

Carsten Balzer

***Ayahuasca* rituals in Germany:**

the first steps of the Brazilian *Santo Daime* religion in Europe¹

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Abstract: *Ayahuasca* rituals in Germany: the first steps of the *Santo Daime* religion in Europe

The article examines the consequences of an attempted transposition of *ayahuasca* rituals from Brazil to Germany in 1993. While in Brazil the *Santo Daime* religion uses the psychotropic brew *ayahuasca* in fixed social settings as a religious sacrament, in Germany the rituals were offered in a New Age work-shop-like context. The consequences dwelled in problematical experiences by German participants that provoked both, a controversial discussion in parts of the German media and investigations by the police against the “dangerous drug abuse”. The detailed presentation of the origins and the present situation of the *Santo Daime* in Brazil allows us to contrast Brazil with Germany regarding the different ways in which the ritual is perceived and the effects which it brings about. Using the so-called “set and setting” theory to analyse the *ayahuasca* rituals held in Berlin, one sees, that the failed transposition of the rituals from one cultural context into another is primarily caused by the new context, the European “market of religions” and thus the commercialisation of the *Santo Daime* and its sacrament *ayahuasca* and not by “drug abuse”. The since then established *Santo Daime* groups in the Netherlands, which use *ayahuasca* as a sacrament in a religious context legally, underline this argument.

Keywords :

Ayahuasca, *Santo Daime*, “hallucinogens”, entheogenic religion, „market of religions“, commercialisation of religion.

In November 1995 the Brazilian, *ayahuasca*-using religion *União do Vegetal* (UDV) stepped out of the shadows with a grand conference, the “International Conference of Hoasca Studies”.² One of the aims of this conference was to present the results of research on UDV

¹ This is the revised and updated version of an article originally written in 1998 and published in Portuguese in 2002 (see BALZER 2002). The article is based on two seasons of field work (1994, 1995-1996) in Brazilian cities and the Amazon region. I would like to acknowledge the support of my mother Doris Balzer and the critiques of Thomas G. Kirsch, Viola Hörbst and Birgit Uenze and express my sincere gratitude to all the individuals and groups in Manaus, Maceió, Rio de Janeiro and Rio Branco, who welcomed me so heartily.

² Hoasca is the UDV-term for *ayahuasca*, a very potent psychotropic brew, made from two Amazonian rainforest plants, usually the *jagube* or *mariri* vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and the leaves of the *chacrona* tree (*Psychodria viridis*). In the following, I use the newer term entheogenic, rather the older and misleading terms psychedelic or hallucinogenic, to describe *ayahuasca* and its effects. Entheogen is derived from the greek language and refers to „the God/divine within“ or, as Ott puts it „realizing the divine within“ (OTT 1993: 19f). The term stresses the emic perspective rather than the biased etic perspective of the older terms.

members from the Amazonian city of Manaus in 1993 carried out by the interdisciplinary, international „*hoasca*-project“, showing that the participation in *UDV ayahuasca* rituals doesn't bring harm to the members' health, but benefits to their daily life. The strategy pursued -to present the data in a large-scale international conference in the luxurious Hotel Gloria in Rio de Janeiro- echoed the ongoing and controversial discussion in Brazil about urban religions, which use *ayahuasca* in their rituals as a sacrament. This discussion centered on the practices of the *Santo Daime* group *CEFLURIS*, another Brazilian *ayahuasca*-using religion, which was often confused with the *UDV*. Such confusion was evident in a poorly informed article, published in the German magazine DER SPIEGEL one year earlier (ANON 1994: 110f).

Whilst attending the *UDV* conference in 1995 I became aware of this discussion. To my surprise I found the said article translated in the appendix of a journalistic book, which accuses *CEFLURIS* of being a sect with fanatic leaders (MOURAO 1995). The article comments on *Santo Daime* rituals, held in Berlin in 1993, in which I participated and that prompted me to travel to Brazil and to study the *ayahuasca*-using religions.

Looking at the *Santo Daime* rituals held in Berlin in 1993, their reception, modification, and „side-effects“ as well as the discussion in German media in 1994 - partly reflected in the Brazilian discussion begun in 1995- the differences between the religious practices and benefits of the *ayahuasca*-using religions in Brazil and Germany are striking. I shall use the example of the first official *Santo Daime* rituals in Berlin, to expose some thoughts on the reception of Brazilian *ayahuasca* rituals in New Age circles in Germany and, on the transposition of entheogenic rituals from one culture into another. To emphasize these differences I will first discuss the Brazilian background, present the origins and development of Brazilian *ayahuasca* religions. Subsequently I will concentrate on the Berlin *Santo Daime* rituals and their participants' background.

The Brazilian *ayahuasca* religions - a phoenix rising out of the rubber boom's ashes

All three main Brazilian *ayahuasca*-using religions originated in the area of the former “Federal Territory of Acre”, currently the smallest state in the Brazilian Amazon. They emerged in situations determined by the decadence following the two rubber booms: the *Santo Daime* in the 1930s in the decadence phase after the *ciclo da borracha* (1860-1915), the *Barquinha* in the mid-1940s and the *União do Vegetal* at the end of the 1950s after the *batalha da borracha* (1942-1945) (see diagram, page 5). All of them were founded by

migrants, who came to Acre as fortune hunters and fugitives of the big droughts in northeastern Brazil or were sent as so-called rubber soldiers (*soldados da borracha*) by the Brazilian government to support the Allies in World War II (BASTOS 1960: 23f.; TOCANTINS 1984: 41f; WEINSTEIN 1983: 172, 205ff; DEAN 1987: 96; MARTINS & VANALLI 1994: 36ff). Thus, they not only emerged from a chaotic migration situation of social disruption and dislocation, a migration situation which Ioan LEWIS has described as necessary for „*the rise of new inspirational religions from messianic eruptions in medieval Europe to Cargo Cults in Oceania*“ (LEWIS 1989: 156-157). In the present case the emergence of these religions was also imbued by a chaotic economic situation and took place in the midst of an encounter of different cultures (MENDES 1989: 10ff, 49) and therefore different realities³: in summary a chaotic social, economic and cultural situation.

