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## **AYAHUASCA AND ITS EXPANSION IN BRAZIL: THE COSMOGONICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE THREE MAJOR AYAHUASCA RELIGIONS IN THE STATE OF PERNAMBUCO**

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**Abstract:** In recent years, traditional and new ayahuasca religions have expanded in Brazil and throughout the world. Ayahuasca, the DMT- containing drink used in these religions, induces deep mystical sensations, which attract people in search of religious experiences and new perspectives on life. This article describes the cosmogonical principles of the three major ayahuasca religions located in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, and provides a brief history of their origin in the region. As there are not references to pantheistic religions in the prior Ayahuasca related literature, this article presents a monistic religious concept and describe its epistemology and ritual aspects. Survey data regarding the sociodemographic information of followers of these religions was used to establish profiles ayahuasca followings. The results of this survey are discussed aiming to draw a preliminary picture of the characteristics of the members of these ayahuasca religions in the state of Pernambuco.

**Keywords:** Entheogens, Psychedelics, Pantheism, Mysticism, Monism.

**Ayahuasca e sua expansão no Brasil: Os princípios cosmogônicos das três principais religiões da ayahuasca no estado de Pernambuco**

**Resumo:** Nos últimos anos, as religiões ayahuasqueiras ditas “tradicionais” e “novas” se expandiram no Brasil e no mundo. A ayahuasca, a bebida contendo DMT usada nessas religiões, induz profundas sensações místicas que atraem pessoas em busca de experiências religiosas e novas perspectivas de vida. Este artigo descreve os princípios cosmogônicos das três principais religiões da ayahuasca localizadas no estado de Pernambuco, Brasil, e fornece uma breve história de sua origem na região. Como não há referências a religiões panteístas na literatura anterior relacionada à Ayahuasca, este artigo apresenta um



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conceito religioso monístico e descreve sua epistemologia e aspectos rituais. Os dados da pesquisa sobre as informações sociodemográficas dos seguidores dessas religiões foram utilizados para estabelecer perfis de seguidores da ayahuasca. Os resultados desta pesquisa são discutidos com o objetivo de traçar um quadro preliminar das características dos membros dessas religiões da ayahuasca no estado de Pernambuco.

**Palavras-chave:** Enteógenos, Psicodélicos, Panteísmo, Misticismo, Monismo, União do Vegetal, Santo Daime.

Ayahuasca is a psychoactive drink made by cooking two plants *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*, commonly used in religious rituals in South America (Lira, 2009b; McKenna, 2004; Schultes et al., 2001). It is called Yagé, Natema, Caapi, Dápa, etc., and largely used in traditional divination and healing practices (De Feo, 2003; Desmarchelier et al., 1996; Luna, 1986; Luna and Amaringo, 1991; Mabit, 1992; Naranjo, 1979, 1995; Schultes et al., 2001). In Brazil it is mostly known as Santo Daime, hoasca and *vegetal*.

Ayahuasca religions have expanded in recent years, and despite the use of the same drink, variations of the ayahuasca religion present distinct cosmogonies and different epistemologies and ontologies about the world, nature, man's purpose and reality. The ayahuasca phenomenon consists of a profusion of life and world models that informs the interpretation of reality of thousands of people. Its current expansion implies new ways of living, recreates ancient myths, and propagates the culture of the forest to urbanity and the culture of South America abroad. Further, it represents the reinsertion and reinvention of the natural aspect of human beings. The modulation of consciousness, due to programmatic practices of alteration and management, is an intrinsic tool to understand the reality in which we are all embedded. These altered (or amplified) states of consciousness improve the dynamic functions in the life of the ayahuasca drinker, *ayahuasquero*. Wakefulness (the ordinary state of consciousness) is enriched by the rituals surrounding Ayahuasca and their



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effects on the psyche of those who practice use of the drink. The Ayahuasca religions have a positive impact on their members' everyday behavior (Escobar, 2012; Lira, 2009b).

The religions studied in this research were: the Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society (APS), a neoayahuasca religion guided by Dr. Régis Alain Barbier, ex-member of the CEBUDV; the Santo Daime (SD), formerly the Igreja do Culto Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal (ICEFLU) and previously known as Igreja do Culto Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra (CEFLURIS), in which followers are guided by the teachings of Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo; and the União do Vegetal (Centro Espirita Beneficente União do Vegetal - CEBUDV), founded by Mestre (Master) Gabriel da Costa. Each of these religions use the same sacramental drink, yet differences are found in their guiding myths, in the mode of preparation of the drink, in the conduct of their followers. Shared behaviours and experiences among them, interpenetrate each other in nuances, such as ideas, actions and attitudes toward each other, only perceptible through continued intimacy.

The diversity of ayahuasca religions and their expansion seems to be based on work and common implication of the people involved. Their work's schedule expands beyond the sacred communion of the drink, demanding a proactive dedication and coordination between members responsible for the activities. There is a spatiality and temporality in which the beverage is consumed, but it doesn't exhaust the space of the plant in the lives of the members of its many religions. The success of the cooperation between different work groups depends, to a large extent, on overcoming the cultural gaps between them. This interdependence has been demonstrated by previous research (Sánchez & Yurrebaso, 2009).



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Psychedelic experiences are classified by their tendencies to promote the paradoxical conceptual coexistence in minds (Watts, 1968). Despite intra or intergroup differences between the religions, we observe points of convergence between them, namely in their discourses about Ayahuasca's acute effects and benefits. The results of investigations carried out in any scientific field should also consider the differences in ideological, imagistic and discursive interpretations of experience, seeking to evaluate the emerging dialogue and to understand the experience of expanded awareness, as well as the benefits and impacts resulting from ayahuasca rituals.

This paper aims to present results of investigation of three major ayahuasca religions in the state of Pernambuco, in Northeastern Brazil, and to describe their basic structures and distinguishing features. Here we describe a monistic religious perspective unique within ayahuasca groups. We seek to highlight the differences and similarities between these religions and identify the general profiles of their followers. The data presented here was acquired through questionnaires, interviews and participant observations made during rituals.

### **The Igreja do Culto Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal or Santo Daime**

#### ***Brief Foundational History of Santo Daime***

The Santo Daime religion originated in the early 1930s through work undertaken by Master Raimundo Irineu Serra after contact with the drink in the Amazon rainforest. Master Irineu's experience included an apparition of the *Nossa Senhora* (Virgin Mary) who directed the master to teach and rebind the world through the sacrament of the tea. The Santo Daime (a term that means “saint, give-me”, which is used in some of the religions' hymns) displays a syncretism which blends aspects of Kardecism with strong indigenous, Umbanda and other African cultural influences, and displays rural features such



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as the return of man to the forest/nature (Dawson, 2008; MacRae, 2004; Moreira and MacRae, 2011). Dawson (2008) specifies that Santo Daime presents a salvationism-based and millenarism paradigms traditionally adopted in religions in general, especially in Christian religions. The paradigm adopted by the Santo Daime establishes a very intimate line of continuity with traditional values and ethics presented in most religions.

