

PART I

FRAMING AND TACKLING THE QUESTION

WHY SANTO DAIME IN EUROPE?

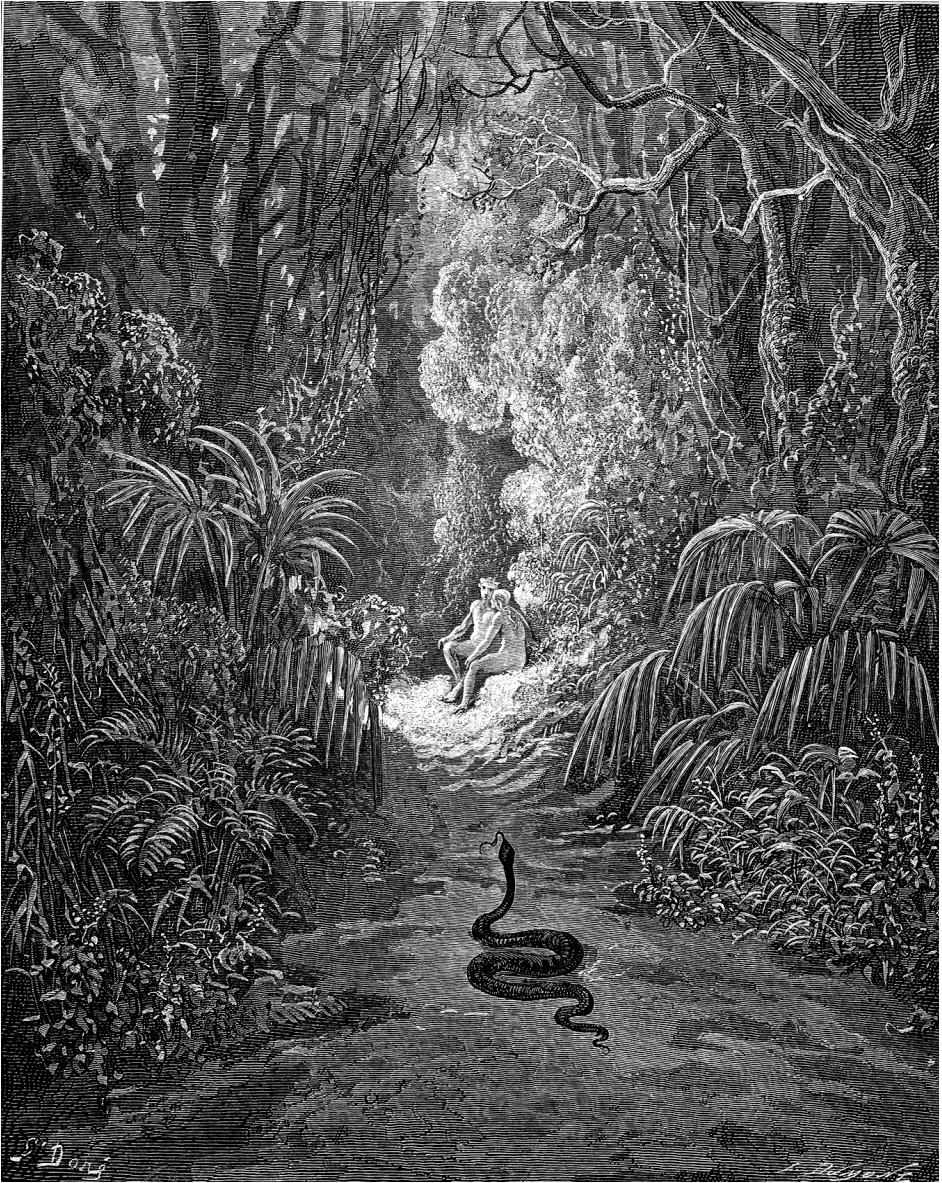


Figure 1.1. *The First Approach of the Serpent*, engraving by Gustave Doré (1866), published with permission from the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF).

The believer possesses the ever-sure antidote to despair: possibility; since for God everything is possible at every moment. This is the health of faith which resolves contradictions. The contradiction here is that in human terms the undoing [i.e., mortality] is certain and that still there is possibility. Health is in general to be able to resolve contradictions.

—Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*

<i>Encontrei uma chave</i>	<i>I found a key</i>
<i>Para ser feliz</i>	<i>To be happy</i>
<i>É fazer</i>	<i>It's to do</i>
<i>O que Jesus me diz</i>	<i>What Jesus says to me</i>
. . .	
<i>Se errar Deus perdoa</i>	<i>If one makes mistakes God forgives</i>
<i>E eu peço perdão</i>	<i>And I ask for forgiveness</i>
<i>Limpai a minha mente</i>	<i>Cleanse my mind</i>
<i>E o meu coração</i>	<i>And my heart</i>

—from Santo Daime hymn #8, “Eu Encontrei uma Chave”
(I Found a Key), in *Flores de São João (Flowers of St. John)*,
by Cristina Tati