The encounter of the rubber tappers (*seringueiros*) with mestizian and indigenous *ayahuasca* rituals, performed mainly as healing rituals, lead to different new forms of *ayahuasca* use among the Brazilian migrants (PRANCE 1970: 66, MACRAE 1992: 62). Besides the recreational use by *seringueiros* of Acre, a more spiritual or religious use was adopted in the rituals of three different religions. In these *ayahuasca* rituals the founders, migrants from northeastern Brazil, experienced revelations, in which they received differing missions.

At the first glance, one finds in these religions elements of the multiple realities perceived at the time of their genesis: adapted catholic and spiritistic, European elements (Amazonian Catholicism, Kardecism), Afro-Brazilian elements from the northern coast of Brazil (e.g. *Casa das Minas*) and indigenous elements from the Amazon (e.g. ritual *ayahuasca*-use, Amazonian spirits) (cf. FRÓES 1986: 26, BOLSANELLO 1995: 103ff, MACRAE 2000 (*Santo Daime*), ANDRADE 1995: 9ff, HENMAN 1986: 219ff. (UDV), SENA ARAÚJO 1997: 71ff, BALZER 2003: 12f, 203ff (*Barquinha*)). Upon closer inspection of the emic discourse, one finds that the development of these religions was not only influenced by external factors like new migration influences, dictatorship or police persecution, but also by internal factors such as their different missions and internal strife (cf. HENMAN 1986: 219f; MONTEIRO DA SILVA 1983: 111; SENA ARAÚJO 1997: 66; BALZER 2003: 76ff, 95f). Especially the missions have influenced the further development: while the *Barquinha* and the original *Santo Daime* group *Alto Santo*, have shown no tendency to expand, the *União do Vegetal* and the *Santo Daime* group *CEFLURIS* have spread all over

³ Here I use the term "reality" to refer to social realities and perceptual universes.

Brazil, to countries in the Western World and the Internet.⁴ As all of the religions have suffered several splits there are now more than a dozen dissident groups in Brazil (cf. Diagram 1).

I will now focus on the development of the *Santo Daime*, the group with the most dissident groups including *CEFLURIS*. The founder of the first *Santo Daime* group, *Alto Santo*, Raimundo Irineu Serra (1892-1971) experienced *ayahuasca* in mestizian rituals in 1918. Following his central revelation he began referring to *ayahuasca* as *dai-me* (give me) or *santo daime*. In the 1930s Irineu Serra settled in Rio Branco, founded the first *Santo Daime* group *Alto Santo* and became a very famous local healer. He was seen as a second Jesus Christ and the hymns he perceived in the *daime* rituals were regarded as the third testament (JACCOUD 1992, FRÓES 1986: 119ff, MACRAE 1992: 75).

In the mid-1940s Irineu Serra healed his friend Daniel Pereira de Mattos (1888-1958), who later received his own mission and founded the *Barquinha* religion. Sometime during the 1960s Serra also cured the spiritist Sebastião Mota de Melo (1920-1990). After being healed and experiencing revelations Sebastião Mota dedicated himself to the spiritual work of the *daime* organizing *Alto Santo ayahuasca* rituals in a place called *Colonia 5000*. When Raimundo Irineu Serra died, he split from the *Santo Daime*, introduced organizational changes and added a new sacrament, the *Santa Maria* (Cannabis Sativa), to his new group *Colonia 5000*, which was later registered as *CEFLURIS: Centro Eclectico da Luz Universal Raimundo Irineu Serra* (Ecclectic Center of the Universal Light Raimundo Irineu Serra)(MACRAE 1992: 72, 74). The mission of Sebastião Mota de Melo altered the one Irineu Serra received. Part of de Melos new mission was the exodus into a rubber area in the Amazon, the establishment of a New Jerusalem called *Céu da Mapia* and the inclusion of spiritual practices from *Kardecism* (BOLSANELLO 1995: 137). *Céu do Mapia* is now the headquarters of *CEFLURIS*. In the 1970s *Colonia 5000* attracted young followers, mostly backpackers from all over Brazil and -later on- from foreign countries (MACRAE 1992: 77f., FRÓES 1986: 48). Since the early 1980s -the ending phase of the Brazilian dictatorship- *CEFLURIS* has been spreading to urban centres in Brazil. In cities like São Paulo and especially Rio de Janeiro progressive middle class people close to the alternative and counter-culture and the New Age-movement (SOARES 1989: 142), among them actors, artists and scientists, joined this new religious movement. Some leaders of groups in the cities also travelled abroad, organizing *Santo Daime* rituals in the Western World, in the USA, in Europe and later on in Japan. In 1993 and 1994 leaders from Rio de Janeiro together with several

⁴ See <http://www.santo-daime.org> and <http://www.udv.org.br> (October 2004).

organizations from the European New Age Movement organized modified *CEFLURIS* rituals in The Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Spain (TNI 1993a, PÁSZTOR 1994a: 26, SCHÄFER 1995: 28). One of these leaders held the *CEFLURIS* rituals in Berlin in 1993 mentioned in the beginning.