The origins of Santo Daime mark it as the oldest ayahuasca religion in Brazil; it is widespread nationally and boasts numerous churches abroad (Anderson et al., 2012; Labate and Feeney, 2011; Labate and Jungaberle, 2011). Although there is no exact data on of the number of followers of the Santo Daime, the group's literature estimates around 5,000 members, which is most likely an underestimated figure. Founded in Acre in the 1930s, Master Irineu's religion was significant to the identity of the region's inhabitants, a people subjected to harsh working hours in the rubber forests of a region with low population density (MacRae, 1992, 2004; Moreira and MacRae, 2011).

After Master Irineu's death in 1971, the movement suffered a split into two main institutions: CICLU (Centro de Iluminação Cristã Luz Universal) also known as *Alto Santo*, led by Master Irineu's widow and; CEFLURIS (Centro Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra) or *Santo Daime*, founded by Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo. The rupture between these two groups began when Padrinho Sebastião parted ways with traditional Alto Santo practice and began healing by incorporating new rituals such as Umbanda (Alves-Junior, 2009), and adopted the use of other entheogens, particularly the ritual consumption of *Cannabis* (Goulart, 2003; MacRae, 1998, 2004). This institution has enjoyed the most success in expanding and propagating Master Irineu's doctrine throughout Brazil and abroad (Labate and Jungaberle, 2011). Due to legal issues, CEFLURIS was recently renamed ICEFLU (Igreja do



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Culto Eclético da Fluente Luz Universal) after a court decision ordered the institution to withdraw "Raimundo Irineu Serra" from its name. From here forward, the doctrine adopted by Padrinho Sebastião will be referred to as Santo Daime, and Alto Santo will exclusively refer to the original rituals and hymns created by Master Irineu. The primacy of Master Irineu's original precepts in Santo Daime's current cosmogony can be noted in the continuation of its hymns and ritual structures, however, this core is constantly being modified by the open flow of people, ideas and experiences encouraged by the counterculture ideology of the 1970s, and has permitted for greater dissemination of Padrinho Sebastião's knowledge (Goulart, 2003).

The expansionary characteristics differ considerably between Alto Santo and the Santo Daime. The first remained restricted to its region of origin (State of Acre, Brazil), while the second took syncretic settings, allowing for the coexistence of other cosmogonies such as esoteric, Umbanda, and showing greater openness to public visitation. This ability to incorporate other religious forms in Santo Daime, the acceptance of thoughts, ideologies and concepts arising from other religious beliefs, along with a greater receptiveness to public visitation, are some of the greatest factors of Santo Daime's growth (Camurça, 2003; Groisman, 2004). These expansionary characteristics differ considerably from Alto Santo, which has remained territorially restricted. Santo Daime has the longest history among the ayahuasca religions, but has had a relatively short life in Pernambuco. Its trajectory will be presented below.

### ***The Santo Daime in Pernambuco: from the Copy Store to the Céu de São Lourenço da Mata***

Marcio Galindo and Javan Paiva Seixas were responsible for the establishment of the Santo Daime as a religious institution in Pernambuco. The ayahuasca drink reached Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, between 1995 and



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1997, via a man named Hare, a São Paulo resident and ordained member of the Céu de Midam church, based in Piedade, São Paulo. Galindo first came in contact with ayahuasca beverage in 1997, when a friend invited him to visit a place where one could, "know, see and talk to spirits." Moved by curiosity, he accepted, and was impressed with what he learned; he recognized a spiritual magnificence in the ritual that led him to deepen his engagement with the religion and its practices. Seixas' first experience with ayahuasca came in 1998, at a family gathering, of which two relatives were former Santo Daime members. Galindo and Seixas met during their second encounters with the drink.

Around this time, Galindo and Seixas participated in various meetings in which the ayahuasca rituals took place in its members' homes. In contrast with those meetings organised at the church, which were more accessible to the public, the meeting that Galindo and Seixas attended were limited to those in more intimate circles. In Portuguese, these in-home rituals took on the name "Núcleo Familiar", (Family's Core). Galindo distinguishes the family core from the church primarily as place where ayahuasca is drunk in restricted way, with a limited number of people who are close and familiar with each other. The Church, he explains, is a space where "the doors are open for those who want and who need." This dynamic of drinking ayahuasca in Pernambuco lasted until the year 2000, due to a withdraw of providers of the tea. At this time, along with Seixas, Galindo began to attend a church called Céu de Campina, located in Campina Grande, a town in the interior of the neighboring state of Paraíba. There, they became formal members and were allowed to continue working in the church. It is important to understand that in the doctrine of Santo Daime, *work* refers to the practice of uniting people to perform the Santo Daime ritual, as outlined by Master Irineu and Padrinho Sebastião. *Work* also refers to the obligation to continue the work assigned by *Nossa Senhora* to Master Irineu. In Seixas' words:



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“From the year 1999 on, Márcio, my mother and I started healing ceremonies in our home and at the homes of our friends, like Heitor and Leonardo Paiva. We liked it more and more, and Heitor was responsible to get the tea from São Paulo. Around that time, we met Feliciano and Moacir, members of the Church in Campina Grande. They were both living here in Recife. That year we had had a few ceremonies, but our interest was beyond that, and this couple, Flavia and Heitor, weren't sure if they wanted to continue the meetings. When 2000 came around, Márcio, my mother and I decided to become members in order to have the rights to have the drink on our own, independent of Heitor, who, afterward, ended up leaving the following. So, Márcio got to Campina Grande in June 2000 and there became a member during the St. John festival. I could not go to the event because I was traveling, so I was only able to join on October 11th during that church's anniversary and Padrinho Alex Polari's 50th birthday, right there in Campina Grande." (Javan Paiva, cofounder of Santo Daime in Pernambuco).

In March of 2001, Galindo, Seixas, and Seixas' mother opened the first center for Santo Daime in Pernambuco, called Céu de Aldeia, located in the Aldeia area of Camaragibe, a forested suburb just beyond the urban sprawl of Recife. Céu de Aldeia elected a committee which included Padrinho Alfredo Gregório de Melo (son of Padrinho Sebastião), Padrinho Nel, Madrinha Cristina and Padrinho Alex Polari. Galindo was chosen to be the center's leader and representative. After the Aldeia location's owner refused to continue renting to





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the church, the group moved to a small space above a copy store in the Torre neighborhood, in the heart of Recife, where it remained for the next four years. At that time, the church was frequented by people of various interests, from psychonauts, a technical term for those who use mind-altering drugs in the name of self-exploration, to those pursuing spiritual and/or religious interests. The church quickly became known in Recife's underground as a purveyor of Santo Daime's doctrines, whose following was expanding. As the number of church followers and visitors increased, its spatial limitations became gradually more apparent; sessions were often interrupted by the copy store's business and, due to its proximity to urban areas, the sound of car horns and pedestrians passing by.