Introduction

On Mother's Day 2005, I found myself hurtling down an Amsterdam highway in a compact car driven by a petite Dutch grandmother. In her mid-sixties at the time, Jacoba¹ is a veteran member of *Santo Daime*, a new religion from Brazil organized around the psychoactive beverage ayahuasca. Through prior email contacts I had made with a local congregation, Jacoba was appointed as chaperone for my first *trabalho* ("work" in Portuguese), the apt identification of Santo Daime ceremonies as performative and introspective labor. As I was then just a backpacker curious about why ayahuasca had found its way to Europe,² Jacoba kindly shepherded me to and from the rural outskirts of the Netherlands' capital city. Upon entering a little rented chapel where the ritual was held, she introduced me to her fellow *daimistas*, a term encompassing both uninitiated parishioners and full-fledged Santo Daime members (*fardados/fardadas*), those dressed in white, green, and blue *fardas* ("uniforms").

Noticing that I was confused by the whirlwind of activities and conversations going on inside the church, my *fardada* chaperone guided me to the registration table where I paid 30€ and signed my name in the official participants' log. She then handed me a small hymnbook before turning me over to the elderly *fardado* in charge of assigning individuals to their "place" on the "men's side" of the *salão* ("hall"). Although I have since acquired a deeper appreciation of Santo Daime works in Europe, a spiritual behavior that is the main subject of this book, my memories of this introductory ayahuasca ritual are mostly a blur due to an utter lack of bearings in 2005. After swigging my first glass of the ayahuasca, which *fardados* lovingly dub "Daime," I spent the next six hours trying but mostly failing

to sing along with a seemingly endless string of repetitive hymns. To the accompaniment of guitars, flute, and a bongo drum, I clumsily attempted to dance back and forth in the manner of the daimistas, a task that became trickier the more the effects of the Daime kicked in. At phases where the music paused in between hymns, the sudden silence was accompanied by an uneasy sensation of being trapped in an intergalactic dream sequence resembling the final scenes³ of Stanley Kubrick's (1968) film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Whenever the music proceeded, I felt lucky not to be joining the ranks of fellow participants making loud retching noises as they vomited into plastic buckets at the back of the room. Amid all this, the foremost recollection of my first Daime work is that every time I closed my eyes, the ambient sounds of vocalized hymns produced in my mind's eye a vivid image of semi-naked tribal celebrations in Africa or South America—akin to *National Geographic* documentaries I watched as a child—but when I opened my eyes I was shocked to remember that these chants were being emitted by Europeans dressed in pristine formalwear. This was no ordinary church service!

Flash forward to a sunny afternoon in the summer of 2010. I had arrived back in Amsterdam and now sat across from Jacoba on the flower-covered balcony of her apartment. While my maiden Daime voyage had been a sightseer's whim five years earlier, her facilitation of that enigmatic experience inspired me to return to gather ethnographic data about Santo Daime groups in Europe. Now, as I record an interview with Jacoba, she speaks in accented but fluent English about what her life was like before she began attending Santo Daime works twelve years ago. She tells me that she had a distressing childhood, beginning with her birth in The Hague in 1941. She states that because her family was then taking shelter during World War II and there were “bombs falling around us . . . [we] had to go [into] hiding in the factory of my grandfather in Leiden.” She then tells me that she was physically and psychologically abused by family members and teachers while she was a youth, attributing the pain inflicted on her to the projection of collective wounds suffered by Europeans at that time: “In Holland we are still in shock from the war; it's really very bad what people can do to each other.” Claiming that these ordeals weighed heavily on her well into adulthood, Jacoba now radiates a sense of steely calm through her blue-grey eyes as she touts the psychotherapeutic effects of Santo Daime. She characterizes the ayahuasca “sacrament” as a spiritual being. She earnestly believes that the brew gives access to a divine interlocutor that can steer people who drink it to become better versions of themselves by

helping them resolve internalized stings of past trauma: “I say all the time, the Daime (the spirit in the bottle [of ayahuasca]), that’s my best friend: it cares about me, it corrects me, it makes me realize how I relate to other people (because I’m not always so nice to other people) . . . and I think that’s the same person as God. . . . God has many faces.”

Needless to say, fardados’ view of the Daime beverage as containing a direct link to God is very different from the generally negative attitude about “hallucinogenic drugs” in Europe. For instance, Jacoba has two daughters, one of whom has two daughters of her own. She now has a close relationship with her granddaughters, but it took some time for their mother to let them visit with their grandmother again after she found out that Jacoba was involved with Santo Daime. Jacoba says she is hurt that some members of her family are staunchly opposed to ayahuasca. She tries to patiently accept that the stigmatized status of her religious orientation has caused such rifts in her family, but she confesses that “it is difficult!”