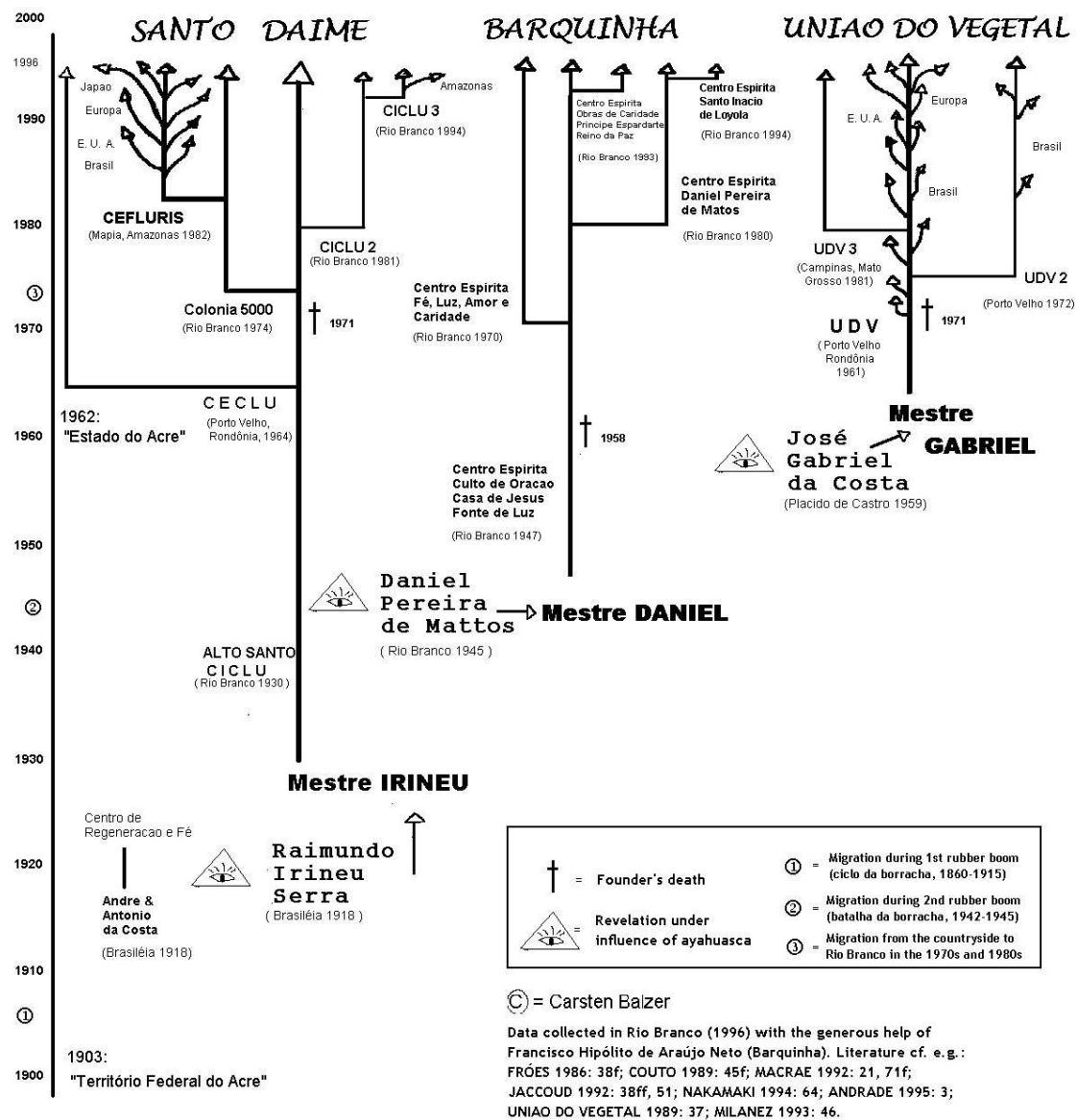


DIAGRAMM 1: Historical development of *ayahuasca*-using religions in Brazil

Ayahuasca: from the New World to the New Age

When I first learned about the Brazilian *ayahuasca*-using religions, I was fascinated by the change of meaning of *ayahuasca* from a paraphernalia and healing plant used by indigenous shamans (HARNER 1973) and mestizian healers called *curanderos* or *vegetalistas* (CASTILLO 1963, LUNA 1984) to the main sacrament of religious groups like the *Santo Daime*, the *Barquinha* and the *União do Vegetal*. Another change of meaning took place in the reception of Brazilian *ayahuasca* rituals in German New Age circles. Under New Age circles I understand what NELSON - who sees the New Age movement as replacing the counter-culture of the 1960s - called „*personal New Age-movements*“:

„New Age movements are basically of two types, personal and social. Personal movements are concerned with the transformation of the values of individuals. Such movements vary from secular encounter groups to meditation groups which expand the awareness of the individual and in so doing change his social values.“ (NELSON 1987: 183).

With the flashback-like comeback of the psychedelic 1960s in the 1990s⁵ and the forging ahead of the New Age movement *Zeitgeist* into ever-wider spheres of western societies (cf. e. g. STENGER 1993: 19), the „*Amazonian ambrosia ayahuasca*“ (OTT 1993: 254) has attained a doubtful popularity in the western worlds. This popularity, which began in the U.S. in the early 1980s (OTT 1993: 240) and in Germany in the late 1980s (see e. g. McKENNA, T. 1989, REMANN 1989, MEYERRATKEN 1989, ZUCKER 1989), is mainly due to New Age publications. It reached a questionable peak with the „*proliferation of ‘ayahuascatourism’ to Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia*“ (OTT 1993: 254, cf. also DOBKIN DE RIOS 1994). Ott has even claimed that:

„It is evident that ayahuasca is presently the entheogen en vogue among aficionados in the United States and other countries.“ (OTT 1993: 254).

As a result of the European historical process of separation of state and church, and of religion and society, the main churches transformed from socially binding institutions, into which one is born and has to stay for a lifetime into religious associations, which one can leave and re-enter. The guarantee of religious freedom meant not only the right to choose one's own religion, but also a supply of new religions, and thus, religion has become a

⁵ Indicators for this comeback are: 1.) The interest of the „rave-movement“ in entheogens and empathogens like LSD and “Ecstasy” (WRIGHT 1994, KROLLPFEIFFER 1994). This movement originated in avantgardistic, illegal „acid-parties“ (LSD-parties) and ended in a mass youth-movement with more than one million revellers attending the Berlin Love Parade. 2.) The great diversity of psychedelic media, including hypertext media (HARRIS & JESSE 1994) 3.) The late release of entheogenic substances for scientific research by the US-american protagonists of the „war on drugs“ (GROB 1994).

primarily private affair. In capitalist societies this development led to a commercialisation of religion, which can best be observed in the new phenomenon, Hartmut ZINSER has denominated as the “market of religions“ (ZINSER 1997: 7ff, 28ff). The “market of religions” basic rules’, ZINSER argues, follow the laws of supply and demand and the methods used to attract followers are often those of advertising campaigns (ZINSER 1997: 112ff).