In 2002, still located above the copy store and supporting an increasingly large number of group members, a division among the church membership produced a new center, under the leadership of Daniel Andrade, named Céu das Matas, located in a wooded area of the city of Paulista, part of Recife's greater metropolitan area. However, with the closing of the Paulista church in 2003, Pernambuco's Santo Daime followers would be forced to worship once again above the copy store at Céu de Aldeia. That same year, construction of a new church on a donated space began in the city of São Lourenço da Mata, in the middle of Pernambuco's Atlantic Forest and far from the commotion of the city. About that same time, Galindo moved to the city of Garanhuns, Pernambuco and, though he still made the trek to attend the church regularly, he passed his leadership to Seixas. The church, called Céu de São Lourenço da Mata, remained there until December 2013, when construction of a stadium for the World Cup in the vicinity of the church necessitated another move (Figure 1), inaugurated on December 7<sup>th</sup>, to a new area located in the proximities of the town Chã de Cruz near Camaragibe. After 2009, when Seixas moved to the state of Acre, church leadership was passed on to Joaquim de Souza Leão, who still heads the church today.



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Apart from the Céu de São Lourenço da Mata church, Santo Daime is also practiced in the city of Garanhuns, Pernambuco, at the Céu das Sete Colinas under the guidance of Márcio Galindo, who leads meetings of small, intimate groups. With only 15 years of existence, the history of Santo Daime in Pernambuco is quite recent. At the Céu de São Lourenço da Mata, rituals take place following the guidelines of the ICEFLU (MacRae, 1992, 2004; Oliveira, 2010; Oliveira, 2008).



**Figure 1.** Céu de São Lourenço da Mata, a church of Santo Daime, located in São Lourenço da Mata, city in which a new football stadium was constructed to host the World Cup in 2014. In the picture, a visiting of the ICEFLU national committee. Photo: Arturo Escobar.

### **The Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal (CEBUDV) xxx**

#### ***A Brief History of CEBUDV***

The Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal (CEBUDV or simply UDV) is the newest branch of the traditional ayahuasca religions. It was founded by



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Master José Gabriel da Costa in 1961 and currently has 20,636 members from 60 nationalities (data from the end of June 2018) in eleven countries: Brazil, USA, Canada, Peru, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Italy, Netherlands and Australia (CEBUDV, 2018). As with other religions, the ayahuasca drink (or Hoasca as it is called by the UDV) is consumed in hopes of achieving spiritual growth, evolution and healing, and represents an exercise of individual faith within the strongly-oriented institutional precepts.

While both Santo Daime and UDV agree on the concept of spiritual reincarnation, and both religions show points of convergence regarding ideas of continuous spiritual evolution, UDV differs from Santo Daime in that it does not view the human spirit according to the principles of Kardecism. UDV constitutes a kind of spiritualism based on empiricism and built on the teachings of Master Gabriel. Knowledge in UDV can only be obtained by following a hierarchy and by following the rules of the religion that enable its followers to traverse hierarchical paths. This path of knowledge culminates in the conferral of the status of Master (Andrade, 1995).

UDV was founded by Master Gabriel in parallel to the expansion of the Santo Daime. Founded in the state of Acre by Master Irineu 30 years before, it is believed that the emergence of the two forms of ayahuasca developed independently of one another. Master Gabriel was entirely responsible for the institutional, organizational and hierarchical establishment of the União do Vegetal, a name coined in order to explain the unity among its drinkers and a point of convergence of understandings. The doctrine is designed to bring people together (Andrade, 1995).

The UDV doctrine has roots in Christianity, incorporating the concept of reincarnation, approaching it from a spiritual perspective, even adopting



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terminology and subtle aspects of indigenous culture. As pointed out by Andrade (1995), both UDV and Santo Daime are religions that "Christianized" the shamanic tradition of ayahuasca; shamanism is a dualistic epistemology, a concept perpetuated in both of these religions.

Master Gabriel described UDV as a movement to recreate the habit of drinking a preparation used by sages and kings in an ancient ritual. According to Master Gabriel, the Old Testament's King Solomon himself used this drink in his teachings in order to obtain purity and knowledge. Thereby, Master Gabriel rediscovered the mystery of the drink, recreated the ritual, and established the UDV (Andrade, 1988, 1995; Henman, 1986). It is interesting to note that the creation myth revealed by Master Gabriel echoes several popular Indian myths, in which plants are seen as representations of entities/beings/people. For example, there are myths of guarana, corn and cassava growing in sacred burial sites.

The origin of Master Gabriel's teachings is rooted in a strong personal conviction that the plant is crucial in helping spread the religion. Healing of the spirit has always been closely linked to the origins of UDV. By consuming the drink and entering into the state of *burracheira*, the individual may partake in the mysteries of *Astral* (the spiritual dimension) and attain necessary healing for the spirit (Andrade, 2010; Prado, 1968). The *burracheira* refers to a state within the experience with ayahuasca in which the member may obtain knowledge. There is distinction between the *burracheira* state and *mirações* (complex visual arrangements over the mystical state) in the sense that the images or visions gain a personal sense and orient or "speak" to the individual (Andrade, 1988; Lira, 2009b).



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Ricciardi (2008) points out the characteristics of change and healing in accordance with the UDV member's views and opinions, verifying that there is initially a search for experiences of spiritual significance, but that physical or material healing depend on individual will. Although the healing process does not represent a central goal of UDV's doctrines, it was instrumental in establishing the basis of the institution under the command of Master Gabriel (Andrade, 2010; Ricciardi, 2008).

With membership distributed throughout Brazil and beyond - it has achieved legal authorization in the United States - UDV today represents not only the most orderly and organized of the ayahuasca religions (Groisman & Dobkin-de-Rios, 2007) but also a pivotal contributor to the scientific investigation, through clinical and pharmacological studies, of the effects of ayahuasca on the human body (Doering- Silveira et al., 2005; Grob et al., 1996; McKenna, 2004).

### **The União do Vegetal in Pernambuco**

UDV in Brazil is divided into regions and Pernambuco belongs to the 10<sup>th</sup> Region. The history of the origin of this Region begins in the mid-eighties, when a homeopathic doctor José Laércio do Egito was teaching a course in Manaus in 1986 and participated in an ayahuasca session in a UDV Nucleus called Caupuri in this city. Dr. José Laercio realized that the vegetable was what he had been looking for a long time. As he lived in Recife (Pernambuco), and with the purpose of continuing to drink the mysterious tea, he sought to find a way how he should continue to have contact with this hoasca tea.

After a series of further contacts with the Nucleus Apuí in Bahia and other UDV masters decided to start a nucleus in Pernambuco. A Nucleus is the place where the UDV members are get together and drink the hoasca tea in a ritual



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termed session. Thus, Dr. José Laércio bought an area in the municipality of São Lourenço da Mata, Recife Metropolitan Area, and on February 10, 1988, the Authorized Distribution of Recife, today Nucleus Cajueiro, was inaugurated.

From the initial group interested in ayahuasca, there were some families from Caruaru who constantly traveled to Recife to attend the sessions and participate in the work, and whenever possible, masters from other places traveled to Caruaru to conduct sessions, at the residence of Dr. Raimundo Neto or at the family home of Dr. Ernesto Queiroz.

Since there is a rule in the UDV that once a nucleus exceeds a certain number of members (about 120) a new nucleus needs to be formed, there was a considerable expansion of the religious group and currently the nuclei of Pernambuco that belong to the 10<sup>th</sup> region are five. The following is a list of these five nuclei according to the chronological order of their foundation with their opening date: (1) Núcleo Cajueiro – São Lourenço da Mata (opening date: 10/02/1988); (2) Núcleo Pau D'arco – Caruaru (01/05/1989); (3) Núcleo Imburana De Cheiro – Abreu e Lima (15/11/1996); (4) Núcleo Mouraiá – Caruaru (21/04/2006); (5) Núcleo Mãe Gloriosa – Abreu e Lima (08/12/2009). Thus, the UDV is the oldest ayahuasca institution in Pernambuco with the largest number of followers, consisting of five nuclei, each with more than 100 members.

