

Dance is a fundamental part of the Santo Daime, it exists in Barquinha but not in Boris' group.

In the Santo Daime, the dance is called *bailado* and happens during the entire ritual -- except Concentration Works, when people dance and sit down alternately.

The main instrument played by all followers is the rattle, or the *maraca*. Rattles are made with a wooden stick and an aluminum can on the top, with grain inside it. Other instruments are played as well, like guitar, accordion, banjo and flute.

The dancing rhythms receive European names: March, Waltz and Mazurka. The March is characterized by three beats with the rattles downwards and one upwards, giving two steps to the right and one to the left. The Mazurka has nine time divisions, and the body is rotated 180 degrees to the right and to the left. Despite receiving European names, these rhythms reveal a strong

indigenous influence, as well as the utilization of the *maracás* (Fróes 1986:99).

In Barquinha rituals, members dance as they please, in general towards the end of the session. Instruments may or not take part in the same.

In Boris' group there is no dance.

#### 7.2.4 Concentration

Two types of concentration can be verified in these three ayahuasca groups: quiet concentration, which is like a meditation, and active concentration. Both are an essential key to all ayahuasca groups.

In the Santo Daime, specific rituals are called Concentration Works. In them, people stay most of the ritual time -- six hours, in Rio de Janeiro -- sitting in silence with the spine erect. For a short time the hymns are chanted; briefly during breaks. Daime is served at the beginning and in the middle of the ritual.

Barquinha and Boris' groups have quiet concentration rituals. Boris is centered in quiet concentration only, while Barquinha mixes some quiet concentration with dance.

Active concentration is required not only during the ayahuasca sessions, but through the member's life in relation to the teachings received with the drink. This is because the people feel the need to start paying attention to their thoughts and behavior in daily life. Also leaders emphasize in any ayahuasca doctrine the seriousness of this kind of experience and the consequent sense of responsibility which is usually developed through contact with the drink.

Active concentration takes many forms: abstinence from sexual activity, food and alcohol before sessions; caring of the ritual clothes and the environment; and caring of oneself and related relationships. In the Santo Daime, concentration is also an essential part of the *Feitio* (the making of the drink), is performed collectively in a big festival. There is no *Feitio* in Barquinha and Boris' group. Phillippe and Boris bring the drink ready from the north of the country.



In the Santo Daime, when people are dancing they need to concentrate on their place in the ritual and their chanting. Many times we could hear Paulo Roberto, the leader, saying, "Pay attention to the concentration."

This leads to the importance of the energetic chain in all groups.

### **7.2.5 The Energetic Chain and Group Work**

Some informants, mainly in the Santo Daime, talked about the "work of the group" and the "strength of the group." The quality of the work a group performs lies in the strength of the energetic chain during a ritual. Informants talked about their experience with this chain. Under the effects of the ayahuasca, the energy -- the sensitivity, the emotions, the feelings, the sensations, even the thoughts -- become more refined, opening possibilities for the individuals to sense the level of "energy" and cohesion of the group. Many of them said that, of course when the group is tuned, the work unfolds easily, with progress for everyone. If people are not concentrating enough, there is a break in the chain and more difficult passages with ayahuasca can be expected for all participants.

The collective is fundamental inside the Santo Daime. The liturgy preaches the spiritual chain. Daime is not something that you drink alone, it doesn't preach this. It preaches necessarily the chain, the charity, the group, the other -- your relationship with the other. The whole arrangement of the chain are poles, and with the help of the chain, which is greater than its parts, you go on transcending. In that moment we transcend the limits and reach a spiritual contact with the high astral, with the creation forces, the forces of the light. The work is individual, but inside the chain (JAug, Santo Daime).

For me [ayahuasca] was 'cool' because I see it as a sacrament, which is linked to a ritual. I don't know if it would be valuable if taken outside a ritual. I don't know if I would like it. For me it has a fundament while it is done in a ritual. For me the brew is a symbolic act, is the sacrament which will give , inside this ritual, this collective thing, a greater union -- a strength. The fundament of this sacrament is this one, whose intention is union. Another thing that has always been important in my life, since I was a girl, in the Presbyterian church, that enchanted me, are the songs. The music for me is a channel, a means that helps me a lot to get in touch with myself... I think that experiencing such a beautiful ritual, collectively, helps us and strengthens us, for life, for the outside world, for each one in his work. Each person gets extra strength to practice his/her profession (R, Barquinha).

I did some works with only one other person. The group has an energy, every group has its own energy which flows in a certain stage. When there are only two people we lose a bit of the force, even us repeating everything, the callings, putting on the same music, etc. It is different, the concentration changes (P, Boris' group).

I like to drink it with the people, as long as they are tuned with each other. When there are newcomers, they disturb. We can feel all their 'noise'. The energy level gets heavier, it seems to drop down. The group which has been working together for a long time, is tuned. It's wonderful, you climb up together with the group (L, Boris' group).

### **7.2.6 The Ritual as a Generator of Nurturing Feelings**

Apart from the three men who don't belong to any group, all my informants related specific feelings about taking part in a ritual. Most of them feel that the ritual is important, and the experience with ayahuasca shouldn't be conducted in any other way than in a collective.

The Santo Daime is designed to offer its members this feeling of communion, fraternity and love. In the other groups, these may or not come naturally as an extension of an individual's integration to the group. This is different from the feeling of love which, I think, is inherent to the brew.

Boris thinks that the ritual definitely influences newcomers' experiences. He told me,

In general new people are also watching the external, are searching something. Then everything that is around, the external, the place, the people, the chants, everything influences the ayahuasca experience. When the person has been doing it for a long time, the place doesn't matter, because she's already worked on herself. She can drink it in a desert, in a slum, she has a concentration energy which goes beyond that. For a newcomer, I think that it is important and even fundamental that the experience is good. That's why the leader has to be very careful with, and be very loving towards the newcomer. The first impression is the one that stays, that's true.

I felt that it [the Santo Daime ritual] took me to a level more in touch with my essence, in touch with my own soul -- touching layers that I had hardly ever touched in the UDV. I think it is due to the format of the ritual -- I am very mental, and a session of questions and answers [like in the UDV ritual]

transports me to a mental level, and so obviously diminishes the possibility of being open to other perceptions. As we can't find this in the Daime, and there is the beating of the maracas, the rhythmic movement of the dance, the chants, a period of deep concentration, a lot of incense and candles, fumigators, so I feel that this mental side in myself was not stimulated (V, no group).

I think that the rituals are beautiful. In the Santo Daime the ritual is more synchronized with the indigenous thing, the steps, the rattle, here I think it's more on the vibration level of the Catholic church. Both are beautiful, although they take to two different directions (Mar'lia, co-founder of Barquinha).

### **7.3 Meaning and Content: The Nature of the Ayahuasca Experience**

#### **7.3.1 Responses to the Question: What is ayahuasca to you?**

All the informants gave similar answers when asked what is the Daime, or vegetal, or ayahuasca. However, not surprisingly, three of the four people who didn't belong to any group gave explicit non-religious answers. People gave multiple answers, so I count here the most frequent definitions.

The most common description of ayahuasca was "a manifestation of Christ/ God himself/ the materialization of the divine spirit/ a divine being". This was mentioned 11 times.

Following this comes "A key to my real self" and "A way of life/a process", with five answers each.

"A master/ a guide/ a teacher" follows next, with four answers.

"Love" and "Power/Energy" comes then with three answers each.

From the 11 people who see ayahuasca as a "divine being" or as "God", ten are from the Santo Daime church. As I interviewed 13 people from there, here we have a cultural theme for Santo Daime adepts -- most of them see ayahuasca as a manifestation of God, or as divine.

This can be directly contrasted, for example, to answers given by three of the four

people who don't belong to any group. Of these, two said ayahuasca was “a hallucinogen like any other one”, whereas only one said it is “a key to yourself.”

Other answers, with one vote each, were more vague and include the following: “a trip”, “a balsam”, “something essential”, “any name you want to give.”

We can simplify the answers above in mainly two groups: most individuals see ayahuasca as either a manifestation of the divine, or a self-discovery process. Some see it as both. This study shows the majority of ayahuasca drinkers show reverence, respect and/or awe about this brew and its effects. Many consider it sacred. In this sense it is not different from what the Indians considered it to be. Only one informant didn't show any of these attitudes mentioned above. The other 25 agreed that this was or has been a radical, transformative experience in their lives and their self-knowledge.

Here I should add some of my own experience and observations. Indeed, under the effects of ayahuasca a person can experience an incredible, immeasurable amount of love. The feeling of love can be absolutely overwhelming and interpreted as “divine”. The kind of love and light -- I mean, truly light, with all colors and intensity -- might seem much more than what a human being is able to tolerate and/or imagine. Thus it might be, again, felt as something which clearly possesses a divine origin.

Two other facts lead, in my opinion, to a connection with the notion of “divine”: first, profound insights and revelations about our selves, or about something that is shown as past lives; second, the fear of being lost in a nowhere place from where we won't return --, madness, or disintegration of the ego.

It is hard to attribute a strong, insightful revelation or information to our selves, other human beings, nature, or of our unconscious. I think we “sense” somehow that all this is bigger than us. That it comes from a place where there is more information about ourselves than we are able to access alone. So we human beings tend to call this place “divine” or “God”.

Feeling the disintegration of the ego is also a radically transformative experience.

The ego is everything we know as “I”. The experience of it being broken and destroyed makes us confront a sense of absolute nothingness. The sensation is of a body with nothing inside. The dissolution of this part we call ego or “me” then, throws us into a nowhere place. The self is broken into pieces: scattered all over. Who remains, then, if it is not “me”, anymore? God. The mystery. The divine.

It is interesting to compare the data on ayahuasca definitions provided above with data on how people define God. From the answers, 11 said “it's everything”, seven said “the creator, the father”, five said “energy/power.” One person said explicitly it is “ayahuasca, the Daime”, and three acknowledged that they “don't know.”

The conclusion I draw is that for most individuals “God” is an all-encompassing entity, absolute, non-corporeal, undoubtable. Those who are more faithful and less analytical about their feelings, identify ayahuasca with God, merging the two: those who are more analytical about their feelings can classify ayahuasca as a self-discovery process -- carried on by something that, like God himself, is hard to label.

Ayahuasca makes us feel something which is definitely different than ourselves, alive, with a consistency and an intelligence of its own.

### **7.3.2 Responses to the Question: What do you feel when you take ayahuasca?**

Frequently the plants which comprise the ayahuasca brew introduce themselves. This happened to me in my first powerful journey. The vine showed itself, and it said “I am powerful, I am really sacred.” Very often the plants talk to the people, and this is a common feature related by informants.