The *CEFLURIS* rituals held in December of 1993 in Berlin must be placed in the New Age sphere of this international „market of religions“. *Ayahuasca* was known to several of the participants through articles in esoteric magazines, which tend to mystify the „*Amazonian ambrosia*“. However, the majority of them had not experienced *ayahuasca* in rituals before. The rituals had been advertised as a „*legendary shamanic ritual from the Amazon*“ in the small section of the Berlin magazine „Zitty“. After calling the advertised number and asking for further information, I received a handout from The Natale Institute (TNI). TNI is related to the international New Age movement and specializes in offering „shamanic“ and esoteric workshops like „Soul Hunting“, „Life Skills“, „Energizing Training“ and „The One Experience“ in New Age circles all over Europe (TNI 1993b, PÁSZTOR 1994a). The handout received presented another „shamanic“ workshop: „*AYAHUASCA - the legendary shamanic ritual of the Amazon*“ (TNI 1993a). It informed me that:

„From all shamanic rituals to alter consciousness and to burst open the frontiers of the Ego, the AYAHUASCA-ritual being practiced since thousands of years in the Amazon, is regarded as the most important, most powerful and most legendary.“

and promised that the ritual participants would:

„ (...) experience a deep state of ecstasy and happiness, free from all negative side-effects on body or mind“

and attain the ability to get in contact with

„... Logos, the biggest, all-embracing wisdom, needed so much by our planet.“ (TNI 1993a).

The handout asked that the participants to wear white clothes, fast for three hours before attending the ritual and transfer 475,- Deutsche Mark to a bank account. The night before the rituals the German organizers invited interested parties to an information event in the TNI-center „Haus am See“, a cottage in the affluent Grunewald quarter of Berlin. In a room decorated with feather masks and filled with shamanic drumming and New Age melodies from a tape recorder, the participants came to know the „*shaman from the Amazon*“, a psychologist from Rio de Janeiro and spiritual leader of the „*Santo Daime*“ center *Céu da*

Montanha. While he introduced himself as a spiritual leader of the *Santo Daime*, a religion of the jungle, the audience listened patiently.

The audience consisted of several dozen attendants some of who knew each other from various esoteric work-shops, especially TNI-ones, but there appeared to be no close relationships between them: there was a homeopathic healer, a Green ex-politician, a secretary, a student, etc.⁶ The *Santo Daime* leader explained that the participants were going to experience revelations, rather than hallucinations, and that the sacrament *ayahuasca* is made from rainforest plants, but failed to mention that it is a potent plant entheogen.

While telling the story of the *Santo Daime* founder, his revelations and the religion of the jungle as a connection between creator and creation the audience listened respectfully. However, when he explained that the *Santo Daime* church is a mixture of Animism and Christianity and stressed the importance for the ritual of biblical figures like Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary or Saint John, and thus revealed a modified catholic doctrine, the audience became upset. A bizarre discussion about the authenticity of Jesus Christ and the catholic doctrine ensued. I call this discussion bizarre, because the attendants were invited to participate in religious rituals and not to question the religious realities of their hosts. The discussion made the audiences' perception of Christianity clear. New Age circles in Germany tend to have a rather rejective attitude towards Christianity. Following their doctrine, the so-called New Age, the Age of Aquarius is to replace the Old Age, the Age of Fishes, i.e. Christianity (cf. STENGER 1993: 11ff.). The remark of one of the German organizers that some of the participants might re-experience troubling Christian childhood experiences during the rituals, as had happened to him during rituals in Brazil, points into that direction.

The „legendary AYAHUASCA-ritual“

The „legendary Ayahuasca-ritual“ took place from the 3rd to the 5th of December 1993 in Berlin and was the first official *Santo Daime* ritual in Germany and the third ritual of its kind ever held in Europe, the handout informed.⁷ Frank Natale, the organizer, admitted later in an interview that the rituals were „modified for the west“ (PÁSTZOR 1994b: 29).

Indeed, they were a modified mixture of two of the four types of *CEFLURIS* rituals: the “official festivals” (*festas oficiais*) and the “concentration rituals” (*trabalhos de concentracao*). The “festivals” are ritual commemorations of Christian Saints like the Holy

⁶ The information was gathered through observations and informal conversations in between rituals.

⁷ Two weeks earlier two *Santo Daime* rituals had taken place in Amsterdam (TNI 1993a: 2).

Virgin Mary, Saint John etc. In these 6 to 12 hours lasting rituals the participants receive the sacrament *daime* more than once and pray, chant and dance together. In the 2 to 4 hours lasting “concentration rituals” the participants receive the *daime* only once remain mostly silent and meditate or listen to parts of the gospels and holy scripts of other main religions that are read aloud by the ritual leader. While the concentration rituals are held twice a month at 7 p.m., the festivals follow the Christian Calendar and start at 6 p.m. (see e. g. FRÓES 1986: 29ff; MACRAE 1992: 100ff; GOULART 2002: 323ff).

The three-days-lasting ritual held in Berlin, however, consisted of three parts (1 ritual: open, 2. ritual: go, 3. ritual: coming back and close) and three levels (1. level: relation to the ego (working with “ego traps”), 2. level: relation to other people (working in relationships), 3. level: relation to the universe). Such a three-days-lasting mixture of two types of *CEFLURIS* rituals, which from the *Santo Daime* doctrine’s perspective makes no sense, as well as such a modified threefold concept of the rituals aren’t heard of in Brazil. As a further modification the second sacrament *Santa Maria* (*Cannabis sativa*) wasn’t offered in Berlin.

The *CEFLURIS* rituals held in Berlin started at 6.00 p.m. and ended at 1.00 a.m. They began with the leader and several initiated *Santo Daime* members from Rio de Janeiro -who were wearing white uniforms (*fardas*) and were called *fardados*-, sitting around a rectangular table called *mesa* serving the sacrament *daime* to the 25 women and the 25 men dressed in white clothes, who were to sit cross-legged on the floor, close to each other and in two separate rows in front of the *mesa*. After the sacrament was taken by everyone the different ritual elements -praying, chanting, dancing, meditating and concentrating- alternated with the leaders instructions. While the *fardados* were singing and praying in Portuguese the German participants listened.⁸ During the phases of concentration and meditation all participants were able to follow the English instructions. These instructions weren’t religious but psychological or therapeutic. For instance, the ritual leader asked to open one’s heart and to forgive relatives, friends etc.