### **The Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society**

#### ***The insertion of a new religion in the Ayahuasca “Pantheon”***

The dissent ayahuasca religions are configured via the spread of adherents to the ideas of the original doctrines. Usually, in interactions with "Astral" or "spirit world", the follower is called to create a new institutional composition. The split can occur for political, ideological or for other reasons, such as parts



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of the original doctrine not adopted by the religious leaders (Labate, 2004; Labate & Goulart, 2005; Lira, 2009a).

The most prevalent characteristic in dissent is the continuity of the religious tradition to which they were institutionally affiliated. Thus, dissent is more often related to internal and external political problems of ayahuasca groups and their conduction clash, but perpetuates the same teachings with changes in the belief system. Several factors can lead to dissent and hence the formation of neoayahuasca groups, due to the distancing of the members of these religions, whether compulsory or not, the isolated practice of people dedicated to the study of the occultism and esoterism continues. The main characteristic of a neoayahuasca group consists of a profound reconfiguration of original ritual and a distancing from tradition, that is, the cutting off of direct relations with such early traditions that guide ayahuasca religions (Labate, 2004; Labate & Goulart, 2005; Lira, 2009b). It is the search for a new sense of use, along with the radical distancing from or removal of tradition in religious use of ayahuasca, that allows for the remodeling of ideas, guides and explanatory assumptions of their rituals and interpretations of reality.

The Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society fits this model, with a departure from the traditional UDV doctrine of its founder, especially in recreating and adapting a central mythical model, the redirection of the concept of God or the Divine, or removal this concept according to the Christian perspective. Despite the epistemological distancing, some structures and driving ritual mechanisms were maintained or moderately transformed. It is possible to observe this emergence in discourse of some conceptual links between UDV's ideas and ideologies, albeit quite modified.



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New ritual structures, chanting and ideological insertions usually add to these new ayahuasca foundations tend to remain in the field of the sacred. As Lira (2009a) observed on dissent surveyed in his study: The sacredness of infusion continues to act, so that the divine extent promoted does not evade the mystical and ritualistic atmospheres where consumption patterns emerge, and help followers to deal with the experience of entering the world of ayahuasca as in take advantage of these astral journeys towards continual reshape of themselves acts and concepts due to contact with the sacred (Lira, 2009a).

The Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society can be viewed as a movement of the expansion of ayahuasca religiosities close to neoayahuasca conceptual perspective. Its founder presents the foundational bases of the religion, according the institutional webpage (Sociedade Panteísta Ayahuasca, 2012):

Conceived over a lifetime of searching and learning, the Society emerges from the perception of the world by a person who lived 40% of his life in Europe and 60% in Brazil, subjected to various social and cultural influences. The Catholic and early Christian influences dissolved on contact with religious syncretism; esoterism; scientific studies; the practice of meditation; Yoga; the contingencies of life and the experience of expanded states of consciousness. These states of consciousness had been expanded not only provided by the practice of meditation, but





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mainly by the ritual use of sacred plants like Peyote and *Salvia divinorum* (Mexico), Wachuma - the San Pedro cactus (Peru) and Ayahuasca (Barbier, founder of APS, our translation).

The Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society was founded in 2001 and is currently led by Dr. Régis Alain Barbier, physician and French national radicalized in Brazil. Its cosmogony differs radically from UDV, the institution in which Barbier first tried the drink and of which he was a member for a long time. There is a movement towards atheism and impersonality. He says in interview “I found in the UDV a restrictive structure, dogmatic as to say, a salvationist structure, theist, built around Christianity and Judaism (...), and all the syncretism found in Brazilian religions, but I didn't find myself” (Barbier, founder of APS).

According to Barbier, Pantheism (from greek, *Pan*= all, *Theos*= God) identifies God with the universe as a whole; it is the religious certainty, or philosophical theory, that God, together with the universe and universal laws are the same. It consists of a thinking style that amplifies reality comprehension. The Pantheism practiced in the Society evolves an ethical position, a specific interest in the environment as sacred, a way to revere the natural cycles through ceremony and rituals; a way to perform mystical experiences, unite with nature, that is, the group of activities is closed to that scope in what is identified as Religion (Barbier, 2009; Sociedade Panteísta Ayahuasca, 2012). He describes it for us in his site:

A deep impulse in search of a genuine and unique experience of the sacred, towards mystical union in addition to rational and analytical sense in nature (basic trust in the good sense and aptitude for scientific methodology) leading us to progressively



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recognize the Cosmos, as a whole, as the divinity itself; to an understanding the "matter-energy" as the essential binomial creator cosmos. (...) Therefore, in the Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society, the Universe is the Supreme Being, absolute and fundamental creation itself, it just 'Is', without authorization or mandate, without the need, purpose or goal: nothing may exist before, after and outside of God-Universe; humanity is inseparable from Him.

This pantheistic nature determines that the virtues usually conferred to God are ascribed to the Universe. In the Society's view, God-Universe has all the power to be undefined, eternal, transcendent, mysterious and omnipresent. However great may be the power of science and humanity - a set of limited and finite creatures - will never be able to define and know the immeasurable universe; explanations of its origin will forever remain as theories lacking of absolute evidence - the universe will always be mysterious and transcendent.

Recognizing the Universe as the deity, it is common for a pantheistic society to cultivate feelings of reverence, love, acceptance and respect for all beings and nature as a whole. The wish to understand, accept and admire the supremacy of the universe induces ecological desire to care for nature, plants,



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animals and our fellow man (Barbier, founder of APS, our translation).

We observe the application of Arana's conceptualization to pantheism, characterizing Barbier's Society to be philosophically-oriented in the form of contemporary pantheism, non-dialectical, focused on the ethical and spiritual resources of Eastern pantheism and classical intellectual writers inspired by occidental pantheism (Arana, 2001). The Society's hope to get closer to nature is also a characteristic of other institutions such as Santo Daime and UDV (MacRae, 2004).

According Barbier (2009) pantheism considers the universe as a divine whole, therefore, the central objective is a true unity, a union of all, described as Nature. Relating God with nature, he affirms:

We are Nature, absolute and endless interdependence: the concept of God refers to the universe radically (p. 12).

Celebrates a monistic metaphysics dedication; the response to the divine concept evokes no dichotomy or spiritualist dualism; there is not, as occurs in shamanistic theories, two ontological Astral qualitatively opposite, upper and lower: there is an event, the reality, able to be described as an interaction of polar instance incorporating a unit. The Universe, essential Creator, is existentiality in absolute (p.24).