A voice was saying, “You have to trust what you see. Look at the power that is in the Daime. ... You are very fat, and the time for your spirit to live in your body might be very short, because your body is not healthy.”... I saw all this, and the voice was speaking, and I was watching my body dissolving. It's me, the being in the Daime, the divine being (AB, Santo Daime).

You see, you receive the information, you know what it is, but you don't know how to explain, everything informs you. You open yourself to another thing and that tells you everything (JR, Santo Daime).

The revelations are obscure points inside our mind that become lightened, that keep on giving a much larger understanding of yourself and the world, of what you want, where you come from, where you are going, what you need, what you are doing (MM, Santo Daime).

It was when, inside the Céu do Mar church, I received another convocation - - and, as a good soldier, I attend all convocations! It was, "Go to Rio Branco because this time you will get to know other churches, other lines of work." I received this, and a few weeks later I was gone ...And there was a voice in my head saying like this, "This power came to cure the sick, to save the innocents, to revive the dead." Very strong (Phillippe, Barquinha's founder).

With time I started to receive hints from my consciousness, I could hear the voice of my consciousness talking in my ears -- look, you have to pay more attention to such and such (P, Boris' group)!

### 7.3.3 The *Peia* or *Cacete* - Purification and Other Challenging Experiences

Despite the effects varying from person to person, the interpretation of these effects constitute a common theme among ayahuasca drinkers. It is a universal feeling that, after a period of deep physical suffering -- vomiting, diarrhea (sometimes both at the same time), fainting or difficult passages -- individuals feel a profound cleansing in their bodies.

The *peia* (in the Santo Daime) or *cacete* (in the Union of the Vegetal) is the name given to the physical aggravation experienced as heavy sickness followed by vomit and/or diarrhea. *Peia* and *cacete* mean, in Portuguese, "aggression" (as in "beating up"). Most ayahuasca drinkers experienced it at least once, and most agree it is a form of cleansing. Most individuals feel much better and renewed, physically and emotionally, after passing through a hard time like this. Together with it come interpretations of a moral nature, and it is a common opinion that the *peia* or *cacete* frees people from something which was stopping further spiritual development. In other words, the person feels free from an obstacle such as a trauma, or bad and negative feeling, habit or thought pattern.

No matter how hard it can be for the person, the *peia* is always considered a good sign -- that the person is receiving a chance to be cured and to progress. Several times I heard people say, "Oh, I was going through such a *peia*, but it was so good for me." The *peia* can be regarded as a gift, more than a suffering. Something that the person deserves -- deserves the suffering, but also deserves the opportunity to go ahead in what they need to achieve in spiritual life.

My husband, right after drinking the first one, vomited everything but also saw everything. The only thing I felt like doing was crying, I used to cry all the time -- I see this as a form of cleansing. Right after the fourth work I had a very strong work. I felt a terrible pain, a huge pain. It was the pain of forgiveness. I had never asked to be forgiven for anything. I used to think that everything I was doing was right. But I felt the pain of forgiveness, it seemed like a sword punching me... For me, that year was the cleansing part, and of insisting. Today I know what are those things that I had in the cure room: it was a death. It means to finish, to die really. A lot of times you are alive but you keep things, blockages, defenses, very ancient things. (R, Santo Daime)

On the other hand, if you drop off of the right track, it comes on you, you notice it. It isn't going to kill you, because God loves you, but he is going to give you one of those, very strong. And this is good, it's good that it is this way. That's what I want. I truly want to be corrected. And it is an immense power -- the power of love. (JR, Santo Daime.)

I felt very bad many times, physically, the material body suffers a lot. But the spirit was tremendously happy, and the mind was...broken into pieces, destroyed, isn't it? ...While I accept that the spirit is well, the flesh is there, suffering, so these are incredible trips. (JA, Santo Daime)

I vomited, felt very bad. I thought that all that was crazy, but after it was gone I saw that it was part of the work and thought that it was worth to continue. (CM, Santo Daime)

It already happened to me, of going there and drinking it, and bringing problems and tensions, and nothing happened. This for me is the greatest *peia* of the Daime --the crowd talks a lot about *peia*, that the Daime may cause very unpleasant sensations -- it really happens, but the worst of all is to drink and not feel anything. This is really sad, to watch everybody having visions and with you, nothing...it's a mystery, and it happens.  
...If you don't take this *peia* you won't feel anything indeed. That's exactly the way people are before the *peia* [not feeling anything]. Truly, people talk

about it as “feeling bad”, but deep inside is to be well -- we are very well there. I have already gone through *peias* which I guarantee you, at the moment it was very difficult, but it was fundamental. And we keep drinking, because we have a lot to clean, who is in the Daime way -- things from past lives too. The Santo Daime is a spiritist center, we should say(AA, Santo Daime).

So in the first day [in Barquinhas's church, in Rio Branco], I, who had done star works at the Daime, at Mapia, who had taken full glasses, for the last two years I never vomited. Rarely I would feel bad. The first thing; I took a tiny little glass like this, and BAM. When the work started there was that strong thing coming up. Coming up like this, those psalms, look, extremely strong ... I vomited inside Barquinha's church, in the first and the second days. Also, after those terrible airplane meals...But I interpreted this as a work in a higher level of light, and I had to digest that there. (Phillippe, Barquinha's founder)

There is a guy at Céu do Mar who takes a lot of drugs at the same time, and he took Daime to London -- and it was a one and only “*peia*”. With no explanation for anyone, they didn't even try to place the Daime in a religious context. It was hard, it was a chaos. Daime is situated in the territory of the sacred. We have to respect it, to have a serious attitude. (M, Barquinha)

Then I went there [at Barquinha], and I had an impact that day. That touched me, I vomited, and my son had diarrhea, but at the same time I felt that something had moved me inside. Those chants, those psalms, those hymns, I felt a certain enthusiasm in balancing my body, even in the astral. I never missed any work after that. (G, Barquinha)

After having been taking Daime in small quantities, some two months later I went there and took half a glass, and felt as bad as in that other day when I had taken five glasses. There was a moment when I didn't know what I was feeling: if it was hunger, thirst, tiredness, or wish to use the toilet, or what. I decided, then, that I wanted to use the toilet. Then I felt fine... I also felt very cold, I would cover myself and then the cold would start again. I thought I would die. An old lady, beside me, was saying, “This is nothing to worry, my son! That's the way it is!” She took it already many times. (M, no group)

At two a.m. I started to feel bad physically, and I couldn't vomit. I felt very bad, sweating. I went to the kitchen and drank warm salted water, and of course vomited loads. Then after that I got an incredible sensation of well-being, an amazing tranquillity and an accuracy of the senses that I never had before in life...[Another time] at a certain moment I said, “I have to faint, something has to happen.” I had the sensation I was vomiting something solid, it seemed like a bone, but I looked and it wasn't anything. The last



vomiting wave came, and it was the greatest marvel in the world, the sensation of well-being, I think that's because I was free of that thing. It was a very valid experience, I think I would not go through another one. (S, no group)

When Boris opened a gallon, there were twenty or thirty people, I felt emotional. That was very important to me. Everybody vomited. And I was so enchanted, so happy I was drinking that, and the drink was very weak... And how humble you have to be! You vomit, you have diarrhea, you freak, but you say, I want to see, I want to see God. You have to really want. This is the way, so I have to pay the price. Because the glory finally comes. (Z, Boris' group)

#### 7.3.4 Abstinence

Abstinence, either of food or sex, is a common theme for ayahuasca drinkers. Whether people follow this injunction or not is another issue, but from Peruvian indigenous ayahuasqueros to urban Carioca ones, everybody is soundly advised in any cult, church or group to take abstinence before drinking the brew. Researching the subject I found that Indians used to abstain from eating spicy and greasy food before rituals with ayahuasca. This is also a common shamanic feature -- before any journey, the shaman needs to be “clean” of unhealthy food.

In Rio Tigre and Beyond (Lamb 1988) the ayahuasquero Manoel Cordoba Rios gives the recipe for not going through *peias*: eating only unsalted and light food, and not having sex three days before drinking ayahuasca. And on the ingestion day, if possible go on a complete fast.

I felt this difference myself. When I fasted I had a wonderful experience, with a lot of strong visions. Another time I had a bit of wine beforehand and vomited. I threw up only the wine, while I was receiving “teachings” on why alcohol, tobacco and heavy food don't match with ayahuasca. It was like a class on nutrition. However, the most terrible *peia* of my life didn't seem to have a straight relation to whatever I had ingested on that day. *Peias* may or may not be related to what people eat. Sometimes a not so fresh ayahuasca can be

responsible for a lot of sickness.

The advice on avoiding sex is also present, with different interpretations among ayahuasqueros. It is supposedly because of lust, and then it involves the notion of impurity or sin. For others, it is mainly because of the effort involved in it; we are supposed to rest before a ritual.

In the Santo Daime church, people are advised to rest before the *trabalhos* (works), not to eat heavy, spicy and greasy food and not to have sex three days before and three days after the work. Barquinha and Boris' group are more flexible, telling their followers to eat light food and avoid sex one day before.

I follow sexual abstinence and light diet, at least two days before the work. I think it is important to do this, I already saw through my own experience that it's better to go in complete fast. We know that even for meditating it's easier if we are fasting, we are more clean, more purified. So in general I fast before. (R, Barquinha)

Paulo Roberto, leader of the Santo Daime church, quit drinking and became vegetarian. He explains, about the diet in the forest, at Céu do Mapiá colony, that

In the jungle we don't have an option. Sometimes we have to eat leopard barbecue, because that's what is available. In the beginning we used to hunt a lot, because nothing was planted, anything we would buy to eat would cost us six days of journey. So we had to hunt. But after the seeds blossomed, and we started to have rice and beans, Padrinho Sebastião said, "It's over, now we eat only what earth gives to us, nobody kills even a butterfly anymore." (Goldenberg 1990)

### 7.3.5 Visions and Insights

Ayahuasca is, in its core, a substance which provokes trance followed by visions. Most of the drinkers of any kind of group either have regularly, or had at least once, some type of vision. However, is not rare that people may drink ayahuasca and not have any visions ever. There isn't an explanation for this variation so far.

Visions can be generally related to the amount of the drink ingested -- but not only

to that. If a person takes many full glasses of it, probably they will end up having some visions - or *Mirações*. Although this person might just vomit and not “see” anything. It is difficult to have visions with a small amount of the drink, but not impossible, especially for those already experienced with it.