Apart from the inner contemplation and euphoric moods promised in the handout, the ingestion of the sacrament *daime* in the ritual context of the *Santo Daime* doctrine also evoked effects that differed from the promises given. These were expressed through intense weeping, moaning, wry faces, shivering fits, crying and weeping spasms. Up to one third of all participants clearly showed these reactions during all three rituals. Two persons experienced strong problems during the first ritual, which could not be ameliorated by the

ritual leader, and did not take part in the following two rituals. A woman close to the TNI organizers told me that during rituals held some weeks earlier in Amsterdam half of the attendants had quit the rituals after the first day.

During the second ritual, besides the reactions already described, giggling and loud laughing could be heard. The *padrinho* complained that this would disturb the deep and painful inner experiences of others as well as the meditation and concentration. On the third day many people expressed these uncalled-for reactions. One woman was crying out so loudly that the ritual leader intervened in order to shut her up. In this last ritual of the cycle the second drinking of the sacrament *daime* was cancelled.

The described reactions forced the leader to change the ritual frequently. He replaced phases of the concentration and meditation by phases of chanting and dancing. During the rituals he tried to help the suffering people by using special finger gestures, known in Brazil as *dar passes*, a kind of spiritual purification originating in the kardecistic Spiritism (cf. CAMARGO 1961: 22). This spiritual healing practice is unknown in Germany. He also asked his „patients“ to believe in God and His saints, and to pray to them.

Similar reactions to those observed in the Berlin rituals also took place at the following *Santo Daime* rituals held in 1994 in other German cities (ANON 1994: 110f; LUCZYN 1994: 30ff). After a German journalist experienced a very desolate state the day after the *Santo Daime* ritual in Stuttgart, the „side-effects“ of the *ayahuasca* rituals began to trouble not only the participants but also the „*Santo Daime*“ and the German organisers. Feeling that „*his esoteric weekend ended as a horror trip*“ and that „*they gave him a drug*“, the journalist took his story not only to the German magazine DER SPIEGEL, but also to the police (ANON 1994: 110f). These steps were followed by a controversial discussion in parts of the German media and by a police investigation of The Natale Institute (ANON 1994: 111; PÁSZTOR 1994a: 26), because the alkaloid Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) contained in the *ayahuasca* brew (cf. LIWCYK et al 1991: 91) is regarded as a forbidden substance by German drug law (Betäubungsmittelgesetz) (cf. Der Bundesminister für Gesundheit 1994: 20).

Rather than reflecting upon the poor information and preparation of the participants and the rituals single-event-character, Frank Natale, the organizer, blamed the participants themselves:

„... I believe that many people in the West are shocked when they get the "real thing"
(...) No-one should ever expect free and easy experiences full of dance and happiness,

⁸ They also sang some *Santo Daime* hymns in an English version, but as they are unknown in Germany only a handful of people close to the organizers who had participated in rituals in the Netherlands were able to follow

never - and I've said that to the people (...). The fact, that many participants are not well prepared is in my opinion related to the following: I believe that most people in the New Age movement have no idea what a real illuminating experience is." (PÁSZTOR 1994b: 29).⁹

Due to the investigations of the German police Frank Natale called off the *Santo Daime* rituals planned for May 1994 (PÁSZTOR 1994b: 29). Since then, the *Santo Daime* groups existing in Germany have become clandestine, as they are acting illegally.

Medical, psychological and anthropological research in Brazil has shown that the ingestion of *ayahuasca* in the context of the rituals of all three religions *Santo Daime*, *Barquinha* and *União do Vegetal* along with the participation in the religious life of these groups has beneficent and therapeutic effects on the members and their day-by-day life (cf. UNIAO DO VEGETAL 1989: 71ff (all), MACRAE 1992: 115ff, PELAEZ 2002: 435ff (*Santo Daime*), GROB et al 1996 (*UDV*), SENA ARAÚJO 1997, BALZER 2003 (*Barquinha*)). Among the beneficent effects described are: developing a more faithful attitude towards life, feeling generally more stable, cheerful and relaxed, gaining abilities to solve family and personal conflicts, and the absence of or the healing from drug abuse (tobacco, alcohol, cocaine).

Before discussing the obviously different reactions and effects in Germany and the proposed failure of the transposition of these rituals from one cultural context into another, I will now focus on the expectations, mentality and cultural contexts in Germany. These aspects, are, in the context of entheogenic rituals, described as *set* and *setting*.

Set and Setting

In 1964, the psychologists LEARY, ALPERT and METZNER introduced the terms *set* and *setting* into the then ongoing discourse about the ritual ingestion of entheogenic substances. The so-called „*psychedelic experience*“ is determined not only by the effects of the psychedelic (or entheogenic) substance, but also by the two aspects they called *set* and *setting*.

the songs.

⁹ In fact, Frank Natale was not present during the information event and did not take part in the Berlin rituals described below, and the German organizers present failed to warn the participants that they would get "*the real thing*".

Set was defined as the individual preparation, the personal structure and mood of the ritual's participant. *Setting* was defined as the social structure, i.e. the emotional relation among the participants and the cultural structure, i.e. the shared reality (LEARY et al 1993: 9).

In the following years psychologists (e. g. ZINBERG 1984), sociologists (e. g. LEGNARO 1982) and cultural anthropologists (e. g. DOBKIN DE RIOS 1990, ROSENBOHM 1991, MACRAE 1992) have used a modified version of the *set and setting* theory to analyse entheogenic rituals in different cultural contexts. The quoted above psychologists differentiate between two aspects of *set* (momentary and ongoing *set*), and focus on the different expectations of the consumers (e.g. medical, rebellious, religious or intellectual expectations, LEARY et al 1993: 85-87), while, in their cross-cultural studies, sociologists and anthropologists have tended to focus on the social and cultural *setting*. Anthropologists also point out the importance of performative acting, music and odours in traditional entheogenic rituals (DOBKIN DE RIOS 1990: 215).