Whereas social bigotries can perpetuate laws that exacerbate the very problems they are designed to resolve, ethnography informs more effective public health and crime policies by shining a light on unseen realities lived by marginalized groups (Fleisher 1995, 5/243–47).⁴ Based on stories of youths experiencing “bad trips” a half-century ago during the “psychedelic sixties,” in Western societies so-called hallucinogens are assumed to be inherently dangerous. Popular fears about the hippie counterculture’s promotion of psychedelics provoked a worldwide criminalization of this class of chemicals, enacted by the United Nations’ Convention on Psychotropic Substances in 1971 (Beyerstein and Kalchik 2003; Spillane and McAllister 2003). Since then, 184 member states have signed this UN treaty, which obliges each signatory to also legislate their own national sanctions.⁵ Globally, the *International Narcotics Control Board* (INCB) now adjudicates international prohibitions of these psychoactive materials (see Tupper and Labate 2012). Because DMT, the mind-altering molecule found in ayahuasca, is also officially classified as a banned “hallucinogen,” Santo Daime rituals remain a punishable offense in most countries⁶ (Horák, Novák, and Vozáryová 2016). Consequently, in many liberalist nations where the freedom of religion is enshrined, those whose religious convictions revolve around ayahuasca now risk incarceration. Even while ayahuasca’s constituents are condemned in most places, Santo Daime has managed to earn full legitimacy in Brazil, as well as in small sections of Europe⁷ (Netherlands, Spain), the United States (Oregon), and most recently in Canada.⁸ In these exceptional localities, courts of law upheld fardados’ right to practice their religion as superseding

statutes that outlaw ayahuasca. On the other hand, the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Portugal, and Germany have opposed this religious use of ayahuasca, arresting and in some cases imprisoning fardados for importation and distribution of an illicit substance (Dawson 2013, 31–35; Labate and Feeney 2012; see also Silva Sá 2010). By contrast, fardados flatly reject the terms *hallucinogen*—which implies that the substance engenders delusions—and *psychedelic*—reminiscent of hedonistic use during the 1960s. Instead, they prefer the terms *sacred plant* and *entheogen*. Meaning “to generate god/s within” in Greek, entheogen denotes “vision-producing” substances employed “in shamanic or religious rites” (Ruck et al. 1979, 146). This vocabulary of entheogens as revealing an inner divinity is crucial for apprehending fardados’ nonconformist approach to life. Now, years later, sifting through the transcriptions of interviews I recorded with fardados across Europe, I find that the essence of these testimonies is neatly summarized in the words of Jacoba.

I had asked Jacoba why she chooses to participate in these Christianized ayahuasca works, a question I put to every fardado I met during more than a year of fieldwork in Europe. Jacoba paused, and thought for a moment before saying, “Of course, we come to the Daime because of our despair.” When I invited her to elaborate on what she means when she pinpoints “despair” as a motivation for attending Daime works, she resumed:

It's despair . . . the feeling of estrangement . . . from others . . . and isolation . . . there is no unity at all. . . .

Everybody is always looking for the answer of why we are here. What is this all about? You know, at my age sometimes I'm bored; is this all there is? I've seen everything of theatre, of art; it's all repeating itself. And then I found something so new . . . it is so intriguing, so fascinating, so fitting and logical. I thought it was a fantasy, but as a child I was connected with spirits. . . . So there was already a clairvoyance in me before I went to school, and then I was abused [at] school, very repressed . . . and all these layers you have to [take] them off, one by one, and that [took me] at least ten years [of Daime] works. . . .

In a [Daime] work, in the beginning I got a lot of corrections. It's called “peia” [in Portuguese]; it's actually an “obstacle” you have to overcome . . . it's very good lessons . . . it's like suffering, but it's also good for you to be humbled. . . .

What the Daime gives me is that I observe myself observing, and that means I can change. . . . You observe the observer

observing, and that's why you can change yourself with the click of your fingers, because you see directly the implementation you have on others, but also on yourself, and you see the whole picture, like [from] a helicopter. . . . After Daime works it stays in you all the time, that's really the big progress you see [over] the years.

Peia is a complex concept. When taken in Jacoba's sense of "obstacle," *peia* is like the Daime form of karma. As will become more apparent in the ensuing chapters, daimistas view their ayahuasca ceremonies as a microcosm of life itself. They presume that whatever negative thoughts or actions a person puts out into the world will eventually come back as a corrective reaction from the universe (Schmidt 2007, 167). As a word for what outsiders might conceive to be a "bad trip" during Daime rituals, *peia* is seen by worshippers of ayahuasca religions "as a sign that something inside the person must be out of tune with the cosmic order," which is often "manifested as a physical symptom; thus, the act of vomiting is seen as an expulsion of pernicious matter, as an act of purification" (Henman 2009[1985]). Besides the physiological reaction of vomiting, *peia* can also convey the connotation of "aggression (as in 'beating up')," which accounts for devotees viewing difficult or horrifying ayahuasca experiences as a psychophysical "cleansing" (Soibelman 1995, 104). In a theological treatise that summarizes some of the basic tenets of Daime belief and practice, a widely respected daimista elder gives this gloss for *peia* (Polari de Alverga 1998, 212):