The bottom line is, then, that having visions depends on both the individual, and the amount and the quality of the drink. There is no ready recipe and/or research results which can show exactly how this state is achieved under the effects of ayahuasca.

My personal experience was that the better the diet, the stronger the vision. The best experience I had was after fasting for many hours. Another time, when I went through a terrible “*peia*”, I couldn't figure out the reason for that at all.

From participant observation (informal relationships and conversations) I was able to conclude that most people do have visions, even if only once. Visions vary from geometric scenes, colors, and shapes to known or unknown supernatural deities. The word “known” here means both known to the holder of the visions and the culture in which he or she is taking the drink. There are several accounts, also, both from individual conversations and in the literature (Polari 1984) about fantastic worlds and universes, blinding lights, crystal and precious stone-like palaces and other amazing realms.

Telepathic phenomena are definitely common among ayahuasca drinkers. When Fisher isolated a crystalline alkaloid of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* he called it telepathic, thinking that it was responsible for the telepathic phenomena produced by the plant. Later on, in 1928, this alkaloid was called harmine by Elger (Fróes 1986:83).

Telepathic occurrences were never seriously researched, as well as collective journeys with ayahuasca, but in my opinion they should be, because they are so frequent. Few of my informants mentioned these two aspects of their experience in the interviews; but I've heard of these experiences so many times, and also experienced some myself.

For example, Paulo Roberto, founder of the Santo Daime tells an interesting story about an anthropologist who came to the ritual to do a study:

Then she drank the Daime and sat in a corner, observing...I entered in her mind to see what she was thinking, "How silly, they look like the Salvation Army!" The word silly was right on her mind. And in my vision I saw her sitting on the top of a pile of books. I think more than a hundred; all those she had read in her life. And she was sitting up there, looking down on us. She was analyzing and labeling everything, "Levi-Strauss talked about this, this was pointed out by Margaret Mead." It was something like that, her mind was like a computer. Then the hymn was about the spirits of the forest, and she also ridiculed that. Suddenly, when she looked at her side, there was a green man with pointing ears. Waw! This woman started to shout around the room, "There is a being here. He wants to come inside me!" She was really seeing it. When the work finished, she told us the story. (Goldenberg 1990)

I asked my informants to tell me what visions they had. Fifteen of them described some visions in detail; six said that they have mostly insights, and five others gave unclear answers.

In the process of doing the interviews I found the answer to this question flowed easily from all ayahuasca drinkers except those who don't belong to the Santo Daime group. However, among Santo Daime adepts, I noticed it was an uncomfortable question. Later on I discovered why -- it is a taboo for Santo Daime followers to talk about their visions. The doctrine's code of behavior states that a vision is something sacred, extremely personal, which should not be shared with anyone else. A person who says their *mirações* is under the risk either of not receiving them anymore or not being able to learn from them. Therefore some of the Santo Daime followers who told me of not having visions might not be telling the truth. thus I don't have reliable quantitative data in this particular case.

As I will explain later, all ayahuasca effects don't depend on settings and/or rituals. Individuals who took it by themselves and in totally diverse contexts reported much the same kind of experiences.

Magnificent *Mirações*! I see enchanted worlds. Once I drank the Vegetal, in a group of six or seven people. The music was only a soft flute. Suddenly I started to see a very little tiny point of light, coming out from this chakra, of the third eye. And that point started to draw all geometric forms of the universe, everything in electric lights, as if it was a sort of neon. And as they

were formed, the light followed them and also a sound -- a huge OOOOMMM...and exploded inside of me an enormous fire. I was a bonfire, and this fire went up to this chakra on the top of the head and exploded. It was the sound of thunder, the universe, the voice of God. It was such an emotion, I discovered the sacred fire within us.

Then all those things went on getting smaller, smaller, and I entered the realm of the ice. I traveled through the ice -- all its forms, I mean, water.

I also saw my body, my stomach, my lungs -- became aware of myself.

Once I had a wish. I wanted to meet an old friend with whom I had completely lost any contact. I entered this desire, this wish, and so the sky opened to me, so blue, beautiful. I saw on both sides very old men, like wise men, with long beards, and in the middle of them a clock. It means "the time". So I got the message: time will bring your friend back. And so it did, a short time later." (Z, Boris' group)

In my first *miração* I saw all the characters of my childhood...Snow White, The Sleeping Beauty, in the forest, with the form of an animated cartoon, really...and I thought, "Why am I seeing this?" They were all dancing... and the happiness that Snow White was feeling there, dancing in the forest with the little animals, I could feel too. I felt I was her. Then I realized, "I am receiving a gift!" I started a phase with the vegetal that was feeling: I could feel everything in my own body. I could feel as a tree, as a river...my water body going down all those round rocks, floating over them, down and down... .

I saw a lot of entities, I don't even know who they are. Once I was in a ranch in the countryside, and I saw a *caboclo* -- and he was standing up! He just stayed there, looking, still; he didn't say anything. Only stared at me. I felt very scared. At the same time I saw a mustard bush growing. I could see its growing movements. And I was asking what that man wanted, and he wouldn't tell. Then I thought, "Maybe he wants to drink the Vegetal." I told him he could help himself! I think he did it, because then he disappeared. But I could still feel his presence.

Our Lady of Conception I already saw many times. She appeared to me in many ways. She doesn't have a face. It's a sort of feminine figure, always surrounded by light, sometimes in white, sometimes blue, and always close to water, either a river or a waterfall. (P, Boris' group)

I wrote everything, I tried to get some symbols of the *Mirações* I had and study them a bit. For example, Jesus crucified, a beautiful Pieta. I tried to reach some content from that experience. I mean, an experience with a very strong collective content, so all those loose symbols didn't make sense to me. (M, Barquinha)

When I saw Christ, he lay me down on his cross [to suffer with nobody's help]. In one of the visions I had, I said, "Oh, my, Christ!" The Godmother<sup>11</sup> came and told me "you are one of us", and she gave me her hand. Then I climbed up some stairs, and when I looked I saw Buddha, Mishusama [from the Messianic church]. I started to see all spiritual leaders I knew, and some others I've gotten to know only later. That's why I remember this *miração*. They were all there. The Christ appeared. When I saw him, it was pure light. Then I said, "Christ, I identified so much with you during my life." Then he said, "you didn't identify yourself with me, I was you." Then he entered inside me and I became large, only light! I threw that light to the whole world, it was gorgeous. What a power, what a consolation.

In another vision he lay me down on his cross, and I actually fell on the ground, with the arms opened. People were telling me [for real] to stand up, but I was OK -- it was a work of a lot of courage, a lot of struggle. (AC, Santo Daime)

One hour and a half later, I had, like that guy was saying, the *borracheira*. It was very intense, I would close my eyes and things would start coming up, and that was a very interesting experience, very rich. It lasted eight hours, and I was the only one in the group who had it. I believe it's because I'm not a very repressed person. I have some courage to go into these trips. It was personal relationships, sensations, and fabulous geometric visions. I would close my eyes, and they were gorgeous geometric structures, and very colorful -- it was an unbelievable beauty. And a sensation of loneliness, of emptiness, and then reliving facts of my life, my own story. I experienced this with a lot of intensity and perplexity, because I realized that it was an area of mine which I didn't know. (SM, no group)

The thing never hit me as a religious thing. I saw my childhood, my future...not everything happened, there's a lot of folklore out there...I have always been afraid of dogs, something very weird, because in my life I crossed moments much more threatening and dangerous than a simple dog. Any dog! Then I took Daime and had a *miração*. I saw myself very small, being bitten by a dog. I called my mother and she told me that this had actually happened, when I was three years old. An enraged dog bit me on the face and I almost went blind. Another vision I had was about the place where I was born. I had always been told that I was born on the Acre river, but in that vision I saw myself very small, being born in the Purus river [an affluent of the Amazon river]. Then my family confirmed that it was true. But I never saw beings, entities, none of that." (E, no group)

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<sup>11</sup> Godmother, "Madrinha" in Portuguese, means the female person who works a guide in the Santo Daime and Barquinha cults.

I saw a gigantic web, the web that connects us to all. That tissue, almost at an atomic level, that gigantic web, connected to everything, between people...when people walk, their movement connects them to the earth, to other people, to everything. When I watched that, I understood things that I could understand only theoretically before. I started to understand energy, telepathy, why things reach us... I also saw spirits of nature. A huge tree spirit was giving me energy, once. And I kept this altered state of consciousness up to now, each time I have a new understanding. (L, Boris' group)

Some people see the most diverse things. I see a scene. What I see frequently is the chain of feelings and thoughts of a relationship... I already saw places that we call the astral, that don't belong here. A very blue place, but populated with energy, we can see those beings' contour, but they are not humans. (Boris)

The BG, princess Janaína, the king Titango, beings of the forest. They show up in the visions. In the visions I already saw Ogum and Iemanjá. She is a princess of Our Lady. Our Lady is the empress, Iemanjá is the queen of the sea, but is below Our Lady. It is difficult to explain. Ogum is the saint warrior. (Paulo Roberto, Santo Daime founder)

### **7.3.6 Insights and Other Non-Visual Experiences**

Despite being known mostly as a powerful hallucinogen and being labeled a “vision” agent, this is only the first aspect which makes people feel curious about the drink. Once people start drinking it regularly, it becomes clear the ayahuasca “trip”, tradition, or teachings encompass much more than simply the production of extraordinary visions.

The sensations or insights are as frequent and as fundamental in the whole ayahuasca experience as the visions. It is very mysterious indeed that people can change so much with, or be so impressed by ayahuasca without having any visions. But they do change, many times only by having remarkable insights. So it is common to see newcomers anxiously awaiting their first big vision, while old drinkers know this is not what ayahuasca really is about. What matters is the results the experience as a whole imprints on each person's life. We can even point out that insights, and not visions, are the most frequent experience for everyone who drinks ayahuasca. Yet, many individuals don't get either one

for a good length of time.

