

SANTO DAIME
AMAZONIAN CULTURE
THE HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF JURAMIDAM

WINNER OF II SUFRAMA HISTORY AWARD - 1983

VERA FRÓES

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Vera Fróes Fernandes

Preface

Vera Fróes was studying History at Acre Federal University, and used to document and interview people aiming to carry out her academic work on “Daime and community relations in Colônia Cinco Mil”, which would become the basis for the publication of this essential book for those who wish to know more about the history of Santo Daime and the constitution of a Daimist branch under the leadership of the rubber tapper and canoe maker Sebastião Mota de Melo, Padrinho Sebastião – the one who diffused the Santo Daime Doctrine. Winner of the SUFRAMA Prize for History in 1983, Vera Fróes, in her *Santo Daime: Amazonian Culture* (a rare book now fortunately being reprinted) has managed to, in a clear, objective and didactic way, situate the movement of Santo Daime starting from its founder, the Master Raimundo Irineu Serra, and in this way, register the beginning of the expansion of this Amazonian cultural expression in Brazil.

In addition to a description of the historical background, starting with the rubber cycle and the advancement of agrarian frontiers in the 1970 and 1980, and its consequences that have influenced Padrinho Sebastião in his decision to start a migratory movement into the forest.

In this way, the book depicts the messianism of Sebastião Mota de Melo, who in 1980 entered the virgin forest leading the people from the community he had founded in 1974 at Colônia Cinco Mil, to start the Seringal Rio do Ouro and, later, in 1983, the Seringal Céu do Mapiá, experiencing the journey of the construction of a new time, a new life and a new system.

After a visit to Acre in 1978, I moved to Rio Branco in 1980. At that time, I met Vera Fróes, who already had a great life experience in the Amazon, as she had gone deep into it, living with the Indigenous Ashaninka society, from the High Envira river, at the border between Brazil and Peru.

At that time I already thought about studying Anthropology and had the opportunity to participate in several interviews with Vera, during her research work. I got a professional recorder which was immediately used in the documentation of valuable lectures of Padrinho Sebastião.

It is possible to say that the author formed the first documentation team of CEFLURIS (now ICEFLU – Eclectic Church of the Universal Flowing Light), collecting and organizing data recorded by Lucio Mortimer, widening up, with her research work, our knowledge about the origins and the history of this Brazilian religion, born out of Indigenous, African and Christian-Spiritist influences. Finally, we may affirm that Santo Daime: Amazonian Culture is a pioneering work, an important step to leave oral tradition and create more permanent and safe records to consolidate the memory of the ritual use of Indigenous medicinal plants and the “saga of the people of Juramidam”, as she says in her book.

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Introduction

I started the present study in the year of 1979, in Colônia Cinco Mil, registering the official festivities and their several hinários (hymnals received by someone). Little by little, I understood the process of initiation: the chants, the rhythm, the instruments and the messages conveyed in the hymns. I had come from an experience with the Kampa (Asháninca) people, who live next to the Envira river, in the Municipality of Feijó, near the Peruvian border, where I had the opportunity to take part in the traditional ceremony of Camampi (Daime), accompanied by beautiful child and adult chants. This encouraged me to study the subject in Rio Branco.

Between 1980 and 1982, I compiled all data, interviews, and documents I had collected at Colônia Cinco Mil. I had then a closer contact with the community and was able to enter their magic-religious universe, what is automatically related to respecting their internal laws.

In order to understand this sacred environment in a comprehensive way, I went through an apprentice process, knowing that only a vision from “inside out” is able to give us full understanding. I took part in several spiritual works – Oração, Concentração, Cura and Santo Daime Feitio ceremony, fundamental experiences for my understanding of this mythical universe.

My personal experience with Santo Daime has always been positive, as a valuable therapy in which I could relive passages of my life and project future actions. In the beginning I saw colorful lights, in the shape of luminous serpents, my senses became

sharper and the objects seemed to be alive, the trees in the forest transformed into people. After some time, when I felt comfortable with the ritual and was not afraid of Santo Daime anymore, I had the pleasant feeling of leaving my body to travel to known and unknown destinations.

The availability to go deeper into the spiritual works helped in the creation of trustful bonds with the community, especially with Padrinho Sebastião, Madrinha Rita and her son Alfredo.

With the people of Juramidam I learned the value of calm and humbleness, the importance of searching perfection in all that we do, and last but not least, of developing self-discipline, which I have since then tried to incorporate to my daily assignments. The name “Juramidam People” refers to the descendants of Juramidam, name given to the founder of the doctrine by divine entities of Santo Daime. Juramidam is the chief of the mission. Jura is the Father and Midam, the Son – Juramidam represents the return of Jesus Christ on Earth and in this way the Juramidam People are the People of Jesus Christ.

This research motivated by my interest in verifying and understanding the existence of a cultural expression, typical of the State of Acre, originated from Indigenous rituals and having been influenced by Christianity and Spiritism, also presenting characteristics of African religions, which have resulted in religious syncretism: the Santo Daime doctrine.