Peia—A purgative and mimetic process that sometimes occurs with the use of the sacramental Daime beverage. This is considered a cleaning of the physical level and a necessary discipline to unlock resistance and crystallization in the interior level.¹⁰

This seemingly upside-down interpretation of severe and harrowing episodes as therapeutic provides a convenient starting point for framing fardado perspectives on ayahuasca rituals. As such, the ways that daimistas describe the suffering in Daime works and in everyday life as ultimately restorative "processes" are mirrored by the psychiatric concept of "creative illness." According to Henri Ellenberger (1968, 443), to value the "good usage of illnesses" can appear like a "moral masochism" from the standpoint of physicalist biomedicine: "With the advent of Positivism, the hedonistic utilitarian notion came to prevail that [mental] illness is simply and exclusively a disorder of psychological origin, to be cured or to be prevented by scientific

methods.” But what might ordinarily be taken as a self-destructive drive to undergo torments that one should really try to avoid is the crux of disagreements between materialist approaches to psychotherapy and the initiatory trials of shamanic dismemberment or mystical death/rebirth experiences (Ellenberger 1968, 445–47). Such disparity means that strictly physicalist approaches to understanding Santo Daime cannot but misunderstand the perspectives of fardados. On the contrary, Jacoba’s perception of sicknesses temporarily imposed by ayahuasca as signifying a healing of despair calls to mind notions from existentialist psychology. As an ethnography that brings existentialism to bear in explaining daimistas’ entheogenic piety, the present study contributes to anthropological liaisons with philosophy and theology on the question of what it means to be human.

In advancing these new interdisciplinary ventures, the present text turns to various philosophers and theologians to draw instructive links between conventional Western thought and the unfamiliar social context of Santo Daime. To start, we turn to the nineteenth-century Danish philosopher/theologian Søren Kierkegaard, a founding father of existentialism who has long received scant attention from cultural anthropologists (the writings of Ernest Becker 1997[1973] are one major exception). Recently, Kierkegaard has been gaining notice in the now-blossoming subfields of existential anthropology, the anthropology of Christianity, and the anthropology of Santo Daime (Jespersen 2016; Lambek 2015; Rapport 2002; Tomlinson 2014; Willerslev and Suhr 2018). As displayed in interview narratives from European fardados, my informants are preoccupied with self-confrontation and faith as antidotes to existential anxiety and despair. Thus, I deploy perspectives from the existential anthropology of Christianity as an efficient framework for apprehending Santo Daime beliefs and practices.

Another key observation derived from ethnographic fieldwork and interviews is that European fardados disregard the dualist split between secular science and traditional religion as obsolete. For my informants, “belief” or “nonbelief” are beside the point of human flourishing. They say that they have jettisoned belief in favor of “experience” mainly because of the phenomena they must navigate within ayahuasca states of consciousness. They say Santo Daime provides them a dependable path for directly encountering a primordial source of healing and serenity that they could not find through the established secular and religious options in Europe. They value the otherworldly happenings of the Daime rituals as opportunities to effectively confront and resolve defects of their individual selves. But apart from the power of existential anthropology for elucidating alternative systems

of thought, how does the ethnographer go about appreciating fardados' quest for self-enhancement through Santo Daime? Using visual and gustatory metaphors, one of my Belgian informants communicated the ineffability of experiences brought on by the Daime sacrament:

I can't tell with words . . . you can [only] have an experience to get close. . . . It's like [trying] to describe colors to a blind person . . . you know or you don't know. How do you explain the taste of chocolate to somebody who has never eaten chocolate?

Despite the dubious identity of his key informant Don Juan, Carlos Castaneda (2016[1968])¹¹ was right that the most important anthropological insights about New World plant medicines can only be tapped by having expert informants guide us through the experience directly.

The dialectic compilation of both first- and secondhand data about what a specific cultural experience feels like comprises a method of inquiry known as *ethnophenomenology* (see chapter 2). Relationships between *existential* “analysis of what constitutes existence” and investigations into “the question of the meaning of Being” (*ontology*) are a cornerstone of *phenomenology*, an analytic technique defined by Martin Heidegger (1962[1927], 32–33, 58–63) as a “way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology.” Thus, the ethnophenomenologist elects to temporarily set aside (or “parenthesize”) their own personal biases when they submit themselves to the rites of a religious culture they are trying to comprehend (an ethnographic extension of the “phenomenological epoché” of Husserl [1960(1929), 20/131–36/150–51]). I was initially drawn to study the anthropology of ayahuasca after reading *The Antipodes of the Mind*, a book written by cognitive psychologist Benny Shanon (2002). Through his text, Shanon proceeds to “chart” the “phenomenology of the ayahuasca experience,” including meticulous chapters on contents/themes of visions, encounters with supernatural light, alterations of consciousness, and time. His report is based on his personal experience with the mind-altering brew at more than 130 ayahuasca rituals in South America (Shanon 2002, 41–45). But apart from his engrossing depiction of what is an almost unspeakable affair, I was taken aback by the following remark about outcomes of his fieldwork with ayahuasca drinkers:

Personally, if I were to pick one single effect of Ayahuasca that had the most important impact on my life (there were many and the choice of one is not at all easy), I would say that before

my encounter with the brew I was an atheist . . . and when I returned back home after my long journey in South America, I no longer was one. . . . I did not, despite strong encouragement, become a member of any of the groups I associated myself with nor do I have any intention of doing so in the future. But my [worldview] was radically changed. (Shanon 2002, 8–9/260)

Years later, having carried out my own participant-observation with Daime groups in Brazil, North America, and Europe, I now empathize with Shanon's statement of scholarly quasi-entanglement. It is inevitable that researchers of ayahuasca spirituality must eventually confront their own thoughts and feelings if they choose to repeatedly indulge in the brew themselves. Unlike Shanon, I was not a "devout" atheist going into my fieldwork; like most social scientists I was more of a disenchanting agnostic predisposed to cynical deconstruction of the theological beliefs underlying any organized religion. In the social sciences, this kind of incredulous agnosticism is usually synonymous with "methodological atheism" (Bialecki 2014; Dawson 2013, 196; see also Poidevin 2010, 46–53). But through painstaking observational experiments at Daime ceremonies, I likewise underwent shifts in my metaphysical outlook. Now, in no way have I abandoned my resolute commitment to the Enlightenment ideals of scholarly rigor grounded in verifiable evidence. What I have come to deny is the hasty arrogance in secularist "world structures" of "closed immanence" (i.e., absolute this-worldliness), whereby issues and questions beyond what can be empirically measured are devalued as "epiphenomenal" or not worthy of serious attention (Taylor 2007, 433–34/539–93).

Everyone experiences ayahuasca in a distinct way contingent on personality and mind-set. I myself faced a panoply of weird, frightful, sorrowful, agonizing, but also ecstatic, pleasurable, and even therapeutic sessions with ayahuasca. As someone who has always felt the presence of atheist/theist cross-pressures within and outside academia, my fieldwork with Santo Daime did result in what I now feel as a private reconciliation of these secular-religious polarities within my own thinking, a stance akin to Richard Kearney's (2011, 7) *anatheism*. Perhaps I would now identify as more of an awestruck agnostic, someone who feels content with "the openness and skepticism of science wedded to the zeal and exaltation of religion . . . the veneration of mystery wedded to the solemnity of [empirical] responsibility" (Schneider 2007, 33). I am still nonconfessional in my agnosticism¹² vis-à-vis both cross-pressured extremes because I have no idea whether the ultimate nature of the universe is divine or not; however, I am now more attuned to the

inscrutabilities of existing as a human being and to a sense of wonderment about Nature that was absent prior to my fieldwork (see Tupper 2011, 224–36). Directly because of my Daime experiences, I now recognize a deep wisdom in the mythoses of the world’s major religions that beforehand I would have viewed with haughty suspicion. For instance, the pluralistic way my informants conceptualize Jesus Christ and other Christian figures challenged and transformed residual bitterness I had held toward my Irish Catholic upbringing, which I had stridently rebuffed as a teenager. And even though I maintain contempt for the political and moral corruption that can fester within all human institutions, I have a newfound respect for the lessons of compassion, altruism, and forgiveness that constitute the ethical root of all great religious traditions. I do not feel comfortable counting myself as a “Christian,” nor as a member of any religious group for that matter. But I am now proud to say that being an anthropologist does not preclude my admiration for the faith and charity exhibited by many religious believers.

“Cultural relativism,” the bedrock of modern anthropology, underscores that all human beings think about and act in the world according to (or sometimes in defiance of) the system of ideological and behavioral norms within which they were reared. Contesting ethnocentrism, cultural relativism “strategically suspends moral judgement in order to understand and appreciate the diverse logics of social and cultural practices that, at first sight, often evoke righteous responses and prevent analytical self-reflection” (see Bourgois and Schonberg 2009, 7). Philosophers also acknowledge that each person has “pre-theoretic” beliefs/intuitions, which dictate one’s degree of openness to ideas *prior to* one’s making a decision to accept or reject them (see Güzeldere 1997, 2; Heidegger 1962[1927], 360; Velmans 2007, 348–49). As humans, we all habitually ignore inextricable connections between pre-theoretic values informed by our enculturation and the stances we take with regard to metaphysical conundrums, such as the underlying structures of conscious life. For example, is it better to assume that the observed world of external objects is the primary touchstone for acquiring knowledge? Or should our inner sense of subjective mindfulness be treated as the epistemological starting point? Does ayahuasca cause hallucinations that misrepresent the one true objective world or are these visionary dispatches from a spiritual otherworld that normally goes unseen? The kneejerk ways in which each reader reacts emotionally and intellectually to such dilemmas show how we are predisposed to liking or disliking certain ideas at the outset.