All this time -- it was two years, in total -- most of the times I got in touch with experiences of much suffering, really. Nothing wonderful, only contact with a deep pain. It was the world's suffering. Today it already modified a lot, but it is still this, very much. I never had those visions, never saw any mythical, legendary character. After this phase I had a real consciousness expansion, but nothing to do with images or colors. (V, no group)

It started in me a concern, something saying, "Look, pay attention for not to stop breathing"... some concern with the body. One hour later I lost completely the notion of time and body...I also had very strange sensations, like knowing -- don't ask me how -- what is it like to be a frog, and a bird, what they feel-- something that is imprinted in some DNA memory, whatever. (S, no group)

My work is done at the sensation level. I never had this thing of visions, like many people talk about. It also doesn't come in the form of dialogues. Sometimes, some thoughts come, things relative to the present moment of my life; kind of explanations on why I am crossing this or that issue. It is as if I entered another level, and it's not always that I succeed in doing that. This doesn't depend on the amount of Daime: it depends more on personal availability to be there, to go for the light. (R, Barquinha)

Well, my experience varies a lot. Normally I don't have a lot of visions. When Daime gives me something, it's on the understanding level, an understanding related to emotions..., sensations of communion and love. Mostly what I see is only geometric scenes. (CM, Santo Daime)

I stayed some four months without going to the Santo Daime. When I resumed, I felt very bad again. But in the next work I received the greatest gift. I felt the presence of God and I received the gift of healing. God was saying to me, "I'll give you the gift of healing". Believe it or not. I always worked with massage, but only for friends. ... Is it true that I have this capacity, to help people? But deep inside me I knew it. (RA, Santo Daime)

This visual mediumship is very special, that people work on inside the Daime, but it is something slow. My work of *mirações* is still small, it exists but it is small still. Only recently I started to develop more meaningful results in this sense. (AL, Santo Daime)



### 7.3.7 Physical Cures

Many people either got cured of some illness inside them or heard of other people who got cured, by ingesting ayahuasca regularly. During my research there were nine people who gave accounts on this particular aspect of the drink. Physical cures seem to be prevalent, even if the person is not taking ayahuasca because of this exact reason. It is well known that the drink has been used intentionally for curing purposes (Dobkin de Rios 1972; Lamb 1988) by individual healers in Peru and Colombia (Taussig, 1987). There hasn't been a complete study published so far on the curative powers (physical) of ayahuasca, but it is believed by many the brew can help to heal. My experience is that any person involved with it for a long time has stories to tell about the curing properties of ayahuasca.

At that time I used to weigh, more than 200 pounds (102 kilos)... Then I started to see my body inside...every organ, in the smallest detail. When I arrived at the intestines, I said, "Oh, my, it is like the Earth!" Everything gets transformed and circulates there. I saw my intestines working. And a voice went on saying, "You are taking care only of your spirit, but your material body is very sick, very bad"... After I had this vision, this "class" on my body, I took seriously a treatment to lose weight. Daime also helps losing weight, it's diuretic. (AB, Santo Daime)

Then one of the consequences was that I totally quit any kind of addiction. I can't understand, now, how I was able to drink. I stopped smoking cigarettes instantaneously... I started to discover a lot of things which I already knew but that in reality I wouldn't put into practice, because I couldn't feel the effects of that. But with the Daime these things became clear and began to work for me. Such as the need to change my diet, to pray every night, to feel lighter, with more energy to perform my daily walks. Finally, my life started to change under all aspects, and one of the things is that I became healthier, to have more physical energy, more resistance... In five months I changed completely. (G, Barquinha).

I think that ayahuasca cures. If you open up to it, like anything else, it can cure. It is a great accelerator for cure. I healed myself, in a very intense healing process... I had a lump in my breast, and I managed to eliminate it. But I believe the greatest cure was on the emotional level ... The lump in the breast was cured due to an understanding of a big resentment, a big emotional wound. I only discovered this lump after I was taking the vegetal. (L, Boris' group)

Well, I already took part in many stories of healing, many cases, but I prefer to talk about my own. I had many tumors in the uterus, with bleedings and everything, and I never have any of that anymore. I also had a period of my life with a lot of acute appendicitis, sand in the kidneys, a lot of physical stuff, and after I took Daime I had nothing anymore. A short time ago I had a serious problem in the bones of my knee, everybody wanted me to go for surgery by all means, I refused to go, and I am cured. If I have a flu, anything -- I cure it with Daime. For any illness, for me and my children, there is no other medicine --only Daime. (TT, Santo Daime)

Daime facilitates your diagnostic, like a doctor. It helps to see your situation, then you yourself can enter into a curing program. It doesn't cure by itself, it is necessary to have an active participation. About physical cures, the answer is paradoxical, ironical, like Brazil itself. I know a doctor who was able to cure himself of a tumor in the pancreas. (GR, Santo Daime)

Addictions, alcoholism, cocaine, it is very big the number of cures in these areas. (JA, Santo Daime)

I quit smoking after I joined the Santo Daime. I also became much more tranquil, I was very agitated... I take it even for common colds. (MM, Santo Daime)

Boris thinks that individuals who live in rural settings look for the Vegetal for curiosity, while the city dwellers look for it more for healing. I asked him what are the most common illnesses that people present. He answered:

Illnesses of the nervous system, ulcers. This system originates other kinds of illnesses too, but it is the main origin. I knew a woman that would wake up everyday with the eyes swelled. She drank the Vegetal with me for awhile and got cured. It was the nervous system. Ulcers, hemorrhoids, stomach problems in general are easier to cure. Some people quit drinking, others quit smoking.

### **7.3.8 Past Lives**

Accounts of past lives, or what drinkers experience as past lives, are also frequent. From the 26 informants, four talked explicitly about this kind of experience, while six others mentioned it in the interviews.

Then I had many experiences. One of them was really funny, I don't know if it's my mind's craziness, or a past life experience, who knows. I saw myself in Britain, and all the view, all the critics of this British kind of barbarian. I had a lot of fun! I never had any specific relation with Britain. And I came back home driving... it seemed so ridiculous, to be inside a car! Because my relation was with a horse, I could feel my whole body as another body, of another individual, in that time. (S, no group)

There was a phase in which I burnt past lives. One especially was very strong, in the Orient, I guess it was Egypt. I was going on the top of an animal, on a kind of rug. I could feel the walking balance on the top of that and I was sitting very erect, and that sand, all that place. It was as if I was that body. It is very easy to identify it as a past life, you can see beings and not feel that you are them. (P, Boris' group)

I definitely saw a past life. There was an initiation, I heard the voice, it was fantastic. I was a person, thousands of years ago. I was offered a crown of glory, and I said, "I don't want that, I want *mithra* [from Mithraism - I didn't even know that this existed!]. I want God, I don't want this crown, I want nothing from Earth." Then they crowned me and gave me a sacred beverage to drink. Afterwards [for real] I told a friend, and he gave me a book on Mithraism to read. And the initiation in Mithraism is like this -- at the very moment the person has to renounce a crown of glory, gold and precious stones [I saw this crown in the vision, like that] to become a soldier of Mithra. And the animal that they venerated was the crow...I always had a strong interest in crows. Since I used to live in the fields in the south of Brazil, where I was born, I used to stay at the window watching them. I liked them because they fly so high, and only eat leftovers. They don't kill to eat. (Z, Boris' group)

In some hymns, mainly those about our Lady of Conception, I saw weird things, mirages, places where I already lived, identification of past lives. That's when I started to accept, with conviction, the reincarnation. The [catholic] belief talks about resurrection ... today I have the plain conviction that death doesn't exist, there is a transition, to another life. I became convinced of karmic events. (G, Barquinha)

#### **7.4. Results and Consequences: How do People Change as the Result of this Experience?**

The ayahuasca experience is definitely a remarkable, and radical transformation for the vast majority of individuals who go through it. Of my 26 informants, only one said that

this experience was like any other in life. All the rest of the people told me how profound and important it was in their lives, to the point of causing personality and diet changes in a lot of them.

I collected statements in this sense, from all of them; however, I will transcribe here only the most significant. To enlarge the scope of understanding of the meaning of this experience for the informants, I will add some information on their lives' stories.

G (Barquinha) is a 56 year-old man, who struggled tremendously in life to obtain what he wanted. He came from a poor family in the northeast of Brazil, and at 14 years of age moved to Rio, to work and study hard. He managed to graduate from a Law college, and therefore was able to establish his own business and climb up the social hierarchy. He is a man of firm opinions. He has always been religious in his own way, following Catholicism somehow. As he defines himself, "I don't consider myself anything important, but what I acquired, in relation to what I was...I am a person, not complete, because this is rare, but there in my native town I am considered a person who came, saw and won."

G amazed me because of his intense transformation due to ayahuasca at this point of his life. Through the "sacred brew" he was able to quit alcohol -- a persistent addiction through his whole life -- and even change his diet, in less than five months. He told me,

I joined it with body and soul, getting better, dedicating myself. So one of the consequences is that I quit any addiction. I can't understand, now, how I was able to drink. I stopped smoking instantaneously. I started to like parsnips, spinach, vegetable soup...and I ended up becoming a vegetarian! I started to feel that every time I would eat meat the works would get heavy, and how light they were when I didn't eat meat... My life started to change in all aspects, and one of the things is that I gained more physical energy. However, on the other hand, it was not a material aim anymore -- there wasn't anymore the concern of earning more money. I started to feel the need to think of others, to help others. Before I was much more materialistic, I would only see my side in the everyday work. Then I became a lawyer who is interested in the other's reasons, too... All this in a very short time. It was a real change, a fantastic thing, people can't imagine what this is for me.

AL, from Santo Daime, is a musician, writer, and 27 years old. AL was fat, used to wear long hair and beard, and was very bohemian. By the time of the interview, he had lost a lot of weight and became thin; he didn't have a beard and became a very serious, non-bohemian individual, who would go out mostly to attend meetings at the Santo Daime church.

I think I am a good case of the transformation that Daime provokes in people. There are religions that people enter and follow but don't transform themselves too much; I think this is almost impossible concerning the Santo Daime. I was a completely different person, even physically; I used to think and behave in a completely different way, and I was very firm. I was very attached to myself and my lifestyle. People who knew me before can hardly believe this transformation, moreover because I was so different physically, to start with.

MM, of the Santo Daime, is 30 years old. He is an unemployed actor, born in São Paulo who came to Rio to further his professional life. He now lives inside the Santo Daime community, in the surroundings of the church, with his wife who I also interviewed for this research.

In truth, this physical transformation is only a reflection of an inner transformation -- the conquer of a light which comes from Daime, a serenity, a flame, an enlightenment, an inner peace that you get inside Daime and which becomes your mission to keep it going throughout your life... So all this changed in my life. I don't go out at night as much as before anymore. I don't go to discos anymore. I lost a lot of the material and professional ambition I had...I think that nowadays I prefer to live a simple life, not miserable, but simple... I think that we learn to respect more the other people. We learn to love.