The effects of any given psychotropic substance, usually referred to as psychoactive, hallucinogenic or - more recently - entheogenic, vary from individual to individual. On a general level the effects of entheogens are described as involving changes of perception (e.g. synaesthesia), somatic changes and changes of mood. In the case of *ayahuasca* the effects are described as sedative, emotive, euphoric and empathic (cf. DOBKIN DE RIOS 1990: 215, OTT 1993: 223ff). As a result of a recent study from a cross-cultural perspective, DOBKIN DE RIOS and GROB asserted the importance of the so-called „*suggestible properties*“ of “plant hallucinogens”. Comparing the cultures of Australian Aborigines, the Thsogana Tsonga of Mozambique and the Chumash of Central California they concluded that

“...plant hallucinogens have been used by tribal elders to create managed states of consciousness to provide their youth with a fast-paced educational experience where values, beliefs and religious tenets have been inculcated.”

and added that

“Plant hallucinogens were generally utilized by Homo sapiens within a ritualized, sacrosanct, socially-sanctioned context with the intent to contribute to group cohesiveness and survival, particularly in pubertal initiatory rituals of identity. The unique suggestible properties of the plants made them ideal catalysts of this process.” (DOBKIN de RIOS & GROB 1994: 113-114).

My observations and experiences with the *ayahuasca* rituals of the Brazilian religions and especially the results of interviews carried out from a biographical perspective strongly

suggest that *ayahuasca* can have these suggestible properties when used in a religious context.

The failed transposition

Using the concepts mentioned above and keeping the Brazilian background in mind I will now give an interpretation of the failure of the transposition of *CEFLURIS* rituals from Brazil to Berlin. First of all it must be stated that the religious rituals of the *Santo Daime* group *CEFLURIS* were offered to individuals on the „market of religions“ in Germany. This does not only imply a transposition of these rituals into a different cultural context but also a change of the way of „supplying“ these rituals. In Brazil interested people join the *ayahuasca* rituals of a religious group they know about from friends, parents or hearsay, first undergoing a preparatory training on a one-to-one basis and paying only a small contribution towards the production of the sacrament. By contrast the fifty German participants came to know about these rituals from an advertisement in a magazine or the German organizers workshop announcements. They each paid about 235 € for three „shamanic“ *ayahuasca* rituals in an esoteric and therapeutical work-shop context.

These *ayahuasca* rituals were therefore not the rituals of an established religious group capable of providing a permanent social reference. As outlined above, these rituals appeal to the expectations raised by a one-off, exotic and new workshop in German New Age circles. In informal talks and short discussions in between the rituals, many of the participants showed that they did not know that *ayahuasca* was a potent entheogen capable of provoking such dramatic effects. In these discussions some of the participants referred to their experiences using terms derived from TNI workshops, terms unknown to the ritual leader. The participants had no previous contact with the *Santo Daime* before the information evening and could not get adequate preparation for the ritual, especially for taking the sacrament. DOBKIN DE RIOS, who has carried out research on *ayahuasca* rituals in Iquitos (Peru), has stated that

„...sudden access to the unconsciousness by means of hallucinogenic ingestion, despite the aesthetic and expressive dimensions possible, is dangerous for human beings. Psychodynamically oriented researchers stress that the emotional response to such entry is displayed by the nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, tachycardia and high blood pressure of the participant.“ (DOBKIN DE RIOS 1990: 10).

Regarding the dangers of "*drug tourism on the Amazon*" she explained that

"This Amazon drug tourism does not dismantle the illusion nor destroy the sense of the exotic. It does on occasion leave psychotic depression and confusion in its wake."
(DOBKIN DE RIOS 1994: 313).

In the case of the *CEFLURIS* rituals in Germany the lack of preparation was exacerbated by the failure to provide the time and space for reflecting the experiences. In one of the discussions in between the rituals an approximately thirty-year-old woman asked to whom she should communicate her experiences. "*I cannot talk to my colleagues in the office about these things on Monday, can I?*" she said.

It is important to realize that the work-shop character of rituals performed or experienced only once or twice, as it was the case in Berlin, constitutes a strong contrast to continuous and regular participation in religious rituals as practiced by *ayahuasca* religions in Brazil. The work-shop context, the three-fold concept of the rituals (relation to the ego, to other people, to the universe) and the promises of the announcement ("*experience a deep state of ecstasy and happiness*") may have raised therapeutical expectations besides possible spiritual ones.¹⁰ Indeed the discussions in between the rituals and the conversations afterwards clearly showed the predominance of expectations typical for workshops with esoteric emphasis not those of religious devotees. The emphasis lay on individual experience, not on collective spiritual work.

This crucial difference leads directly to the subject of personality structure. While religious devotees in traditional contexts often tend to have a more sociocentric personality structure, individuals in western societies, such as loosely organized New Age circles, often tend towards a more egocentric personality structure. MACRAE has stated that during their rituals the initiates of the *CEFLURIS*, the *fardados*, fight collective „astral battles“ as soldiers in the so-called “army of Juramidam“. These *fardados* may have individual therapeutic expectations and may experience individual transformation processes, too, but they also collectively experience a „battle for the good“ (MACRAE 1992: 118). The same holds true for the *fardados* of the *Barquinha* religion, who fight as soldiers in the “armies of Jesus” (*Exércitos de Jesus*) for the good (BALZER 2003: 161). Contrasting to such a collective religious behaviour, STENGER presents in his „sociology of the New Age“ an emic discourse of New-Age protagonists in Berlin that shows the prevalence of consume-oriented social

¹⁰ Nonetheless every participant was obliged to sign a declaration stating that the rituals do not substitute a therapy and that the responsibility for possible consequences lies with the participants.

practices and resulting superficial attitudes among most New Age followers (STENGER 1993: 35).

As the „Good Friday“-experiment lead by the psychologist Walter PAHNKE in California in the 1960s has shown, the use of entheogenic sacraments can also have a beneficial influence on the religious experiences of the participants in western societies. During this experiment twenty students of Theology participated in a religious ritual, a Christian mass. Ten of them took the entheogen Psilocybin¹¹ and the other ten a placebo, but without knowing who had taken what. The students had been very well prepared for this experiment, which took place in a religious ritual in their own cultural and religious context. The results of this experiment showed that the students ingesting the entheogen, tended to have experiences -mystic or otherwise- that influenced their lives and especially their relationships with other people in a lasting way (PAHNKE 1972: 61f, 66f).¹² The results of the "Good Friday"-experiment relate to the reported beneficial effects provoked by Brazilian *daime* rituals and underline the importance of the cultural *setting* of entheogenic rituals.