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It is clear that different interpretations have the potential to offer different types or facets of pantheism. Barbier recognizes that there are perhaps as many forms of pantheism as people; pantheists act as leaders and authors of their own religiosity, which means it is essentially a creative religion. There is a central view, defined by the presence of some essential factors: (1) the denial of the belief in the existence of a creator entity as personal and exterior, or transcendent to the universe; (2) the assertion that God is the universe itself, more specifically, the essential unity between all things; (3) the emergence of a sense defined as divine in the appreciation of the beauty, the grandeur and mystery of universal nature; (4) the intention to praise, exalt and love life and nature (Barbier, 2009; Barbier & Diniz, 2009). These represent the main distinction from APS within the ayahuasca religions network, with respect to its adoption of a monistic stance against the complementary dualism observed in the doctrination of traditional institutions (Santo Daime, CEBUDV and their dissents) (Labate, 2004; Lira, 2009b).

The ayahuasca dissidents are characterized mainly by the incorporation of a syncretic miscellany, usually involving the coexistence of distinct beliefs: Christian, African, Indigenous and Eastern (Labate & Araújo, 2002). The APS contains a mix of philosophies (eastern and western classical), and cultural trends. Its cosmogony differs sharply from the other religions in that any trace of tradition is so deeply ingrained to the new concepts that it is impossible to correlate the two religions, UDV and APS. Despite the ideological and institutional distance, it is possible to observe the persistence of several similarities related to UDV organizational and ritual structure, such as the seats as well the conversational ritual conduction. As UDV some attention is done in chosen words evoked during ritual (Figure 2). It is important to point out here the completely removal of formalization, obedience, respect, and rigidity of the rules observed in UDV rites.

The chants or texts, when sung during rituals, evoke strength, light or slow down the experience, as seen in the UDV, and similarly to the way in Santo Daime hymns. One can understand that any interventions done by the leader of the session as a report, call, song, aims to lead the individual to more safe and pleasant experience.



**Figure 2.** Symbol located on Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society express the need for some caution with the words used during the ecstasy state. “The speech doesn’t symbolize the alien, speech is everything that dominates the word, and word is power” (our translation). Photo: Arturo Escobar (04/24/2010).

### ***The design of the Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society ritual***

The APS ritual presents a certain consistency in which primordial scenery is the nature. It occurs on the last Sunday of each month and lasts about eight hours. The structural systematic operation observed was not as rigid as that observed in other ayahuasca religions (e.g. UDV and Santo Daime), but rarely changes. One of the most important differences observed from other religions is the freedom of operation and the kind of self-guidance adopted by the group.



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Despite the responsibility of Barbier to conduct the session, a kind of self-responsibility is given to people in the guidance of the session in the mindset that the sessions will work only if each member evolves on his or her own.

As a result of its monthly schedule, the Society has twelve annual meetings, and does not on average involve a dense and vascularized organizational unit as observed in other institutions. Apparently, schedules do not seem to be a fixed phenomenon, nor are they mediated by mythical characters, as observed in UDV and Santo Daime which obey norms of the founders. The meetings in APS may involve extra moments such as the preparation of tea. The functional didactic structure of the ritual here was described as follows: (i) the arrival of participants; (ii) pre-session time interaction; (iii) the fire ritual, each knowing, the sharing of words and guiding of feelings; (iv) intake of tea; (v) concentration; (vi) group interaction, stick-of-speech, the philosophical driving, and the exchange of knowledge in the light of ayahuasca; (vii) post-session times, the interaction at the meeting table.

### ***The arrival of participants***

The arrival of participants takes place in the afternoon, typically from 2 PM to about 4 PM. Participants arrive to Dr. Barbier's residence through different urban paths, beginning in city neighborhoods, and ending in the Atlantic forest. This marks a clear transition from urbanity to rurality, from the city to nature. Upon arrival, attendance is taken, and contributions to aid institutional functioning are collected. In the period during which the group was frequented by the researcher, the contributions normally ranged between 5 and 10 dollars, however, contributions are not mandatory, and there is no fixed minimum or maximum payment. Similar values are adopted by Santo Daime, in the case of visitors (non-affiliated members). The UDV this kind of contribution system does not exist, aside from donations made through the practice of tithing. In



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both UDV and Santo Daime, members contribute a fixed amount monthly. This was not observed in context of APS, that is, there are no monthly payments, and membership in the Society solely signifies permission to participate in the meetings.

***Pre-session time interaction***

Upon arriving individuals may greet each other and share problems of their day-to-day lives. In short, they interact in an informal manner, but all recognize that they have come together with the shared purpose of consumption of the tea, healing, and gaining knowledge brought by consumption of the substance.

***The fire ritual, each knowing, the sharing of words and guiding feelings***

Between 3 and 4 PM, conversation is silenced and followers are gathered around a bonfire (Figure 3). Then, Barbier makes a brief presentation of the rite and its importance to all, independent if they are new to the group or longstanding followers. At that point, those present take turns standing to introduce themselves, after which their names are repeated by the group. In addition, each individual utters a word that represents a positive feeling or expresses a desire or a longing to be reached. Everyone repeats each one of these words, which often exemplify themes such as love, friendship, understanding, attitude, happiness, eloquence, awareness, healing and firmness. The completion of this ritual coincides with the time of ingestion of tea.



**Figura 3.** Bonfire, location for the fire ritual. People gather around this fire after they drink the sacred tea. Photo: Arturo Escobar (04/24/2010).

### *Intake of tea*

Individuals serve themselves tea according to their expectations, willingness and readiness. This practice is unprecedented by other ayahuasca religions, where individuals are served with dosages that vary according to criteria of the person who serves (healer, leader or masters). There is always orientation for the beginners, which includes a decreased quantity of tea, and special attention. People serve themselves in mugs and glasses provided by the institution, gather around the bonfire, and drink together. Afterward, participants can be free to disperse within the proximity of the location. This method of consumption is very similar to that of the UDV, but without any hierarchic order in the act of drink consumption. In Santo Daime, participants drink as soon as they are served. Fruits and juices are available to participants to remove the bitter taste of tea. This practice is also observed in the Santo Daime and UDV, however, not formally embedded in ritual dynamic, and sometimes discouraged by older members.



### *Concentration*

After tea intake people usually spread themselves among on chairs in the lounge, on the ground, or on the grass, usually in silence. Finally, participants concentrate and wait for the effects of the drink, which last about 30 to 50 minutes (Figure 4).



**Figura 4.** People await the effect of tea. Photo: Arturo Escobar (04/24/2010).

### *Group interaction, stick-of-speech, the philosophical driving, and the exchange of knowledge in the light of ayahuasca*

The effects of ayahuasca are felt gradually. At the discretion of the leader of the session, Dr. Barbier, a symbolic call is made by ringing a bell inviting people to the meeting room. A similar use of the bell can be found in Santo Daime and UDV. In the APS other elements may be used such blowing a conch shell. The scattered people come to, and gather in a covered lounge with reclining chairs, spread around a center in which there lies stick (Figure 5). The leader, despite lacking a centralized role, is responsible for moderating the



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group, and leads the progression of events that occur after his speech and the speech of the other participants.