But when I came back home, in the first week, some fifteen days before the second Daime work, my behavior started to change... I began to pray, to have more love, to be a little different. To respect God more. To start seeing God in people. To be more humble... Sadness, depressions, envies, rages, I can say that a lot of these things died in me. Depression, anxiety and sadness, these died forever... I received a lot. Even materially speaking my life became much better... Daime gave me so much joy of living that I went on losing my ambition -- that thing of "I will be rich and famous"... Daime showed to me that you can be strong and healthy by helping others, and not only by doing gymnastics to become more handsome.

GR is an American free-lance writer and journalist, 40 years old, who moved to Brazil in 1974.

I was a Jew on my ID card, in the same way that the Brazilians are Catholic... I became skeptical, in the same way that I was skeptical about being American. Daime taught me to be Jewish. I was a materialist, I didn't connect with the real meaning of the rituals. Daime taught me what religion is, in practice... For the first time, I felt what it is to have a family, to be in a fraternity. Today I feel I have a family, a blood family. Before, being in a group for me was the same as being limited, confined. (GR, Santo Daime)

Paulo Roberto, Santo Daime founder became vegetarian after drinking Daime. He told me,

Before Daime I used to drink a lot, when I saw I had quit drinking, not even knowing exactly why. You come with a heavy energy to the works, you won't enter the sky, you'll go to another place. Through trying and suffering the consequences we learn. You eat meat, you vomit, then you learn that meat is not OK.

## 8. Ayahuasca Visions Throughout Time: Similarities and Differences Between Indians and Urbans

After having collected the data discussed in the previous chapter, it is interesting to compare it to data on the purposes for taking ayahuasca, and the visions of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin.

Of the many different peoples who have been using the “sacred plant teacher” -- Indians, Amazon basin Mestizos, *Caboclos* and rubber tappers of Northern Brazil and city dwellers (urban *Cariocas*, in the present study) -- each had a different set of purposes for drinking the brew, and consequent visions. I am not going to talk here about the experiences where visions are not present; the intention is to verify the power of certain symbols in each cultural context.

Common are the reports on altered perception of time, the role of the animals in revealing to humans the properties of [power] plants, the role of music in evoking visions, the attribution of spiritual life to plants,[the vision of] familiar animals and paranormal phenomena like telepathy and precognition (MacRae, 1992:22).

The key for understanding peoples' relationship with the drink is the forest. The closer the individual (and their culture) is to the forest, the stronger will be their relation to original shamanic features (including herbal knowledge) and images of nature in the visions. When the forest starts to erode, and the city starts coming closer, we observe the increasing influence of Christian religious symbols and a deterioration of local shamanic traditions in the preparation and usage of ayahuasca. This deterioration of traditional features is not meant here in a pejorative sense, although it means a painful loss of knowledge of the whole of humanity. Every time an original tradition is abandoned and forgotten, it also means that life as a whole follows; this cycle of transformation occurs continuously. It is not different with shamanism, as we see through the ayahuasca cults in Rio de Janeiro -- which can still be considered shamanic, and are flexible, plastic,

continuously recreated according to the needs of urban seekers. It would be ingenuous to expect any old tradition, shamanic or not, to pass on intact through generations on the verge of the twenty-first century.

This Mestizo shamanism is a direct heir of the indigenous shamanism, whose secrets were learnt by the rubber tappers, because they used to live isolated and needed the medical knowledge of the Indians... These old *vegetalistas*<sup>12</sup> are representative of a transitional shamanism, almost extinct, which still preserves the botanical knowledge. The younger *vegetalistas*, although still using *ayahuasca*, are more connected to urban life, having substituted the detailed botanical knowledge for esoteric European traditions (MacRae 1992:30-31).

The older *ayahuasqueros* are also intermediaries between the forest and the city, since they grew up in familiarity with the fauna and flora, but witnessed an increasing growth of the urban systems with the consequent destruction of the natural environment.

All the information here refers to the Western Amazon *ayahuasca* users -- indigenous and others. The material gathered by Harner (1973) from available anthropological literature refers to the South American Indian populations of that region. We should take into consideration that these are second-hand reports: indigenous accounts of this period are always told through the white man's words.

The data on Mestizo population is provided by Luna (1987) and Dobkin de Rios (1972). Their fieldwork was located in Peru alone, mostly in the cities of Pucalpa and Iquitos respectively (MacRae, 1992:28-45).

Unfortunately, I was unable to find material on the indigenous use of *ayahuasca* outside the Amazon region and/or exclusively inside Brazil. Actually, I wonder why all the early researchers - ethnographers, botanists, voyagers -- concentrated on South American

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<sup>12</sup> *Vegetalistas* is the word used by the Peruvian *ayahuasca* users and healers, as researched by L.E. Luna (1986)



countries other than Brazil (Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and Colombia). The reason might be the same as today's: if these researchers come either from Europe or the US, they will probably be more familiar with the Spanish language than with Portuguese, and will choose to research in Spanish speaking countries.

### **8.1 Purposes for Ingesting Ayahuasca**

Indians connect with the spirits, in order to: learn the mysteries of life and of the forest in general, do witchcraft or become knowledgeable of witchcraft done to them, and heal and learn secrets of the forest (animal and vegetal) useful in their everyday life.

Mestizos of the Amazon Basin are in transition between the city and the forest (Luna 1987; Dobkin de Rios 1972). Their purposes include: to cure illnesses, do divination about witchcraft done to them, know about some distant relative or friend, and get the solution to some problem involving relationships or money.

*Caboclos*, rubber tappers and northern people in Brazil seek a gathering, a feeling of community, a cure, and communication with the deities of the forest and others (Catholic pantheon and others) to learn the mysteries of life. They are also between the forest and the city. (Monteiro da Silva 1983; de la Rocque 1989; Fróes, 1986; MacRae 1992; Polari 1984)

*Cariocas* and other urbanites in Brazil seek self-knowledge, psychotherapy, a return to an idealized nature through the concept of forest, community feeling, spiritual search. They are in the city. (Soares 1990; Goldenberg 1990)

### **8.2 Visions From Ayahuasca**

According to documents left by early researchers, i.e., travelers, missionaries and botanists at the end of the 19th century and some anthropologists of the beginning of the 20th century, ayahuasca visions experienced by the indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin centered mainly around animals and sorcery.

These visions are radically different from visions told by the *Cariocas* of the end of the 20th century, and also from the northern ayahuasca drinkers in Brazil -- even those who live close to the jungle, like in the Santo Daime community Céu do Mapiá.

Harner (1973) collected some data on this subject, from other researchers' accounts, referring to the following indigenous groups: Zaparo, Jivaro and Quijos (eastern Ecuador), Conibo-Shipibo, Amahuaca, Campa, Piro and Iquito (eastern Peru) Tukano, Siona, Coreguajes, Taiwano and Cubeo (Colombia), Yekuana (Venezuela), and Takana (Bolivia). These reports are scattered and lack detail.

In summary, the meager and dispersed data on the Banisteriopsis drink experience of the tropical forest Indians tend to represent the following themes:

- (1) The soul is felt to separate from the physical body and to make a trip, often with the sensation of flight.
- (2) Visions of jaguars and snakes, and to a much lesser extent, other predatory animals.
- (3) A sense of contact with the supernatural, whether with demons, or in the case of missionized Indians, also with God, Heaven and Hell.
- (4) Visions of distant persons, "cities" and landscapes, typically interpreted by the Indians as visions of distant reality, i.e., as clairvoyance.
- (5) The sensation of feeling the detailed enactment of recent unsolved crimes, particularly homicide and theft, i.e., the experience of believing one is capable of divination. (Harner 1973:155-173)

Villarejo for example, reported that

One under the control of the narcotic sees unroll before him quite a spectacle: most lovely landscapes, monstrous animals, vipers ... one sees who are true friends and those who betray him ... he takes part in fantastic hunts ... the things which he most dearly loves or abhors acquire in these moments extraordinary vividness and color, and the scenes in which his life normally develops adopt the most beautiful and emotional expression. (Villarejo 1953:190-91)

Reports like these sound even funny to contemporary anthropologists like myself, due to the exaggerated tone of the descriptions. If we browse through literature on past encounters between Westerns and Indians, referring to any field, we see this kind of hyperbolic language widely employed to describe indigenous habits in general. This is true for North American, European and South American literature. The first men who came in

contact with Indians were at the same time astonished, marveled and horrified by them -- no wonder they called them “savages”.

At the same time that (in my own experience) a journey with ayahuasca can be something definitely fantastic and truly remarkable in one's life, it's not always like that; and it's really interesting to notice the difference in language (used to describe it) between these accounts and contemporary reports such as those by informants in this study. The bottom line is that, nowadays, with virtual reality machines, computers, videos and other wonders, the language employed to define experiences with the unconscious mind and the supernatural has lost some of its intensity. For the Indians, the universe was magical, unexplained and unexplored, full of exciting and dangerous surprises. For us, science explains many of our fantasies and ghosts; we live in such predictable habitats, the big cities. We go to the supermarkets; we don't have to hunt. If we don't find what we want, we go to another store. Therefore, what I encountered in my informants' language was secrecy and discretion about their own visions. In some of them even a certain “no big deal” attitude.

Besides, now many anthropologists have also drunk the Banisteriopsis brew -- at least in Brazil. In 1973, when Harner published Hallucinogens and Shamanism, very few had done so yet.

### 8.2.1 Flying

The sensation of flying caused by the drink is recounted by Indians and also by urban *Cariocas*, only these two populations don't employ the same words for it. Indians would first connect it with basic shamanic techniques and needs, such as flying away to “recover a person's soul”, or “to kill a distant person at night”. (Harner 1973; Eliade 1972) Informants talk about seeing places, but don't describe this exactly like “flying”. I can imagine that to an Indian who had never been in an airplane, feeling like flying was a real wonder. For modern individuals, it means more the process of getting into the vision than any other thing. It would be described more like leaving the body.

In this sense, the words of Villavicencio are contemporary. “They [Zaparo] feel vertigo and spinning in the head, then a sensation of being lifted into the air and begin an aerial journey” (1858:372).

Personally I feel ayahuasca's power, or strength, either in the way Villavicencio describes or in an opposite way -- as a force who hits from above, pulling me towards the ground. Or even both sensations alternately. It was described by Reichel-Dolmatoff as “the person feels and hears a violent current of air, as if a strong wind were pulling him along” (1975:173).