The discussion before the rituals in Berlin showed that there was little interest in this religious practice of the *Santo Daime* among the German participants. Instead they show a rejective attitude towards the Christian aspects of the *Santo Daime* religious practice. This strongly suggests that their main interest was to experience the "legendary ayahuasca ritual", and not to experience *ayahuasca* within the *Santo Daime* doctrine, or practice the *Santo Daime* religion. The rejective attitudes towards Christianity, and therefore towards parts of the host's religion, the consumption-oriented attitude towards *ayahuasca* and the lack of adequate preparation are partly responsible for the unexpected reactions observed during the rituals. Therefore the inadequate *set* is one of the two main reasons for the failure of the transposition of this entheogenic ritual.

During the rituals the ritual leader tried to help suffering people using practices common to the *Santo Daime* religion. As described above, he used spiritual purification practices like *dar passes* and asked them to pray to God and the Virgin Mary, which evidently confused the participants even more. In a suggestible state of consciousness the participants were not only confronted with unknown and confusing religious practices but also with parts of a religion and practices they rejected. Consequently they rejected the "healing" as embedded in the ritual, i.e. the spiritual purification as well as the faith. As they were only ten *fardados* as

¹¹ Psilocybin is an alkaloid contained in Psilocybe and other fungi species such as those used by Mazatec shamans in Mexico (cf. e. g. MUNN 1973).

opposed to fifty inexperienced people many of which experienced serious problems, the single ritual leader was strained to the limit, the course of the rituals had to be interrupted several times and the inner structure of the ritual had to be altered repeatedly. The fact that the already modified rituals had to be altered while in progress can be seen as a direct result of the supply and demand-structure of the “market of religions”. On the one hand there are obvious mercantile interests on the part of the organizers (advertisements, payment, workshop-context, etc.). On the other hand, there is the consume-oriented attitude of the participants who show little interest in the religion *Santo Daime*. *CEFLURIS* rituals carried out in the context of a “market of religions” have also been observed in other western countries. A report by the Brazilian broadcasting company sbt on *CEFLURIS* activities abroad stated that in Spain each cup of the sacrament *daime* was sold for about 40 US\$. According to the same report trips to *CEFLURIS* center *Céu do Mapia*, departing from Miami, cost 1500 US\$ for three weeks in the hammock in the New Jerusalem (SBT-REPORTER 1996).

While discussing problematic aspects of the “market of religions”, ZINSER has pointed out that:

"The search for harmony refers to the "everyday chaos" prevalent in social relationships and in love. With the other realities come the promises of overcoming the daily routine, which so obviously represents a source of suffering for many people. However, they are inevitably sucked into its structure even deeper due to the mediation of a market (...)" (ZINSER 1997: 90).

In summary, the loose relationships between the participants, especially between them and the ritual leader, the “market of religions”-context with all its problematic aspects, and the lack of a shared perceptual universe -i.e. a shared reality, culture or religion- which also resulted in a failure of the leader’s “healing” efforts are responsible for the unexpected reactions observed during these entheogenic rituals. In addition to the inadequate *set* mentioned above, the second main reason for the failure of the transposition of these entheogenic rituals can be found in the inadequate *setting*.

In the work-shop-like *CEFLURIS*-rituals in Berlin *ayahuasca*, the shaman’s healing plant that had become the religion’s holy sacrament, was turned into a consumable commodity, an exotic and forbidden fruit in the supermarket of religions.

¹² For a description of the ensuing theological discussion see GLADIGOW 1978: 32f; for a methodological critique and a long-term follow up in the late 1980s, which confirmed Pahnke’s earlier results see DOBLIN

Conclusion and Beyond

In my anthropological study on the Brazilian *ayahuasca*-using religion *Barquinha* I depicted major transformation taking place in most of the religion's members lives. This transformation centres upon the re-organisation of the members daily life changing from a material and sometimes conflict-laden life (drug or alcohol dependency, family/job problems, diseases) to a spiritual life as "soldiers" in the "holy armies of Jesus" (*Santos Exércitos de Jesus*). In the context of the religions' emic discourse and the presentation of biographies of selected members I demonstrated that there is a reflexive connection between the transformation and a form of healing (or solving of conflicts). Both transformation and "healing", which I called "Wege zum Heil" (ways to benefit/salvation), are achieved in a very complex "system" that consists of various factors. These factors are described as a motivation to change one's life, the transformation triggering and supporting effects of the *ayahuasca* experience in a religious setting, the role-model character of the community members' modest way of life and the spiritual participation in the *Barquinha*'s mission (BALZER 2003: 199ff). As mentioned above, beneficial effects of the *ayahuasca* experience in a religious setting along with the on-going participation in the religious life of established groups are confirmed for the *União do Vegetal* and the different *Santo Daime* groups in Brazil by interdisciplinary research projects, as well as by individual scientists (cf. e. g. UNIAO DO VEGETAL 1989: 71f; MACRAE 1992: 115ff; GROB et al 1996; PELAEZ 2002: 435ff).

In the German case (analysed above), both the inadequate *set* (i.e. lack of preparation and reflecting, the rejective and consumption-oriented attitude) and the inadequate *setting* (loose social relationships, differing perceptual universes and work-shop-context) are responsible for the unexpected effects and reactions, and the altering of the inner structure of the rituals. Thus, the transposition of the discussed entheogenic rituals failed. I will argue that this failure is the direct result of the supply-and-demand-structure of a *market of religion* -the primary context in which these rituals have been offered- and its ensuing methods to attract clients. While the German police and parts of the German media held the used entheogen *ayahuasca*, the sacrament *daime*, responsible for the problematic effects and reactions, I

would suggest that the responsibility lies in the *set* and *setting* analysed above. The commercialisation of religion or precisely of a religious sacrament is the main factor responsible for the failure of the transposition not the entheogen itself.