The discipline of anthropology as we know it today was born of scholarly aspirations for a general “science of humanity” dating back to the

Renaissance (Zammito 2002, 221–22/435–36, n. 9). Over the centuries, the “empirical [social] sciences of ‘physical’ and ‘cultural’ anthropology” became divorced from “philosophical anthropology” as “a study of [humans] in the widest sense” (Macquarrie and Robinson in Heidegger 1962[1927], 38/n. 2) and “theological anthropology” as any “doctrine of human nature” held by religious believers (Jones et al. 2005, 1972). Yet as attested by William Adams (1998, 1), the philosophical “roots” still apply to anthropology as the only social science that “dares to suggest that in studying the Other, we may learn more about ourselves than we do by studying ourselves.” While anthropologists studying religion need not adopt the positions of their research subjects, Joel Robbins (2006, 287) highlights the budding but “awkward relationship” between anthropologists and theologians, which requires anthropologists to show an “openness to the possibilities” presented by nonsecular Others: “The encounter with theology might lead anthropologists . . . to imagine that theologians might either produce theories that get some things right about the world they currently get wrong or model a kind of action in the world that is in some or other way more effective or ethically adequate than their own.” It is not so much that theology undercuts secular approaches to anthropology, but rather that a genuine anthropology of religion is enriched by interchanges with theologians who write about the wider philosophical sense of anthropology. I agree with Robbins that rather than continuing to omit theology as inconsistent with the goals of sociocultural anthropology, new transactions with theologians can disclose important features of religious beliefs and practices that ethnographers might otherwise overlook. In the case of the present study, Jacoba’s assertion that she “overcomes” her “despair” when ayahuasca helps her to “observe the observer observing” is most expediently illuminated by existentialist theologies about the relation between self and what is considered other-than-self.

For an initial example, I turn to Jacoba’s optimistic view of *peia* as providing remedial insights into her despair and other detrimental defects in her personality. This positive spin on suffering is typical of *fardados*, and matches Kierkegaard’s (1989[1849], 43–45) theistic “formula” for how a human self can surmount the “sickness unto death” he calls “despair”:

Despair is a sickness of the spirit, of the self. . . .

The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation’s relating to itself. A

human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity. In short a synthesis. . . .

If a person in despair is, as he thinks, aware of his despair and doesn't refer to it mindlessly as something that happens to him . . . and wants now on his own, all on his own, and with all his might to remove the despair, then he is still in despair and through all his seeming effort only works himself all the more deeply into a deeper despair. The imbalance in despair is not a simple imbalance but an imbalance in a relation that relates to itself and which is established by something else. . . .

This then is the formula which describes the state of the self when despair is completely eradicated: in relating to itself and in wanting to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it. . . .

Despair is the imbalance in a relation of synthesis, in a relation that relates to itself.

Such a poetic itemization of the relational dialectics inherent in being a human self simulates the way *daimistas* conceptualize existential problems they try to address through Daimic works. They likewise claim that *ayahuasca* rituals help them resolve personal conflicts through teaching them the benefits of self-surrender into “faith” in a higher “power” (Kierkegaard 1989[1849], 165). As will be made plain in later chapters, *daimistas* share Kierkegaard's inverse definitions of illness and health regarding the human self. To further contextualize how this corresponds to *daimistas'* worldview, one can refer to how Alastair Hannay (1989, 4–5) deciphers Kierkegaard's notion of despair:

Kierkegaard detects in contemporary life-styles, in the kinds of goals people set for themselves, in their ideals of fulfillment, a fundamental fear of conscious selfhood. He calls it “despair.” . . .

Despair is not a disorder of the kind that should be rooted out or prevented. Indeed, from the point of view of spiritual development, there is something healthy about it. For one thing, even if it is clearly negative, despair is at least a sign of some first inkling of the requirements of such a development. . . .

The only way of escaping despair, therefore, seems to be to go through with it. The cure is for the self to “found itself

transparently in the power which established it,” but since transparency here requires full self-awareness . . . and full awareness of the self is the goal of spiritual development, the cure is simply not available until one reaches the point where continued denial of one’s dependence upon God is an act of open defiance. Only then does the alternative—open acknowledgement of that dependence—become possible.

For Kierkegaard, despair is a symptom of any self that is malformed in its relation to itself because it is unacquainted with or actively evading deeper truths about itself (a parallel idea was later picked up in Jung’s “assimilation of the shadow” [Dourley 2014, 127]; see also Maté 2018, xvii–xviii). Similarly, fardados are preoccupied with unearthing and resolving internal disharmonies, especially the ways disharmonies manifest in a self’s actions upon the outside world. In concert with their introspective practice, fardados portray their inner journeys with ayahuasca as ultimately serving to help heal despair on the collective scale of human society.