### 8.2.2 Heaven and Hell

Descriptions of going to heaven and hell also abound in early accounts. If an Indian was converted to Catholicism, these words would appear in his vocabulary linked to ayahuasca experiences. In a traditional shamanic way, as described by Eliade (1960), for example, some Indians believed that if a person went to hell maybe he or she wouldn't come back. The Siona believed that if the person wasn't a powerful shaman, “He might not know how to get out of there and might have to remain.” (Placido de Calella 1944:747)

What the Indians call “hell” can be translated, into the urban Brazilians' language, as the *peia* (pay-ah). The *peia* is a journey through a person's inner hell, when the person crosses, with the help of ayahuasca, difficult passages related to their personality and spirituality (i.e., mistakes of the past, bad patterns and habits, aspects that need to be changed). Living in a psychologized society, obviously the meaning of “hell” will be a psychological hell, not a religious or just a moral one. Hell, then, becomes a personal issue more than a culturally shared concept.

In the Santo Daime cult, however, we find the concept of hell containing a mix of what I mentioned before and the old Biblical interpretation as well. This is because the Santo Daime is strongly based on a moral code (sins, regretting, asking for forgiveness,

humiliation) on the grounds of Catholicism. This morality, on the other hand, is intermingled with Rio's contemporary norms of behavior and psychological interpretations (freedom of thought and actions, use of drugs, intellectual sophistication).

### 8.2.3 Snakes and Jaguars

The visions most commonly reported for all tribes are of snakes ... and of jaguars. (Harner 1973:160)

These were so widespread that Reichel-Dolmatoff's (1975) book is even called The Shaman and the Jaguar. Among my informants, none reported having ever seen a jaguar. Snakes and other animals were occasionally seen by the people in Rio, , but visions of human figures are much more predominant than animals. We can say, in general, the *Cariocas* see deities with a human form, and spirits of nature who are not human or animal.

Villavicencio writes "They begin to see terrible horrors out to devour them" (1858:372). It is interesting to note that the dichotomies "killing/being killed", "bewitching/suffering the consequences of a witchcraft", and "devour/being devoured" are pretty much what survival in the forests was about, for the Indians. Their visions with ayahuasca, then, follow these notions.

Again, within the psychological and shamanic (using shamanic in a way different from the Indians, as we saw in the chapter on Brazilian religions) frame of mind, the descriptive vocabulary becomes simpler. Informants don't talk about something trying to devour them, they just refer to "a difficult passage", as I described the *peia* before. It raises the question of whether the greatest enemy to modern individuals is themselves. According to informants, the enemies to be defeated (which would metaphorically "devour" them) are always bad personality traits which need to be recognized and modified. As this informant, from the Santo Daime, points out:

The children of God who want to fight evil, inside themselves...inside your mind, where God lives, where the light of the Daime lives. Evil comes, we throw it off: not to judge, not to badmouth, not to criticize. This is the evil we have to fight against.

#### 8.2.4 Teachers and Guides

The jaguar, symbol of strength, power and agility in the forest, model for every hunter, is also a symbol of wisdom and a teacher -- a spiritual guide. (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975). It "... appears to the sorcerer ... and tells him everything he wants to know, including the whereabouts of the intended victim." (Carneiro 1964:10)

For the urban *Cariocas*, the teachers are human deities. Depending on each ayahuasca cult, and on each person, different deities appear. Since all cults in Brazil are based on Catholicism, Catholic saints such as Saint John the Baptist, Saint Michael, Saint Joseph and others are commonly seen. Jesus Christ and Mary are regularly seen by ayahuasca drinkers of any cult, mainly in the Santo Daime which focuses a lot on these two spiritual beings.

A Siona Indian reported to Chaves, "Then I went through the water to the place where the anaconda is found, who is the mistress and mother of fish; she has the form of a woman, and lives in a big house in the water where all the fish are born" (1958:131-2).

In the same manner that this Indian saw a goddess of his culture, the woman-anaconda, *Cariocas* see their gods and goddesses. Our Lady of Conception, which is identified in Rio de Janeiro with the goddess Oxum of the Candomblé religion, is a common vision. Some identify her with Iemanjá, goddess of the sea, much worshipped in Rio because of the beaches. Other deities of Candomblé and Umbanda religions, such as *Caboclos* (a rural person who knows about plants and helps in divination), *Pretos-Velhos* (old Black slaves, with a strong knowledge of illness and plants to cure), Indians themselves and Orixás (major gods and goddesses of the Candomblé) are also seen frequently. The Umbanda religion works frequently with what is called by its followers "invisible spirits" and "invisible helpers." Sometimes these are also seen, or felt, during ayahuasca sessions, and many drinkers believe in them.

Ayahuasca comes from nature and therefore is strongly related to it, as it is to the

shamanic religions in Brazil. Thus it is natural that urban drinkers perform this connection with nature through deities that rule over nature, like those of the Candomblé.

The jaguar was revered, honored and feared at the same time, in the same manner as the God of the old testament. It could make an Indian feel empowered, if the jaguar as a deity was giving teachings and revealing secrets.

### 8.3 Techniques of Cure

Harner (1973) talks about visions of Indian demons that are also doctors. The Indian doctors were also the sorcerers -- the shamans. In the Afro-Brazilian religions, we see this concept represented in some deities (Exus), who can do good and bad, and in some individual priests and priestesses (male and female shamans) as well. But when a doctor appears to the *Cariocas* in their visions, it is a good doctor, a person who cures.

After this particular kind of demon doctor leaves, the shaman usually sees an Indian demon who enters the patient's body to suck out the intruding object causing the illness (Harner 1973:161).

We know that sucking out the physical object which was sent through witchcraft to produce the illness is a traditional shamanic technique.

*Cariocas*, instead, see themselves on the ground, or on a table, being operated on by a group of doctors, sometimes angelic beings, dressed in white. This was stated, for example, by Padrinho Sebastião, leader of the Santo Daime community in the north. He is not a *Carioca*, but he saw himself lying on the ground while being operated on by angelic beings. After that, he recovered from a persistent disease.

This kind of treatment and surgery is very commonly performed by spiritist groups in Brazil. They offer spiritual surgeries, i.e., surgeries in which the person doesn't need to be physically present. Some people report having watched their bodies surrounded by doctors dressed in white, and witnessing the whole surgical process. We can again think that this

vision is shaped by the cultural context established by the Brazilian religions Umbanda and Spiritism.

#### **8.4 Core of the Ayahuasca Experience**

A sense of experiencing first-hand contact with the supernatural seems to become almost routine with the aid of the Banisteriopsis drink (Harner 1973:165).

This is true of the informants in this study as well, and also the reason for my curiosity about the drink in the first place. It was like this for the Indians, and it is the same for contemporary individuals. I extend this statement beyond the interviews of this study, to include every person with whom I have talked to about ayahuasca experience, up to now. Why it is like this is not known so far; but the fact is that ayahuasca definitely provides an experience centered on spirituality.

#### **8.5 Collective Journeys and Clairvoyance**

Harner recounts the Indians would frequently see, during a journey with ayahuasca, “cities of the whites which they cannot identify but whose reality is unquestioned” (1973:167). This was perceived by him when living with the Jivaro Indians during his fieldwork, and also mentioned sometimes by other researchers.

Roessner writes about an unidentified tribe in the Ucayali River in Peru, “Who frequently practice the use of ayahuasca sit at times together, and drinking it , propose that they all see something of the same subject” (1946:14).

Clairvoyance, telepathy and collective journeys in which everybody partakes of the same vision, are considered routine among ayahuasca drinkers in Rio de Janeiro. Collective journeys are almost a rule in the Santo Daime community, in which people sing and dance together, probably inducing similar visions. I myself had this experience in the Céu do Mar church. This is a point to be further explored, since these kinds of effects have not yet been



taken seriously by researchers in most fields.

## 9. Conclusion

### 9.1 Ayahuasca Phenomenon in Rio de Janeiro

Having analyzed the data brought by the 26 people interviewed here, as well as other material drawn from pre-fieldwork and fieldwork experience, some objective conclusions can be clearly stated from this study.

If we contrast the general use of ayahuasca by diverse populations through times, and compare it with the answers given by the informants of this study, we have the following findings:

(1) Ayahuasca definitely provides an experience linked to spiritual issues in an individual's life. Questions of highly philosophical and religious nature seem to come up under the regular use of the drink. These include questions about: religious beliefs, ethos, the meaning of life and values, our ultimate direction in life, our relationships to other human and non-human beings, as well as with the whole planet.

(2) The cultural environment definitely shapes not only the visions but the whole relationship with ayahuasca. Cultural symbols of everyday life, as well as religious symbols, determine the nature of visions and insights in a great extent.

(3) The physical sensations, pleasant and unpleasant, are inherent to the brew. The sensations vary in degree and quality according to each mixture of *Banisteriopsis* and other plants, and to the way that the brew is made (varying according to ritual used, strength, and freshness). Similar physical sensations have been reported by the Indians, the people of the north of Brazil and the informants of this study.

Taking into consideration only the data provided by *Cariocas*, we also see:

(1) *Cariocas* clearly seek out the experience with the drink as a means of self-knowledge, in a psychotherapy fashion.

(2) A strong attraction of the drink lies in the possibility of direct contact with the divine. This behavior is deeply related to the strong characterization of the Brazilian

religions as shamanic religions in their essence. In this sense, ayahuasca cults offer to a certain segment of the population in Rio de Janeiro the possibility of relating to and exploring shamanism in places other than the traditional Afro-Brazilian cults.

(3) Contemporary Brazilian ayahuasca cults in the cities like Rio de Janeiro can be defined as a phenomenon of urban collective shamanism. Founders of the three groups in this research had an initiation that fits into the classical shamanic initiation process (strong illness and cure, fasting, visions and symbolic death). It is “collective” because all participants are actively involved in the rituals, sharing the same possibilities with the drink as the group leader. All have the same access to knowledge and healing, either through songs, dance or both. This is a characteristic opposite from indigenous shamanism, where the shaman was most often the only one to experiment and control the use of the hallucinogenic plant.

(4) A main reason for looking for ayahuasca is the disillusion with some of the core values of our times and of the Western culture. These include an emphasis on consumerism, materialism, individualism; the dissolution of the family, the community; and the devaluation of the old (old people, old traditions and old ways of life). In this sense *Cariocas* are looking for new values through the experience with ayahuasca, such as: love (primarily), communion, spirituality, peace, and self-knowledge.