The emergence and development of various *Santo Daime* groups in European countries since the mid-1990s underline this argument. It is estimated that there are several thousand *Santo Daime* members in Europe and about 150 members in Germany today (NICKOLAIT 2003). As most European countries prohibit the ingestion of *ayahuasca*, the groups were clandestine. Anthropological or sociological research is therefore neither possible nor suitable and hence does not exist. The liberal drug laws of the Netherlands, however, permitted the ritual ingestion of certain entheogens. The *Santo Daime* groups established in 1995 in the Netherlands were the only ones that can use both their sacraments, *Santo Daime* (*ayahuasca*) and *Santa Maria* (*Cannabis Sativa*), legally.¹³ An article in the popular magazine "The Face" claims that the *daime*-supported healing of a Dutch woman - the current *madrinha* of the group - led her to devote herself to the *Santo Daime* and to establish a group in Amsterdam (SAUNDERS 1996). This reminds one of the founding of the *Barquinha* religion and the *Santo Daime* group *CEFLURIS* in Rio Branco. In 1995 I met some Dutch *Santo Daime* members in the *CEFLURIS* office in Rio de Janeiro. They were *fardados* (initiated members) on the way to *Céu do Mapia*, the "New Jerusalem" of the *CEFLURIS*, and their behaviour thus reflected the Brazilian pilgrimage-situation, i.e. the pilgrimage from the urban centres to *Céu do Mapia* (cf. SOARES 1989, 1990). In the same office a *CEFLURIS* leader from Rio de Janeiro explained to me that the Osho movement fascinated him most of all European religious groups, because of its members collective lifestyle.¹⁴ The pictures from the rituals and the church of the Dutch *fardados*, which were shown to me in the *CEFLURIS* office, revealed that next to the portrait of the founder of *CEFLURIS*, Sebastião Mota de Melo, the portrait of Osho was placed. Osho, formerly known as the Indian *guru* Bhagwhan Shree Rajneesh, was the founder of the Bhagwhan movement, which later became the Osho movement. Thus, in the Amsterdam *CEFLURIS* affiliation a new religious movement, already established in Europe, successfully integrated into the Brazilian *Santo Daime* doctrine (see also MACRAE 2000: 96f).¹⁵ Furthermore, the preparation for individuals participating in the Dutch *CEFLURIS* rituals differs from the one presented in Berlin in 1993. In a *CEFLURIS*

¹³ See www.santodaime.nl (October 2004).

¹⁴ This collective lifestyle he saw expressed in the shared use of apartments, working spaces and spiritual centres, which are all located in the same building.

¹⁵ MACRAE states that Osho died the very same day as Sebastião Mota de Melo (MACRAE 2000: 97).

announcement for the „Second Meeting Of The European Churches“ at the end of October 1998 in Amsterdam, one finds a note about „weekly training sessions“ for new participants:

„As an introduction to the Santo Daime rituals people are required to participate in a training evening before actually drinking the Daime in a work.“ (CEFLURIS 1998).

Such “preparing trainings”, which I could observe myself in São Paulo in 1995, are obligatory trainings for *não-fardados*, i. e. participants, who aren’t initiated in the *Santo Daime* religion (cf. also MACRAE 1992: 120).

In a personal communication the anthropologist Alberto GROISMANN, who has carried out fieldwork among the Amsterdam *Santo Daime* members, underlined the importance of the cultural context when regarding the differences between *Santo Daime* rituals in Germany and the Netherlands. In this context he noted the „proverbial tolerance“ of the Dutch people and the liberal drug policy of the Netherlands (GROISMANN 1998). In his descriptive work on the Brazilian *Santo Daime* movement, the German anthropologist Jakob HUTTNER included a description of a *daime* ritual held by a Dutch *CEFLURIS* group, in which he participated in 1998. HUTTNER was prepared for the ritual by the group leader and was informed that the *daime* is a potent entheogen. The participants of these rituals were initiated members of the *CEFLURIS*. They were wearing uniforms (*fardas*) during the rituals and some had been pilgrims to *Céu do Mapia*. The ritual followed the scheme of *CEFLURIS* rituals in Brazil with the exception that people prayed in Dutch and not in Portuguese (HUTTNER 1998: 87ff). HUTTNER’s description and analysis of the ritual shows that the effects and behaviour he observed among the participants differ from that of the first *daime* rituals in Amsterdam and Berlin in 1993, and relate more to the effects and behaviour that is known from Brazil. Although HUTTNER offers no description or analysis of the Dutch members’ daily life, his account shows that the sacrament *daime* when ingested with an appropriate preparing in a (shared) religious context -indicated in the regularly held rituals, the collective praying in Dutch, the pilgrimages, the initiated members (*fardados*) and the commitment of the leader-, does not inevitably lead to the effects that were provoked by commercialised rituals like those offered in the New Age sphere of a “market of religions”.

Epilogue

By a court verdict in 2001 the Dutch *Santo Daime* groups gained the legal status of a church. Silvio ROHDE offers a detailed description of this case in his study on “the religious use of *ayahuasca* and aspects of its criminalization”. Like in 1994, in 1999, the German police

investigated against *Santo Daime* rituals held in Germany by raiding an international *Santo Daime* meeting near Weimar. As a result, the Dutch police two weeks later raided a *CEFLURIS* ritual held by the leader of the Dutch *CEFLURIS* group Geraldine Fijneman, who had been participating in the European *Santo Daime* meeting in Germany, too. Fijneman and the leader of another Dutch *CEFLURIS* group were arrested and accused of being members of a “criminal association”. In spring of 2001, the *Santo Daime* case went to court in Amsterdam. During the legal proceedings various experts were heard to discuss the questions whether *ayahuasca* is a “dangerous drug” or a religious sacrament and whether the *Santo Daime* is a “bona fide religious movement” that should achieve religious freedom. After hearing the experts, the judge explained that the *Santo Daime* has to be seen as an “authentic religion” and the Dutch affiliation as a church. The verdict argued that the doctrine is a religious belief and the ingestion of *ayahuasca* is a sacramental use and does not present harms to the members’ health (ROHDE 2001: 75ff).

Further research on the Dutch *Santo Daime* groups is expected to prove this an example of successful transposition of entheogenic rituals from Brazil to Europe.

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