Jacoba also justified her ayahuasca practice as an opportunity to “feel the unity” or commune with fellow human beings through transpersonal experiences afforded by the Daime sacrament. When I asked why she continues to attend Daime works, she responded:

Because there is so much to learn, every time you have something new. . . . One of the purposes in a [Daime] work is to feel the unity: you sing together, you concentrate together, you sit together in the round . . . so this is really a community form. Singing together around the light of the candles and the Cross, it’s giving a feeling of community. . . .

Yes, everybody has his own peias (obstacles), so you work alone on your things, but your neighbour is there; on both sides you have neighbours and maybe you [are working on] the same subject . . . you can feel the sorrow and the grief from others. You have your own as well, but you can share . . . directly.

In conversations with Jacoba, she conceded that the Netherlands is a very nice country to live in because it is relatively wealthy and safe. But she also pointed to inequality, pollution, and for-profit exploitation of the Earth’s resources as corollaries of despair in Europe. From fardados’ perspective, this despair develops when human selves are not connected to each other through

intimate social bonds, or, as Jacoba declared, “isolation and estrangement of people makes them crazy.” Her language of “estrangement” echoes theologian Paul Tillich’s (2014[1952], 51–52) rendering of existential despair as an “inescapable” and “desperate . . . anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness.” Like other European fardados, Jacoba contends that ostensibly positive aspects of modern civilization camouflage ways that secularized individualism, materialism, and consumerism express a spiritual impoverishment in industrialized nations today (see also Dourley 2014, 2/13). This Santo Daime value is like philosopher Martin Buber’s (1996[1937], 92–95) distinction between the utilitarian I-It approach to interpersonal relations and the I-You approach of “loving” or “true” communities:

The improvement of the ability to experience and use generally involves a decrease in [humanity’s] power to relate. . . . Standing under the basic word of separation which keeps apart I and It, he has divided his life with his fellow [human beings]. . . .

That institutions yield no public life is felt by more and more human beings, to their sorrow: this is the source of the distress and search of our age. . . .

When the autonomized state yokes together totally uncongenial citizens without creating or promoting any fellowship, it is supposed to be replaced by a loving community. And this loving community is supposed to come into being when people come together, prompted by free, exuberant feeling, and want to live together. But that is not how things are. True community does not come into being because people have feelings for each other (though that is required, too), but rather on two accounts: all of them have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a single living center, and they have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to one another.¹³

Like Buber’s I-You relationship, Jacoba claims that reunion with fellow human you’s and a cosmic You (God) in Daime rituals has led to the progressive healing of her despair. Through transcendent “unity” they experience with each other in the Daime rituals, fardados believe they can reconcile unhealthy separations between their individual selves and the rest of the universe.

Without needing to adopt fardados’ worldview, the ethnographic evidence presented herein raises questions of interest to social scientists, philosophers, legal scholars, medical practitioners, and theologians: What

does the emergence of ayahuasca religion portend about the undercurrents of belief and nonbelief in Europe? Should fardados' notion of ayahuasca as a spiritual sacrament be protected as a religious freedom or should Santo Daime be prosecuted according to the War on Drugs? Is it possible that Western societies have misapprehended the hazards and benefits of so-called hallucinogens, materials that many non-Western societies value as psychotherapeutic medicines? These questions reflect broader public concerns about drug legislation and limits on freedoms of religious expression. Disagreements about where these limits should be drawn intersect with ideological fault lines about the regulation of human fulfillment, or "fullness"; this is why what Taylor (2007, 600) calls a "swirling debate" between the "cross-pressured fields . . . [of] belief and unbelief, as well as between different versions of each, can therefore be seen as a debate about what real fullness consists in." Therefore, in order to uncover the reasons behind Santo Daime's rise in Europe, this book will augment standard anthropological techniques through consultation with Western theologians. In keeping with an established tradition of philosophical anthropology,¹⁴ I refer to existentialist and mystical theorists to help extract the cryptic nuances of fardados' worldview. As opposed to secularist rationalizations for religious behavior, I rely mainly on theological philosophers because their enchanted ontologies are more compatible with that of fardado informants. But before delving further into these theoretical and methodological issues, we must first introduce the Santo Daime as a community of individuals who perform ayahuasca rites in Europe. Following an overview of the social settings within which I carried out ethnographic research, this section closes by formulating the scope and thrust of the present volume.

