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Editorial – Beatriz Caiuby Labate and Edward MacRae

1. Beatriz Labate – Brazilian literature on ayahuasca religions (*)

The text provides, through an exhaustive survey, a panorama of the state of the art of the literature about the Brazilian ayahuasca religions. The first part is a commentary on the academic writings, above all the anthropological ones, grouped by focus, as in: the origins and history of the ayahuasca cults, expansion to the urban centers; syncretism; shamanism; cure and possession; religious use and profane consumption; relations among the groups, etc; followed by other approaches, such as those of psychiatry, psychology, and architecture. The second part of the article treats the non-academic works produced by practitioners of the ayahuasca religions, and here the divisions follow the principal religious lines: Santo Daime, Barquinha, and União do Vegetal.

(*) Translation from article in: Labate and Sena Araújo (ed.), op. cit, pp. 231 – 273. Used with permission of the Editora Mercado de Letras.


The article is the fruit of coauthorship between an anthropologist with long research experience in the area of the Extractivist Reserve of the Alto Juruá, in the far west of the state of Acre in the Brazilian Amazon, and a rubber tapper who was first introduced to ayahuasca in the context of a rubber camp. His initiation has elements of non-indigenous and indigenous culture and results in a quite original synthesis, which is narrated in the first-person in the conclusion of the article. The article traces the history
of the introduction of ayahuasca, or cipó (vine), among the rubber tappers of the Alto Juruá in their relations with indigenous populations and their pajés (shamans), highlighting those rubber tappers who distinguished themselves as apprentices and became healers renowned among their contemporaries. Beginning in the 1980s the use of cipó occurs in the context of the struggle of rubber tappers against the rubber bosses, and ayahuasca mysticism merges with political conflict. New syntheses take place, now with the introduction of elements of the religious doctrine of Santo Daime.

(*) Translation from article in: Labate & Sena Araújo (ed.), op. cit, pp. 201-227.

3. Arneide Cemin – The rituals of Santo Daime: systems of symbolic constructions (*)

This article deals with the Santo Daime rituals developed by Mestre Irineu, and adopts an approach based on Marcel Mauss’s concept of body techniques which are seen to produce the symbolic life of the spirit through physical, psychological, and sociological assemblages. Based on the underlying patterns of shamanism, Mestre Irineu built his own system, taking into account the existing socio-cultural context, enabling it to exert control over the reality perceived under altered states of consciousness, thus directing the control of emotions and unconsciousness. The article also deals with certain elements of the sacred system such as the table/altar, the uniforms, the rattles and the hymns. The author also studies the details of the rituals for healing, manufacturing ayahuasca, dancing, concentrations and funeral services. Other uses of the brew are also discussed such as in the treatment of burns, wounds and other ailments, and as an adjunct to childbirth. There is also a discussion of the use of ayahuasca as an amulet.

(*) Translation from article in: Labate & Sena Araújo, op. cit, pp. 347-382.

4. Edward MacRae – The Religious uses of licit and illicit psychoactive substances in a branch of the Santo Daime Religion (*)

The article deals with the different effects of tolerant and prohibitionist policies associated with psychoactive substance use in Brazil. Whereas the licit use of ayahuasca has been successfully incorporated into mainstream Brazilian society, the ritual use of Cannabis by one of the Santo Daime religious groups has never been fully
accepted and remains a constant source of problems for the ayahuasca churches, their followers and society at large.

(*) Translation from article in: Labate & Goulart, op. cit, in press. Used with permission of the Editora Mercado de Letras.

5. Wladimir Sena Araújo – The “Barquinha”: symbolic space of a cosmology in the making (*)

The purpose of the article is to introduce the symbolic repertoire of the Centro Espírita e Culto de Oração – “Casa de Jesus, Fonte de Luz,” popularly known as the Barquinha. The Barquinha was created in 1945 in Rio Branco (Acre) by Daniel Pereira de Mattos, native of Maranhão. The ritual ceremonies, which include the consumption of Daime, imply a relation of European, Afro-Brazilian, and indigenous religious practices and philosophies. The concept of *cosmology in construction* is used to understand the constant and dynamic process of creation and re-signification of religious symbols of this group unto itself.

(*) Translation from article in: Labate & Sena Araújo, op. cit, pp. 541-555.

6. Christian Frenopoulo - Healing in the Barquinha religion

The article focuses on the healing service offered by Barquinha churches. The Barquinha religion is an Amazonian form of Christianity, with syncretic elements. The article surveys three recurrent methodological and theoretical approaches found in anthropological works on healing in the Barquinha religion, to which the author contributes with his own ethnographic research and analysis. Often, analytical emphasis is located on the participant’s subjective and symbolic processes, in association with the ayahuasca experience. Ayahuasca—called Santo Daime by adherents—is the central sacrament of the religion, frequently implied in accounts of healing. Another common focus is on ritual settings and changing bodily dispositions. Thirdly, anthropologists have considered aspects of the social relations involved in the therapeutic process. This paper considers the social interactions during healing encounters. Such encounters typically involve healer-spirits incorporated in Barquinha spirit-mediums. The article suggests that the healing service may echo symbolic motifs
associated to the historical experience of migration and rapidly changing living circumstances shared by many participants.

7. Sandra Goulart – Religious matrices of the União do Vegetal

This article analyzes the relations between the União do Vegetal (UDV) and other religious traditions. Narratives provided by early members and biographical details of the founder of the UDV since his childhood, reveal the presence of elements within the cosmology and rituals of this religion that are originated in various sources. These span from popular Catholicism, Allan Kardec's spiritism, masonry, Jewish tradition, and Afro-Brazilian religions, to popular Amazonian beliefs. The text shows how the combination of aspects of these different traditions is important in the constitution of the new religious system of the União do Vegetal. The article situates this ayahuasca religion within the field of Brazilian religiosity, indicating, for instance, parallels in its formative process with the history of other religions, such as Umbanda. The article also highlights relationships between elements of the mythology, doctrine and rituals of the União do Vegetal and the Amazonian context linked to the use of ayahuasca.

8. Sérgio Brissac – In the light of Hoasca: an approach to the religious experience of participants of the União do Vegetal

This article deals with the symbolic experiences of urban participants of the União do Vegetal (UDV), in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. Through the analysis of participant speech, it seeks to identify the discursive axes of disciples of the UDV. Subjects’ experiences under the effects of the tea are strongly liminal, and frequently act as mediators through which the subject articulates elements of his life with those of the UDV worldview, experiencing them as a single reality. This experience is labeled by the author as encompassment in the force of the burracheira (the UDV designation for the “strange force” that accompanies ingestion of the tea). As elaborated by Brissac, this idea denotes both the subjective experience of being ‘swept up’ by the effects of ayahuasca, and the way in which the UDV as a symbolic system draws to itself elements of other religious practices.