This stick, referred to as the speech, symbolizes the opening of group discussion, and is passed from hand to hand allowing for the free expression of the participants regarding what they feel, or matters raised by the group leader. There is no restriction of the themes expressed. This stick is also a musical instrument known as a rain stick, of indigenous origin. Barbier entertains participants in a conversation mixed with formality and informality, in order to meet several goals: introspection, extraversion, reflection, fun, knowledge exchange and relaxation. These discursive orientations contains a philosophical nature, with the intention of positing the assumptions of the Society and inducing reflection. This spoken interaction under the altered state of consciousness is of the essential exercise of to act on reality under the modulation of an amplified state of consciousness, which allows for wakefulness and attention to internal and external contents which emerge through the experience, in which participants seek self-control and the significance and integration of the content revealed in the session. This spoken experience is also observed in the UDV. While this is a common practice in UDV and APS, it differs substantially from Santo Daime. In this interaction individuals can deny speech/positioning in the group, thanks, storytelling, the offering music, chanting of poetry and songs, or prayers. Individuals have the freedom to withdraw from the site, as appropriate, without any major effect on the ritual. The effects of ayahuasca vanish gradually, and usually about four hours after ingestion, the session ends with a series of symbolic actions that imply the end of the process, when the stick is put away until the next gathering takes place.



**Figure 5.** Place where people come together around and engage in various conversations. The reclining chairs are distributed around a center point, containing the stick-of-speech. The environment is ornate and contains many symbols. Photo: Arturo Escobar (04/24/2010).

### ***Post-session times, the interaction at the meeting table***

The session ends and members converge to a new meeting place around a table where people drink, eat and exchange their experiences. Undoubtedly, this practice is very similar to what is observed in the UDV. Santo Daime also holds meetings at the end of sessions for sharing food, however, this does not seem to be an integrated or organized ritual as in UDV and APS, in which it is almost a mandatory event and forms part of the ritual as a whole. Among the foods offered are fruits, cakes, breads, pastries, snacks, soft drinks, soups, and other dishes. During this time, people share their experiences, answer questions, directly or indirectly converse about the session, and bid each other farewell.



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These ritual characteristics aim to create an adequate ambience for the mystical experiences.

The structure is non-rigid and incentivizes the individual to participate, while at the same time creating an atmosphere in which individuals are autonomous and responsible for themselves. The ritual is permissive, and it is up to the individuals performing the ritual to follow their own wishes, so long as their actions do not compromise the structure originally conceived to guide their behavior. According to the Society's point of view, this freedom is necessary to increase the possibilities of spiritual/mystical experiences, personal growth and collective enhancement. The Society is among Pernambuco's ayahuasca religions with the highest individual freedom in rituals, composed of small numbers of participants in each session ranging from around 15-30 people.

It is a religion that denies the dualism common to Christian religions, reminiscent of atheism but with substantial differences concerning the relation to worship and glimpse into the mysteries of nature and existence. The group's monism is a feature of Barbier's thoughts, in an attempt to dominate the experience according to his philosophically oriented ideas, he conceives Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society as a religion:

I chose inside of me when faced with the impossibility of judging these things by reason, I chose it because it makes more sense to consider the present (...), the great unity in which we are immersed and constantly changing, as essence of reality. The here and now, in the great transformation (...) this here and now, the state of being, what we are, a state of mind more virtuous. (...) I decided to create the Society as an eco-humanist religiosity, naturalistic, pantheistic, religion in which God is the Cosmos itself. There is not a God, creator of the cosmos, there is a Cosmos that created itself, and it is sacred. The approach is distinct from atheism, because atheism believes the cosmos themselves are sufficient, but never recognizes Him as



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something sacred and deeply venerable (R. A. Barbier, founder of APS, in interview on 28/03/10, our translation).

Thus, Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society brings a new religious view associated with the use of ayahuasca, which converges with older Christian and Shamanic ayahuasca religions in the sense of search and experimentation of feelings like love, harmony, enlightenment, understanding, etc., also in obtaining healing, consciousness and aesthetic pleasure.

**Members Sociodemographic Profiles of Ayahuasca Religions in the State of Pernambuco**

The composition of the profiles aimed to assess the sociodemographic pattern of the members of the main ayahuasca religions in the State of Pernambuco. The research was conducted between April 2010 and June 2012. All participants signed consent forms before answering the questionnaires. The research was conducted according to Resolution 196/96 of the National Health Council, which obtained approval by the Ethics Committee (CEP/CCS/UFPE, nº 384/11). The data obtained from 109 participants showed average time of ayahuasca use among participants of 94.24 months (SD= 88.36) and an average age of years of age (SD= 12.70), ranging from 20 to 68 years. Participants came predominantly from the União do Vegetal, followed by Santo Daime, with members of Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society in the minority. Unequal distribution of participants was statistically significant ( $\chi^2= 41.743$ ; DF= 3;  $p < 0.001$ ). Table 1 shows the distribution board of the participants by ayahuasca religion.



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**Table 1.** Distribution of participants according their religion affiliations.

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Santo Daime</b>	23	21.1
<b>Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society</b>	18	16.5
<b>União do Vegetal</b>	68	62.4
<b>Total</b>	109	100.0

Table 2 summarizes the sociodemographic profile of the three groups, obtained through a survey. Categories were made to facilitate visualization of the duration of ayahuasca use by participants, with the conventions of short time use (within 24 months), medium (25 to 66 months) and long (over 66 months). Statistically significant differences considering the time of use were found ( $\chi^2=13.722$ ;  $DF= 2$ ;  $p= 0.001$ ). The majority of the sample (50.5%) presented higher use of ayahuasca over 66 months. We noted the Society possessed subjects with shorter use, while the UDV possessed the highest number of participants with long use of ayahuasca. The Kruskal-Wallis test considering Religion as grouping variable showed statistically significant differences ( $\chi^2=12.618$ ;  $DF= 2$ ;  $p= 0.002$ ). Post-hoc Mann-Whitney U tests showed no statistically significant difference between the Santo Daime and APS, however, the UDV was statistically different from these two other religions ( $p<0.01$ ).

Regarding sex, we did not find statistically significant differences regarding the relationship between sex and religion, indicating equal distribution across the sample. There is a predominance of men in all groups except the UDV, although it is necessary to point out that these data do not establish there are more men than women in these groups, however, that in the sample in question more men volunteered to participate in the study. In general, we observe a total percentage of 51.9% of respondents were male and 48.1% female. The biggest inequality between men and women respondents was in the Santo Daime.



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Regarding age, we did not find statistically significant differences considering age group or its interaction with the ayahuasca religions. We noted the Santo Daime and APS were composed predominantly of younger people, especially in the age group 28 to 36 years (43.5% and 33.3%, respectively), unlike the UDV, in which predominately consisted of people over 50 years old (33.8%). In general, individuals over 50 years were the largest group.

As for education, we observed statistically significant differences in the distribution of two categories in the entire sample ( $\chi^2= 8.182$ ;  $DF= 1$ ;  $p= 0.004$ ), indicating a significant predominance of individuals with higher levels of education (63.3%). However, we observed no statistically significant differences considering this variable as a function of religions. Despite this, the Santo Daime showed more people with a slightly lower level of education. Both in APS and UDV, about 2/3 of the sample was composed of individuals with higher education or greater.