(5) Many of the people in Rio who either took or are taking ayahuasca belong to a segment that was placed by Soares (1990) in the “new religious consciousness” movement. This trend or characteristic maintains that this segment of the population integrates religion into their lives not following only one path but by browsing and selecting philosophies from various religious/spiritual/alternative groups. These individuals incorporate certain features and specific beliefs related to the concepts of energy and work (spiritual work), and to ecology, which led Soares to employ the term “ecological mysticism.”

(6) The effects (similar) and the visions (diverse) occur for any individual who drinks ayahuasca, no matter if they are in a group or alone while doing it. A certain group,

with a certain ritual, will shape the whole experience in a particular way. This doesn't mean however, the same kind of experience can be achieved only inside that specific setting. Although very few individuals who took part in this research have drunk ayahuasca alone, their experiences don't differ from those who have always taken it in groups.

(7) Cures, telepathy and clairvoyance are part of the ayahuasca experience for many *Cariocas* and need to be further researched. These features were also present within Indigenous societies who took the drink and therefore could be considered a priori, also inherent to the drink itself.

(8) The three groups researched have different kinds of rituals and indoctrinations. The Santo Daime is the one which congregates the greatest number of adepts and the most rigid structure. By the time that the Santo Daime had a fixed number of approximately 250 *fardados* (not counting more 250 non-members) in the Céu do Mar church, the other two groups. Barquinha and Boris' have less than 60 people between them. Boris' group centers mainly in individual's self-knowledge, working almost as a meditation group. Barquinha was only initiating in Rio and wouldn't offer a definite profile of what it will come to be. Some of the members in these two groups were in the Santo Daime before and wanted an alternative place to continue taking ayahuasca. On the other hand, Boris states that some members of this group also moved to the Santo Daime. This only confirms the findings of Soares (1990) on the "new religious consciousness" (see chapter 3).

(9) No matter what line of work they carry, every group performs some kind of ritual. Ayahuasca is freely distributed in all of them, following the ritual observances.

The three groups studied here congregate the same kind of population segment, but with a different set for each group.

The people in the Santo Daime look for a structured experience with the drink, with many of the answers already built in to the cult. It is a religious group to its core, and this is openly offered to those who go for it. Many individuals who don't have a religious attitude

at first, invariably acquire it on their way to becoming adepts. The strong emphasis on the forest and ecology within this doctrine are also a factor of attraction for many *Cariocas* (Goldenberg 1990; Soares 1990). Another important factor is the frequency of numerous famous people, mainly TV actors and actresses, who are extremely valued and imitated in the Brazilian culture.

Boris' group offers a more flexible ritual, in which individuals can participate with a less religious and a more psychological attitude.

Barquinha stays in between the two, tending more to the psychological experience. As its founder in Rio, Phillippe, mentioned, Barquinha places a strong emphasis on practicing charity and this would be a main direction to be followed by the group.

The strength of the Santo Daime and the way it has been widespread, including in the media, in the last eight years can't be compared, in Rio alone, with these other two groups and the few participants in each one. While Barquinha had an oscillatory number of participants and only one *fardado*, at the time of interviews (1991-92), and Boris' group had approximately 20 people, the Céu do Mar church in Rio would gather 500 people on festival days. (This does not include the other Santo Daime churches in Rio.)

The Santo Daime is the group, or religion (many of its adepts call it a religion) which, due to the rich dynamics of its rituals (music, dance, incorporation of many Brazilian religions), attracted the biggest number of people and called the attention of the whole country. It also drew the attention of the rest of the world, mainly the US, where the drink has been increasingly exported (by UDV as well, it seems).

When I first went to Céu do Mar church (Santo Daime), the dance and some religious features in the rituals were different than eight years later. Umbanda religion is increasingly making its way in this ayahuasca cult. Some hymns were added to the hymnals. These were new hymns that already talk about urban issues compared to traditional forest subjects. Now the Céu do Mar doesn't exist in the same way as when this fieldwork was done: a radical internal rupture sent most of its ancient participants and founders away, and

its leader Paulo Roberto now lives in the Ceu do Mapiá community in the north. Meanwhile, in the whole country new Santo Daime nuclei pop up continuously, in cities and remote countryside areas.

For these reasons, much more analysis has been done on the phenomenon of the Santo Daime than on the other ayahuasca groups. At the present time no work has been done on Barquinha and Boris' group alone.

I think it is necessary to describe in detail some of the conclusions on the Santo Daime in Rio de Janeiro, due to the material already available on it. I will include here the findings of two anthropologists on the Santo Daime in Rio de Janeiro, which I consider very interesting -- Mirian Goldenberg (1990) and Luiz Eduardo Soares (1990).

## 9.2 The Santo Daime

In 1988 there was an boom of news on the Santo Daime in the media -- newspapers, magazines and TVs. In this period many television artists and intellectuals gave interviews talking about their experience with the Santo Daime, in the Céu do Mar church. During this time, a big polemic centered on the issue of drug abuse. Is the Santo Daime really a hallucinogen? Is it dangerous? Is it a drug or not?

Goldenberg relates some answers to her question, “What works as an attraction factor for the *Cariocas* in the Santo Daime church in Rio?”

- 1 - The search for self-knowledge is one of the most important elements and the drink starts being a form of “psychological therapy”;
- 2 - The direct contact with God and other deities, specially entities of the forest and nature;
- 3 - The strong link between the doctrine and the ecological struggle, centered in the preservation of the Amazon forest;
- 4 - The essential “Brazilian” character of the doctrine;
- 5 - The valorization of truth, authenticity, harmony, friendship and “return to the roots”;
- 6 - The rejection to contemporary values (1990)

My findings here support her findings, except for one -- the ecological struggle as being a main factor of attraction for people to seek out ayahuasca, in the Santo Daime cult or elsewhere.

I would say the beauty of the forest and the vision of nature as an idealized realm works as an attraction factor for some people, but is definitely not a main reason for the majority of the individuals to either look for this experience or to stay in it. Instead, what determines the inclination for staying with ayahuasca or dropping out is the intensity of personal changes occurred through the revelations brought by the drink.

It is interesting to observe that, despite the need for collectivism, contemporary *Cariocas* (who are as individualist as any American or European, and who have a similar lifestyle) interpret the importance of this experience solely on individual needs and responses. People like the feeling of belonging to a group, to a community, which shares this enchanting, fascinating drink but don't center their experience around this feature.

Another essential characteristic of the Santo Daime doctrine is launched by Luiz Eduardo Soares (1990), on a hypothesis level, but which I consider extremely important for the understanding of the whole picture. It refers to the role of the Santo Daime for the collective unconscious, or the imaginary, of the *Cariocas*, that could maybe be extended to people of other regions of Brazil besides the northeast region.

For him, the headquarters of Santo Daime in Acre, in the middle of the forest, works as a Shangri-La symbol ("the lost paradise") for the *Cariocas*. All meanings and mythologies are implied in this label. The *Cariocas*, then, who frequent the Santo Daime church in Rio, would be essentially looking for a visceral and authentic Brazil, still alive in the North. The Amazon, with its mystery based on its darkness and impenetrability, its excesses constantly renewing the cycles of death and life, its wild, enigmatic, primitive and ferocious nature, is, for the *Cariocas*, something at the same time close and distant, surreal and intimate. It is and isn't part of our reality as inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro. In this sense,

it could represent the unconscious, the full-of-life, pulsating realm which could free the urbanites from their individualistic, rational and polluted Self, giving them “pure and strong energies” still resident and generated in the Céu do Mapiá colony in Acre state. The authentic, natural, instinctive and affectionate Brazil would be located there, superimposed by the rational, cerebral, cosmopolitan Brazil developed in the Southeast.

The truth, the essence, the revealed secret of the origin (and the end) are in the primitive and archaic Brazil, as well as in the individual trajectories...the Daime proposes, in its periodical peregrinations to Acre, ritualized and secularized, and in its discourses, a reinvention of Brazil, of the “brazility”, of the national identity (Soares, quoted in Goldenberg 1990).

Despite its geographic location, what is in question is an imaginary map. The dive into Acre demands a painful journey, adventurous, fascinating, attractive, exciting, seductive ... it reminds the heroic movements, sometimes epic...there you can obtain the salvation, the knowledge, the truth (interview with Goldenberg 1990).

I was able to presence the aspects involved in this “visit to Heaven”, of some friends in the Santo Daime in Rio who went to spend some time in Acre. Of course Soares is talking about its metaphoric, symbolic dimension, and it is so much so that some peoples' world used to fall apart as soon as they would get there (This rarely happens now, because there is more information on this community in Acre). Reality, there, despite the affects of the drink, is that survival is extremely hard. These hardships include lack of food, transport, medicine and any sort of institutional help. It is truly life in the jungle. A life which can be exotic and exciting, but a life which is not easy.

### **9.3 Barquinha and Boris' group**

Barquinha and Boris' group offer a more flexible, free way to experience ayahuasca, without so many restrictions to sexuality and ethics. Their rituals and meetings are more flexible than the Santo Daime: fewer hours, fewer rules about what to wear and how to behave, less obligations -- and less control.



I see a tendency of Barquinha to grow rapidly, and this was confirmed to me after this fieldwork was finished. Now it has some 15 *fardados*. Many Santo Daime adepts will migrate to Barquinha, because it offers the same advantages without many of the disadvantages of the Santo Daime. Also its founders, Phillippe and Marilia, are therapists and ex-Daime adepts, and therefore are good (or even ideal) guides through this experience. Also, Barquinha has a center, like a “church”, although it was located in Phillippe and Marilia's office, occupying a large room and garden in the basement.

Boris' group has not substantially increased its number of members, and I think it will continue to exist as a very selective alternative for the other two groups in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro. It is known by word of mouth and so very few people are familiar with it. It poses other questions too: the members have to trust Boris only for the preparation and administration of the drink. This might seem much more threatening for some individuals than drinking ayahuasca at least with 100 people or more. For others, it offers the ideal, quiet, safe and intimate environment, with no external control by “watchers” or institutions over such a personal experience.

#### **9.4 Ayahuasca Cults as a Revitalization Movement**

Ayahuasca cults in Brazil, including Rio de Janeiro, can be defined as Revitalization Religious Movements, according to anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace,

Religion is a universal aspect of human culture. New religions are, above all else, movements toward the revitalization of man and society. Old religions do not die; they live on in the new religions which follow them (1966:4).

Ayahuasca religions in Brazil are new religious movements (which fall into different categories according to Wallace's classification). These are syncretic cults based on an old religion - Christianity - with a new set of codes and beliefs added to it. However, it is relevant to notice the conditions which create an environment for the appearance of these new religions vary radically from the north of Brazil, in Acre state, to the southeast, in

Rio de Janeiro state.