Santo Daime, also named Ayahuasca, Vegetal, Caapi and Iage, is a ceremonial beverage used in magic-religious rituals by several native groups in South America. It is prepared by the cooking of two plants from the Amazonian forest, the Jagube vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and the leaves of the Chacrona or “Rainha” (Queen) (*Psychotria viridis*). In Acre, Santo Daime is not only taken by Indigenous people and seringueiros (rubber tappers), but it is also

common among inhabitants of towns and of the capital, Rio Branco, where several spiritual houses can be found in the city surroundings, including the CEFLURIS - Eclectic Center of the Universal Flowing Light Raimundo Irineu Serra, a rural community made of 300 people at the time when this study was carried out, known as Colônia Cinco Mil. At that time, it was estimated that out of every 10 people in the state of Acre, four had tried the beverage.

In the 1970s, sudden socioeconomic changes put an end to the harvesting tradition which came from the beginning of the 20th century: Devastation of native rubber and Brazil nut harvesting areas, due to the implementation of cattle raising, causing the expulsion of many rubber tappers and settlers from rural areas to the periphery of cities.

In this new reality, Colônia Cinco Mil started in 1975, from the reunion of 25 smaller settlements in a total area of 380 hectares, congregating 43 rubber-tapper families organized under community principles that have been established as they carried out a profound spiritual work with Santo Daime.

In 1980, with the fast devastation of the forest in the Municipality of Rio Branco and the lack of resources for the purchase of tractors and farming implements to improve conditions to work the land – associated to the spiritual call to Santo Daime's children for a return to the forest – the community leader, Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo, decided to move with his people into the jungle, where he established the Seringal Rio do Ouro, in the Municipality of Boca do Acre – Amazonas. In 1983, another sudden change opened new work fronts in the Seringal Céu do Mapiá, Municipality of Pauini, Amazonas.

A small group of people remained at Colônia Cinco Mil, which became kind of a support cell for the work at Rio do Ouro and later, at Céu do Mapiá, which became the dissemination center of

the Santo Daime doctrine. Here are some questions that will be developed along this work:

1. To what extent the destruction of the forest compromises the ceremonial use of *Banisteriopsis caapi* (Jagube vine) and *Psychotria viridis* (Chacrona leaves), as a cultural aspect of the Amazon?

2. How can the use of Santo Daime and the production relations observed in the communities favor a well-balanced social interaction and a higher ecological conscience, even presenting an alternative model for the occupation of the Amazon?

3. Under which circumstances the rural community of Colônia Cinco Mil chose to have relations of production based on collective ownership and use of the land?

4. What is meaning of the return of the community to a life system based on the exploitation of the native seringal?

5. Can the community of Colônia Cinco Mil be considered as a “people”? According to the definition of the term as: “a group of individuals living in a country or locality, with their own religion and cultural heritage, united by a feeling of sympathy and mutual care and help, to maintain their living and working traditions and to grant education and orientation to their children, according to their collective spirit and customs”.

Questions do not end here, as the complexity of the subject deserves further investigation which may help and encourage the creation of programs for integrated development in the community. A scientific investigation that does not aim at the real improve-

ment of the living conditions of the studied community has no practical sense. This study comprehends the period starting with the arrival of the founder of Santo Daime doctrine, Raimundo Irineu Serra, in the state of Acre, Brazil, in 1912, extending to the moving of the rural community Colônia Cinco Mil to the Seringal Rio do Ouro, in the Brazilian state of Amazonas, in 1980.

The methodology of the study uses tools of scientific History that have been developed since the 1960's in the field of History of Collective Mentalities, with a multidisciplinary approach, in which achievements of other sciences, namely, Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology and Ecology are also considered.

The History of Collective Mentalities approach aims to rebuild mental structures of a given society, including socially transmitted and absorbed ideas; conceptions about time, nature and space; study of influences, contacts and currents of thought; cultural heritage; system of beliefs; models of behavior; myths; rituals and symbols. That is, all the collective representations of a society, at an intellectual level.

Bibliographic references include studies on the economic history of the Amazon, the use of magic plants by South American tribes, shamanism and religion in the Peruvian Amazon, messianic movements in Brazil and studies on non-capitalist forms of production created within and despite the capitalist system.

This methodology avoided unnecessary conceptualizations and classifications, seeking to raise a discussion and a dialectical explanation in the reconstruction of the material and symbolic universes of the studied community. For a sure theoretical approach, I have carried out a document research on the community's oral history and on their files and manuscript documents.

The participant observation was an important part of the methodology and allowed the cassette recording of Padrinho

Sebastião's teachings during the spiritual works and the register of oral testimonies, collected among Santo Daime local brotherhood, from 1981 to 1986.

I hope that the publishing of this work on the Santo Daime doctrine, an authentic cultural and religious manifestation of northern Brazil, can help other researchers interested in understanding the contemporary history of the Brazilian states of Acre and Amazonas.