Ethnographic Contexts

Regarding all new religious forms in Europe, it is extremely difficult to ascertain exact statistics. This is because there exists a wide variety of new religions on the continent—estimated to number more than two thousand distinct groups—all of which define full-time, part-time, exclusive, or nonexclusive membership in different ways (Barker 1999, 16–18). A conservative tally calculates that Europe has 353,000 practitioners of religions founded since the start of the nineteenth century; these "new religionists" had an annual growth rate of 0.39 percent during the decade of 2000 to 2010 (Melton and Baumann 2010, lvii/lxv). Another estimate holds that participants in

“alternative” religions make up between 0.3 and 0.5 percent of the European population (Lewis 2004, 16). This latter estimate suggests that out of the 731 million people in Europe at the dawn of this new century, somewhere between 2.1 and 3.6 million citizens are involved with non-mainstream religions.¹⁵

Considering the concept of “religion,” anthropologist Talal Asad has questioned the legitimacy of applying this concept cross-culturally. In *Genealogies of Religion*, Asad (1993) traces the Eurocentric construction of “religion” into a universal category used by Western scholars to explain non-Western peoples’ institutions of the sacred (Asad 1993). He rejects as “externalist” those attempts by anthropologists to define what religion is according to functionalist (e.g., Malinowski 1939) or interpretative (Geertz 1973) schemes. Instead, he recommends that anthropologists train their efforts on understanding the “internal” aspects of religion, such as worshippers’ subjective construal of ritual embodiment and traditional disciplines for cultivating an ideal human self (Asad 2006, 212/234–35/240). In speaking about his own analysis of medieval Christian monasteries (see Asad 1993), Asad underscores ritual practices as an act of “willing obedience.” He characterizes “monastic disciplines not as something that comes from outside but as an internal shaping of the self by the self” (Asad interviewed in Scott 2006, 272). This is a compelling critique of studies alleging that the essences of particular religions can be detected via the outward traits of symbols, language, and practice. European fardados evince similar doubts about external categorizations of religion; they prefer to accentuate the subjective, noumenal dimensions of ritualized ayahuasca experiences as a direct encounter with God inside oneself. Notwithstanding Asad’s sound critique of the religion concept, for practical purposes fardados do still liken Santo Daime to all other communal forms of worship normally described as “religion” (a complex issue we will return to later on). This shows how anthropologists must also be mindful of the perils associated with the “deconstructive impulse,” and heed Matti Bunzl’s (2005, 534) worry that “in our discipline, we spend far too much time deconstructing the key terms of social debate and far too little time analyzing how they function in the real world.” Since the present text deals with European-born Daime adherents, the Western-centric meaning of “religion” is more appropriate than it would be in say, an ethnography on Australian aborigines. In discussing cross-cultural spiritual devotion, *religion* is herein understood to be any “organized belief in phenomena that cannot be demonstrated scientifically or empirically” (Balée 2012, 55).

The term *entheogen* serves the anthropological focus of this book, which conveys fardados’ insider (emic) view that ayahuasca is a medicinal

sacrament. However, the theological connotations of this term are antithetical to the pursuits of medical researchers who are more concerned with psychiatric and biological effects of substances like ayahuasca. Such scholars may not be interested in religious beliefs per se, but many are attentive to the therapeutic values of spiritual experiences. Thus, the term *psychointegrator* has been proposed for strictly scientific approaches to the synchronizing effects of these substances on body and mind (Winkelman 2000, 229). While this “psychointegrative” utility of ayahuasca is germane, the terms *entheogen* and *sacred plant* will be employed throughout this text because the divine qualities fardados attribute to the Daime beverage are essential to their religious practice.

Santo Daime was founded in 1930 by an Afro-Brazilian rubber tapper and border guard named Raimundo Irineu Serra, now known as *Mestre* (Master) Irineu. After emigrating from his birthplace in the Brazilian northeast to the Western Amazon region, Mestre Irineu began to experiment with ayahuasca by borrowing from local rituals he came across in the rainforest. In visions he experienced through ayahuasca, Santo Daime mythology holds that otherworldly guides informed Mestre Irineu he would be responsible for establishing a new spirituality. He continued to “receive” *hinos* (hymns) and instructions for instituting this new religion throughout his life. His Santo Daime *doutrina* (“doctrine”) began to expand around Brazil and then to every inhabited continent following the Mestre’s death in 1971 (see Barnard 2014; Meyer 2014). According to published approximations, there are now as few as four thousand (Labate, Rose, and dos Santos 2008, 27) or as many as twenty thousand (Dawson 2013, 5) Santo Daime members around the world. Although sociologist Andrew Dawson (2013, 5/203[n. 21]) provides a “rough guesstimate” of “between 4,000 and 6,000” daimistas outside of Brazil, he is right to point out that “the importance of Santo Daime resides not in its size but in its significance for understanding the respective character and dynamic interface of society and religion.”

Through fieldwork, I determined that the first Santo Daime works in Europe were held in Spain, Belgium, and Portugal in 1989. At this time there were fewer than a dozen European fardados. When Groisman (2000, 16[n. 10]) conducted a survey in 1996, he reported twenty-nine individual Daime groups in eleven different European countries, with a total population of 324 fardados. Although Santo Daime grew by hundreds of fardados in its first six years in Europe, since 1996 its growth has leveled out to a more gradual pace. At international Santo Daime gatherings I attended in Amsterdam in 2009 and 2010, I spoke with participants representing eighteen European nationalities. In consultation with informants from around Europe, I learned