One of the informants to this research, Edilson Martins, a Brazilian writer, journalist and video maker, was born in a rubber tapper camp in Acre and met Raimundo Irineu Serra (the Santo Daime founder). He provides a remarkable account of the life in that region, since the end of last century:

I think that ayahuasca plays a fundamental social role among the religious communities of the North. Not only nowadays, but mainly in the past -- when we would register the entire relocation of a people, pushed by draughts, through social environments, epidemics like Beri-beri (which killed a hundred thousand people in 1870). So people were forced to leave their native land because of these tragic facts. And go to the Amazon, in a real exodus, in search of everything -- water, green, fauna and flora. And there they will strive, dominate; from each hundred, seventy will die. It is a hostile area, adverse, dominated by the waters, fevers, mosquitoes, Indians, malaria...and all those people desegregated, due to the nature of the Amazonian cycles themselves. All those people thrown individually inside the rubber camps, which are immense fields surrounded by jaguars, Indians, snakes, rains... and they live in houses in a walking distance of fifteen to twenty hours from each other. And stay there two, three years... I met rubber tappers who had been two, three years without seeing **anybody**, any human being. It's serious: you become a beast. You forget human language.

So, these people, scattered, with their identity practically lost, go for this no-return trip -- the semi-slavery system of Amazon wouldn't allow for a return.

Then comes ayahuasca as a religious expression aggregating, re-agglutinating, bringing mainly a social reference -- much more social than religious. *Mestre* Irineu started an organization, but in a simple dimension. It was much more an organization than a power exercise. It was the need to organize a disorganized society.

If we draw on the history of religion in Brazil, we can say that ayahuasca cults are syncretic, and definitely revitalize Catholic religion. All these three cults - Santo Daime, Barquinha and Boris' (UDV) - constitute basically a mosaic of various features from major religions that formed the Brazilian culture -- Catholicism, Spiritism (which includes European, Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian characteristics) and Afro-Brazilian religions in general (Candomblé, Umbanda, Quimbanda and others).

Master Irineu, founder of Santo Daime, saw the Divine Lady sitting on the Moon.

This initial identification with the moon led to the characterization of other celestial bodies as divine beings for the Santo Daime -- which is a cultural trait of the Indians. Master Irineu's initiation is also a typical indigenous shaman initiation (discipline, fasting and sexual abstinence). His hymns show Christian, African and Indigenous entities, and still others typical of religious syncretism in Brazil. "Juramidam doctrine is resultant of the union of the three ethnic originators of the Brazilian culture: the Indian, the Black and the White." (Froes 1986:85)

De La Rocque states "the new ritual introduces elements that 'indianize' Christian religions ... like the use of maracas, the dance in the rituals" the use of indigenous names and ayahuasca itself (1988:16), "Therefore we can say that the encounter of the Catholic priest with the Indian *paje* (shaman) and the Father-of-Saint of the popular spiritism form the base of this doctrine." Prior to Catholicism, even, we find elements of Judaism present in these new ayahuasca religions, like the Solomon Star (which is called Star of David in Judaism).

Barquinha also uses mainly elements of Catholicism but with much more influence of Brazilian Popular Spiritism than Santo Daime. On the altar, in its headquarters in Rio, we can see many images of saints which belong to Catholic as well as Afro-Brazilian religions.

The chants or "callings" (*chamadas*) in Boris' (UDV) group talk about various mingled, syncretic deities from Catholicism and Indigenous origin as well.

## **9.5 Personal Impact of this Research**

It is very hard to put into words the entire impact this research has had on myself. It is hard to encapsulate.

I wanted to be able to penetrate more deeply and scientifically into a very exciting Brazilian topic such as ayahuasca use by ordinary people like myself. On a personal, non-academic level I have been taking ayahuasca for many years, since 1983; since the

beginning of the Santo Daime church in Rio. Some of the informants of this study have been close friends for a long, long time. I already witnessed many stories related to the use of ayahuasca, good and bad stories.

On a personal, affective level, doing the research gave me an enormous happiness and an important sense of accomplishment, It was something I wanted to do, from the moment I first tried ayahuasca. It was a long, five year journey, which has included two pregnancies. The fieldwork itself was extremely fun and interesting and I got involved in it with my entire body and soul. I also had the opportunity to reconnect with friends I had lost contact with who were now also getting into this new trend in Rio. The whole process of witnessing so many lives, before after they got in touch with the drink, was extremely rich.

Personally, I think we modify our opinion hundreds of times when we take ayahuasca. I think this is a wonderful legacy of the forest to humanity, although it is difficult to use. If we manage to understand some of its messages, and not be trapped in its labyrinth, this would be a great advancement. Ayahuasca is fascinating, and dangerous.

On an investigative level, it was wonderful to chat with professors and researchers in Rio de Janeiro, from different fields, and gather their impressions on this issue. It was interesting to watch the ceremony in the Santo Daime tent in Rio Eco 92, which fortunately happened in the middle of my fieldwork. It was also interesting to attend the large panel on ayahuasca in Brazil, during this same event, which joined most of the researchers on this subject from the whole country.

On an academic level, this research was my initiation into Anthropology and the pros and cons of doing a fieldwork. As an “indigenous anthropologist” I had specific issues to deal with. It was harder, for example, to separate the person from the researcher. I learned to think scientifically and with a more impartial approach; still involved but not so passionate. I had to learn to put aside my personal and opinionated emotions relative to the groups being researched; not an easy task all the time. It was also very rewarding, I think, to go over all the bibliographic material I had collected over the years.

Finally, I feel it has been a big responsibility trying to translate the Brazilian culture in such a short and limited study. I can see there are many wonderful thinkers and researchers in Brazil, who don't become internationally known only because of the language barrier. Fortunately, this situation is starting to change - due, in a great extent, to the issue Ecology. Since the rest of the world became so interested in ecological international problems, Brazil became a center of attention, because of its naturally wealthy land. Ayahuasca became, then, an "export product", both physically and intellectually. It became famous outside Brazil (having been experimented with by other people and also known about through reports and books) therefore helping some anthropologists to make their work public. I hope the present work will definitely add to this contribution.

## **9.6 Further Questions**

This is the first time that anthropological research was done, including fieldwork, on these three groups in Rio de Janeiro. Anthropology theses have been done on the Santo Daime group in Acre, but not in Rio, as well as the Union of the Vegetal in Acre. An anthropological essay was published by Soares (1990) in Rio, on the Santo Daime, and some papers on it were also written. I don't know of any work done about Barquinha in any location; nor Boris' group, which exists only in Rio.

This research provides much ground for further study. I chose to research the three groups comparatively because of the questions regarding the use of ayahuasca that I wanted to investigate. Each one of them could be researched alone, and would provide a rich scope of detail.

It is already lacking, in my opinion, a study on relevant Santo Daime churches in Rio and their contrast with the Céu do Mapiá colony. As Soares says in his interview to Goldenberg,

The difference between the rubber tapper in Acre and the psychologist of the South Zone in Rio de Janeiro is perhaps the same that exists between the

rubber tapper and the American of Boston<sup>13</sup>. I have the impression that between the psychologist and the American there is less difference than between the psychologist and the rubber tapper (1990)

Now that Barquinha is enlarging its body, the same could be done about this group. Boris' group can also be a focus for further works. The Ayahuasca scene in Brazil is so rich and complex nowadays that future anthropological research could focus on separate aspects of this neo-tradition; religion, healing and culture being the main ones. My intent here was to draw a general picture of the relationship of urban middle class *Cariocas* with the drink, not to focus on any particular group. I didn't address here the differences between these groups.

The present study contributes to an analysis of the phenomenon of urban contemporary shamanism in Brazil. Being such a unique phenomenon, it would be interesting to see, as a follow-up, other similar studies related to the use of ayahuasca in other countries.

This research serves as a support document for studies on this subject, as well as a complement for the same in other fields of knowledge -- psychology, chemistry and so on.

On a planetary level, this study will contribute for the awareness of the need to value and preserve ancient shamanic traditions and their wonderful source of knowledge related to the natural resources -- the flora and the fauna.

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<sup>13</sup> He is talking about Boston because a group of Santo Daime was started there.

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## Glossary

*axé* - The spirit within us. Generally used for greetings by some groups and localities in Brazil. A Candomblé term.

*ayahuasca* - originally from the Quechua Indians of Peru, meaning the vine of the spirits or the vine of the soul. Ayahuasca referred initially to the *Banisteriopsis caapi*, the vine employed in the brew; nowadays it is also used for the brew itself.

*ayahuasquero* - A healer who is able to prepare and use the ayahuasca drink.

*baixar o santo* - Candomblé term, literally meaning to make the saint come down. Used when the orixás express themselves in trance possession rituals. Slang in Portuguese meaning “a sudden increase of energy.”

*borracheira* - The strength of the ayahuasca brew, when it hits the drinker during a session.

*caboclos* - Spirits less evolved than the Orixás, employed in Afro-Brazilian religions, mainly the Umbanda.

*cariocas* - Natives of Rio de Janeiro.

*collective shamanism* - A shamanic experience shared by all individuals of a group.

*exús* - Spirit tricksters in the Afro-Brazilian religions. An Exú can be good or bad, and is very close to humans.

*fardas* - Literally, in Portuguese, a military uniform. Name used for the ritual clothes in the Santo Daime church.

*fazer a cabeça* - Literally, to make the head. Candomblé term utilized for being initiated. It became a slang in Portuguese for becoming strongly touched by something, to the point of changing one's mind. Example : "The movie didn't make my head", is equal to, "I wasn't really touched by it."

*hinário* - Hymnal. Set of hymns (chants) used in the Santo Daime rituals.

*miração* - Visions obtained with the ayahuasca. A term used in all ayahuasca groups in Brazil.

*padrinho* - Godfather. A spiritual leader of Santo Daime or Barquinha churches.

*pajé* - Indigenous term for shaman and healer, applied only to Indians.

*ponto* - A place of strong spiritual powers, where rituals are performed, or entities invoked.

*rezadeira/rezadeiro* - (female/male) Healer who cures through chants, palm healing and herbal beatings. Easily found in Brazil.

*simpatia* - Superstitious small witchcrafts, employed for good purposes, such as: healing, getting a husband, a job or any other nice wish. For example, having a certain bird in the house of an asthmatic individual is supposed to cure asthma, arruda plants are good for keeping bad luck away, etc.

*vegetalista* - Spanish word derived from vegetal, a word meaning "ayahuasca". A person who drinks ayahuasca regularly.