In terms of employment we found statistically significant differences in this variable ( $\chi^2= 13.523$ ;  $DF= 4$ ;  $p= 0.009$ ) with predominance of employment in the private sector, followed by employees in the public sector and self-employed professionals. Nevertheless, no differences were observed as function between the religions. In general, members of Santo Daime were most commonly self-employed or employed in the private sector, a fact which differs from APS, who were most commonly employed in the public sector or self-employed. The most common occupations in UDV were jobs in the private sector and public sector.



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According to the marital status we found statistically significant differences ( $\chi^2=102.291$ ;  $DF=5$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) with a predominance of singles, followed by married people. Differences were found regarding marital status between the religions in accordance with the Kruskal-Wallis test ( $\chi^2=10.991$ ;  $DF=5$ ;  $p=0.004$ ). Post-hoc Mann-Whitney U tests showed differences only between UDV and Santo Daime ( $p<0.01$ ); singles were prevalent in Santo Daime and APS, while married people predominated in UDV.

Regarding the number of children we found no statistically significant differences ( $\chi^2=68.909$ ;  $DF=4$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), between any of the religions. We observed that most people have no children (49.5%), and most people who did have children, had at most two (35.8%). The maximum number of children in our sample set was four.

People with children reported that they had used ayahuasca at least once in life, usually after birth (31.4%). Statistically significant differences were found ( $\chi^2=55.434$ ;  $DF=3$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) in this variable, however, there were no differences between religions. People who offered ayahuasca to their children after birth predominated. Individuals belonging to the APS seem not to use ayahuasca during pregnancy, while all people with children in the Santo Daime offered the drink to them, either during pregnancy or after birth.

We investigated the sense of belonging of ayahuasca religion members questioning their religions. The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed statistically significant differences between the pronounced affiliation and the religions ( $\chi^2=18.297$ ;  $DF=3$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). Post-hoc Mann-Whitney U tests revealed differences between the APS and UDV ( $p<0.001$ ), and Santo Daime and APS ( $p<0.01$ ). We note that among the participants studied, 26.1% of Santo Daime members did not identify themselves as belonging to that religion, and 47.1%





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of those surveyed within the APS did not consider themselves as pantheistics. Virtually all the UDV members identified themselves as belonging to that religion. The Santo Daime and the APS are more open to visitors, both are younger religions, and thus boast fewer supporters or associated members, which may have influenced this finding.

We asked the participants how often they practice private activities (at home) with religious overtones such as prayer, religious readings, meditation, worship, etc. We observed statistically significant differences in this variable ( $\chi^2= 28.796$ ;  $DF= 2$ ;  $p< 0.001$ ), but not in comparison between religions. We observed that 58.3% of participants frequently practiced some religious activities and 20.4% did it more than once per day. Member of APS and Santo Daime presented higher numbers of people who engaged in constant private religious practices.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of sociodemographic measures.

Variable (%)		a. Santo Daim e	b. AP S	c. UD V	Tota l	Chi-squared*		Kruskal- Wallis**	
						$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
Ayahuasca use (months; n=107)	1. 0 to 24	31.8	44. 4	13.4	22.4	13.722	0.001 3>2>1	12.61 8	0.00 2 c≠a. b
	2. 25 to 66	36.4	27. 8	23.9	27.1				
	3. > 66	31.8	27. 8	62.7	50.5				
Sex (n=108)	1. Female	30.4	44. 4	55.2	48.1	0.229	0.632	4.293	0.11 7
	2. Male	69.6	55. 6	44.8	51.9				
Age group (years; n=109)	1. 18 to 27	17.4	27. 8	19.1	20.2	3.309	0.346	2.170	0.33 8
	2. 28 to 36	43.5	33. 3	19.1	26.6				
	3. 37 to 50	13.0	11. 1	27.9	22.0				
	4. > 50	26.1	27. 8	33.8	31.2				
Education (n=109)	1. Till undergraduati	56.5	27. 8	32.4	36.7	8.182	0.004 2>1	5.014	0.08 2



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	<b>on</b>								
	<b>2. Graduate or higher</b>	43.5	72.2	67.6	63.3				
	<b>1. Autonomous</b>	30.4	38.9	20.9	25.9				
<b>Employment (n=108)</b>	<b>2. Public sector</b>	17.4	33.3	23.9	24.1	13.523	0.009 3>1>2> 5>4	4.373	0.11 2
	<b>3. Private sector</b>	30.4	16.7	28.4	26.9				
	<b>4. Student</b>	13.0	5.6	11.9	11.1				
	<b>5. Other</b>	8.7	5.6	14.9	12.0				
	<b>1. Single</b>	65.2	50.0	32.4	42.2				
<b>Marital status (n=109)</b>	<b>2. Recasado</b>	30.4	44.5	44.1	41.3	102.29 1	0.000 1>2>5> 4>3	10.99 1	0.00 4 c≠a
	<b>3. Viúvo</b>	.0	5.6	2.9	2.8				
	<b>4. Divorciado</b>	.0	.0	8.8	5.5				
	<b>5. Outros</b>	4.3	.0	11.8	8.3				
	<b>1. No</b>	65.2	55.6	42.6	49.5				
<b>Children (n=109)</b>	<b>2. One</b>	17.4	16.7	16.2	16.5	68.909	0.000 1>3>2> 4>5	4.497	0.10 6
	<b>3. Two</b>	8.7	16.7	23.5	19.3				
	<b>4. Three</b>	8.7	.0	13.2	10.1				
	<b>5. Four</b>	.0	11.1	4.4	4.6				
	<b>1. No children</b>	66.7	5.6	45.5	51.4				
<b>Children vs ayahuasca (n=105)</b>	<b>2. Pregnancy</b>	4.8	.0	13.6	9.5	55.434	0.000 1>3>2> 4	2.583	0.27 5
	<b>3. After birth</b>	28.6	22.2	34.8	31.4				
	<b>4. Never</b>	.0	22.2	6.1	7.6				
	<b>1. Daimista</b>	73.9	.0	.0	15.7				
<b>Pronounced religion (n=108)</b>	<b>2. Panteísta</b>	.0	52.9	.0	8.3	-	-	18.29 7	0.00 0 b≠a. c
	<b>3. Udevista</b>	.0	.0	98.5	62.0				
	<b>4. Outras</b>	26.1	47.1	1.5	13.9				
	<b>1. Rarely</b>	13	35.7	21.2	21.4				
<b>Religious private activities (n=103)</b>	<b>2. Frequently</b>	56.5	28.6	65.2	58.3	28.796	0.000 2>1>3	2.514	0.28 5
	<b>3. More than once per day</b>	30.4	35.7	13.6	20.4				

### Final Considerations

In this article we seek to strengthen the knowledge base and history of the three major ayahuasca religions in the state of Pernambuco. Here, we presented for the first time in ayahuasca literature, a monistic religious perspective,



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describing its functioning and cosmogony. We also presented a profile of the members of these religions according to a survey applied during visits made to these groups. This study is part of a major ongoing investigation on mental health developed during the doctoral study of the first author.

Based on the belief systems adopted by the Santo Daime and União do Vegetal, we observe that they have a "singular" origin, that is, origins that are derived from the mystical revelations of the founders in the sense that revelations have completely changed their understandings of the world and its meanings of existence. The founders took upon themselves a mission to disseminate and propagate their respective revelations (Andrade, 1995, 2010; Moreira & MacRae, 2011). The cosmogonies of these two religions have, at their core, contact with the ayahuasca drink, whose experiences led to a spiritual understanding of reality, formulated according to their *a priori* beliefs. Thus, these two are ontological constructions in a dualism of substances, forms of complementary dualism, as presented in shamanic thought (Andrade, 1988; Marcondes, 1999; Naranjo, 1979; Ramos, 2006; Teixeira, 1994). This phenomenon, the creation of religions or even the personal sense of sacredness has been called a modern movement from word- based beliefs that can be confirmed during entheogenic experiences. It is the idea that people's ideas can become real, at least in their perception, with entheogens or in mystical experiences (Roberts, 2014).

The Santo Daime and União do Vegetal religions legitimized their worldviews based on Christian and spiritualist concepts of reincarnation. The first has *a priori* indoctrination in which principles are guided primarily by Kardecism, whereas União do Vegetal presents spiritualism in an empiricist character. Both religions present doctrines postulating *a priori* parameters that can be better



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understood by the examination of beliefs of their founders (Andrade, 1995; Moreira & MacRae, 2011; Roberts, 2014).

In the case of the Santo Daime there is a reconfiguration of Christian spiritualism, not only around the Kardecism, but also in its incorporation of other indigenous, afro-brazilian, and/or even Eastern traditions, which forms a syncretic functioning structure (MacRae, 1992, 2004; Moreira & MacRae, 2011). Such fluid syncretism is not observed in the União do Vegetal, in which the rituals are firm, and have a relatively stable background based in the revelations given by Mestre Gabriel da Costa who, with his simple form of teaching, explained that he had found “a way to remove evil from people’s hearts” with the Tea. In fact, Mestre Gabriel created the União do Vegetal with the thought of bringing “peace to the world” – preaching the practice of goodness and love for one another. The UDV asserts that when all humanity is obedient to God, police and prisons will be needless, there will there be no war, for peace will be naturally and voluntarily practiced by everyone (CEBUDV, 2019)

Unlike the two religions above, the Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society is not apparently derived from any spiritual revelation and does not adopt a clear theistic stance. It presents a monistic view, philosophical thoughts and syncretic convergence of Eastern and Western classic and contemporary philosophers, resulting in a pantheistic belief. This religion denies the salvation proposed by Christianity, while moving from an atheistic worldview by sanctifying Nature and the Universe as one unique and self-explanatory instance. The association with the use of ayahuasca supports the idea that an altered state of consciousness allows for integration of these conceptions as true experimental feelings, as well, it works like an ancient instrument of worship and veneration of the universe, nature, and their forces. The rituals of APS



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follow a singular system created by Alain Barbier, that obey his opening to philosophical explanations, while remaining open to the personal philosophical interpretations of its individual members.

We are in agreement here that APS, as the Santo Daime and União do Vegetal, is a legitimate ayahuasca religion and has emerged in this field under the concept of a neoayahuasca group due to its major reformulation of ritual practices, doctrines and distancing from the traditional origins of its founder (Labate, 2004; Labate & Goulart, 2005; Lira, 2009a, b).

These three religions appeared in Pernambuco in distinct ways. The União do Vegetal has been present for the longest and has the greatest public reach and bond among followers, perhaps mediated by its highly organized and physical structure, or by its more closed characteristic and limiting of visitors, which promotes continuity of participation. The Santo Daime is a smaller and more recent religion in the region, despite its antiqueness. It shows a greater circulation of people, a more open structure, and little incentive to remain loyal to the group and its members. The Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society is the last of all to arrive in Pernambuco, and has a simple organizational structure and a very limited scope due to its operating characteristic, which is more liberal, with flexible rules, and naturally demands a self-selective audience.

We seek to draw a profile with respect to various parameters by using convenience sample, we believe can approximate in the defining the composition of these groups, but not as exact as probabilistic investigations. Future research needs to be developed to permit comparisons as well as identify changes that these profiles undergo with the passing of time.



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Observation of members of the religious groups by the main author of the present study was initially designed to develop confidence between the two parties. While the nature of the work was quantitative, respondents were initially skeptical of the research and very reluctant or fearful to offer their opinions. This attitude was specific to the religious followers and not of their religious leaders. Participant observation was of crucial importance to obtain data and recruitment. I note that the influence of the groups on the research data as a whole was minimal, yet it is clear that any selection bias on the part of people willing to participate in the study can be related to personal closeness created during the visits to those religions.

In general, Santo Daime followers showed mostly moderate times of usage of ayahuasca. In general, the majority of followers are men, and the typical age range of followers is between 18-36 years. Most have either undergraduate or graduate-level education, and are either self-employed or work in the private sector. Followers of Santo Daime are predominantly single, with no children; people with children have only one, and practice the offering of ayahuasca to their children, especially after the birth. Followers recognize themselves as belonging to the religion and frequently practice religious activities.

Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society members showed short time of ayahuasca use. The majority of followers are men, and the age of followers ranged from 18-36 years. Most people in this group had either undergraduate or graduate-level educations, and are commonly either self-employed or employed in the public sector. Members are single, with no children; those with children have only one or two and do not practice the offering of ayahuasca to their children during pregnancy. Half of the followers recognize themselves as belonging to any religion and frequently practice religious activities.



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The União do Vegetal members showed longer use of ayahuasca. The UDV is composed primarily of women, with followers aged above 36 years. The most common educational level is graduate-level or higher, and common occupations among members are both private and public sector jobs. Members are mostly married, with two to three children, and practice the offering of ayahuasca to their children, during pregnancy or after birth. Members recognize themselves as belonging to religion and frequently practice religious activities.

Based on the statistical findings, we have verified that the profiles of the followers of these three religions are relatively different, showing distinct times of ayahuasca use, a likely consequence of the difference in times of their establishment. We also observed differences in the marital status and age group of people attending such groups; the Santo Daime and the APS are frequented mostly by single and younger people, while the União do Vegetal is attended by older, married women with families consisting of more than those of followers of the other two religions. A similar link can be drawn between the times of existence of these religions in the state. It is interesting to note that the Santo Daime and União do Vegetal members often recognized themselves as belonging to the religion, as opposed to the followers of APS, who did not identify with any religion. It is important to note that both the Santo Daime and União do Vegetal are traditional and ancient in the realm of ayahuasca religions in Brazil (Labate & Araújo, 2002), which may influence the recognition these structures as legitimate religions.

In conclusion, we found that the use of ayahuasca use has distinct purposes in the different religions, in regards to the opportunities people have experiment with different realities. This understanding varies according to the cosmogony of the religious groups that implies in an edification of specific belief systems, supporting the interpretation of reality. The belief system of the União do



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Vegetal and Santo Daime is supported by complementary dualism while the Ayahuasca Pantheistic Society is grounded in contemporary forms of pantheism. A convergence between these groups in the use of ayahuasca can be noted in their aims of achieving self-knowledge and pursuing love, compassion, enlightenment and the veneration of the sacred, and kindness. The APS presents a totally new way of conceptualizing relationships with nature, a profound redefinition in the ayahuasca religious field, and an emergence of scientifically-oriented attitudes that could have importance as model of psychotherapeutic practices of humanist tradition.

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