

THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF AYAHUASCA'S RELIGIOUS DIASPORA

Roger K. Green
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Exigence and History

Three new religious movements in Brazil emerged in the twentieth century: Santo Daime (including *ubandaime*), Barquinha, and the União do Vegetal (UDV). Each group uses a form of ayahuasca or ‘hoasca’ as sacrament, a practice that has also become widespread among New Age groups and “drug” tourists. Ayahuasca use in South America by Indigenous Peoples in some cases precedes European contact, but the spread of its use has largely developed as a result of colonizing efforts fueled by religiously rationalized attempts to extirpate Indigenous People.¹ As with hybridized forms of Christianity across South and Central America, parsing any kind of autochthonous and “purely” Indigenous practice for ayahuasca use as a “spiritual” practice from the spread of Christianity is nearly impossible. Moreover, such a task would most often perform a colonizing and fetishizing gaze that seeks to extract one practice from various forms of cultural embeddedness across the Amazon. The emergence and recognition of these new religious movements cannot be divorced from colonial forms, old and new, because as David Chidester and others have shown, the very concept of religion has been imported from European thought in order to make sense of people and practices deemed culturally “other.”

It is, however, possible to trace more precisely one of the central features informing ayahuasca religions: Spiritism in the tradition of Allan Kardec (1804-1869). Born Hippolyte León Denizard Rivail in Lyon, France and raised as a Roman Catholic, Kardec drew upon Romantic thought to found Spiritism, which spread rapidly to the Americas in the nineteenth century. Operating as a “shadow text” to colonialism, the ‘political theology’ of recognized

¹ Glenn H. Shepard, Jr. “Will the Real Shaman Please Stand Up?” *Ayahuasca Shamanism in the Amazon and Beyond*, ed. Beatriz Caiuby Labate & Clancy Cavnar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

ayahuasca religions can be found in Spiritism and the ways it is informed by Christian ideas of the Romantic period. To understand this is to see the *force* that still motivates the spread of European Christian theology within ayahuasca diaspora..

‘Political theology’ has often signaled discursive tensions concerning what Jürgen Habermas has deemed an “awareness of what is missing”² in liberal, democratic culture against secular liberalism’s critics on both the “left” and the “right.” The traditionally leftist position has been interested in critical theory informed by Walter Benjamin’s thought while critiques of liberalism from the right follow Carl Schmitt’s conception: “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized religious concepts.”³ My use of the term accepts to a certain extent both Schmitt’s nostalgic claim, and Benjamin’s altogether different “acceptance”⁴ of Schmitt’s claim from a perspective of Marxian-informed aesthetics that informs the ethnographic innovations of later anthropologists such as Michael Taussig on commodity fetishism. Informed more by Indigenous Studies, my use of the term ‘political theology’ draws attention to ways liberals, leftists, and rightists *cooperate* with one another to perpetuate

² Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Postsecular Age*, Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010.

³ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapter on the Concept of Sovereignty*, Trans. George D. Schwab, Chicago: Chicago UP, 36.

⁴ As Samuel Weber writes, Benjamin personally wrote Schmitt, sending a copy of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and thanking Schmitt for thinking crucial to his aesthetic theory:

You will very quickly recognize how much my book is indebted to you for its presentation of the doctrine of sovereignty in the seventeenth century. Perhaps I may also say, in addition, that I have also derived from your later works, especially the "Diktatur," a confirmation of my modes of research in the philosophy of art from yours in the philosophy of the state.

The aesthetic confirmation has to do with allegory and “new concept of sovereignty” emerging in the seventeenth century. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* Benjamin writes: “Whereas the modern concept of sovereignty amounts to the supreme executive power on the part of the prince, the baroque concept emerges from a discussion on the state of emergency. And makes it the most important function. Of the prince to avert this” (65). Schmitt would later respond to this in *Hamlet, or Hecuba*. My point is how ‘political theology’ informs leftist aesthetic critiques following Benjamin, and that one must have this in mind in anthropologists like Taussig, for whom discussions of fetishism in South America are important for discussing ayahuasca in diaspora.

Samuel Weber, “Taking Exception to the Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt,” *Diacritics*, vol. 22: 3/4 (Autumn 1992), 5.

eurochristian⁵ discursive frames at the expense of Indigenous Peoples. My focus on ayahuasca religions is a case-study in iterations of dominance that are redeployed through an albeit internally agonistic hegemony that simultaneously advances hoary notions of “western civilization.” In other words, it is the dramatic tendencies within political agons that inflate the occupation of discourse itself at the expense of Indigenous life. Secularist versus postsecularist debates ignore what Taussig has called the “magic” of the state – an entirely eurochristian phenomenon concerning the place of the “wild man” in accusative relation to the State itself.

Alain Kardec’s thought exemplifies the most prominent way eurochristian political theology exported its “magic” to inform ayahuasca religions. Although Marlene Dobkin de Rios has pointed out that tarot cards entered South and Central America with the first missionaries,⁶ features of Kardecist Spiritism and its conceptions of the supernatural are evident in ayahuasca religions of Brazil in particular, where they mixed with Indigenous practices sometimes deemed as “assault sorcery” and increasingly as “shamanism,” as well as Pentecostalism in the twentieth century. Thus, whether in “progressively secularist” new-age or “conservatively evangelical” prayer warrior contexts, it is the operative discourse of *magic* and the “marvelous”⁷ that constellates the available discursive places for Indigenous Peoples in relation to nation states and when ayahuasca users seek state recognition as *religion*. It is the same, *experientially-based*, ontologically liberal seeking that both promotes as it decontextualizes Indigenous uses of ayahuasca (or other plants).

⁵ I draw on Osage historian of Native traditions, George E. “Tink” Tinker’s description of euro-christianity, lower-cased to remind us of the historical power, as a *social movement* rather than a religion.

⁶ Dobkin de Rios, Marlene. *Fate, Fortune & Mysticism in the Peruvian Amazon: The Septrionic Order and the Naipes Cards*. Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2011.

⁷ See Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

During the past fifty years, new ayahuasca religious groups have dispersed outside of South America, to countries where ayahuasca is a controlled substance under the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances. Enmeshed in the Cold War hegemony of the United States and the emergent “War on Drugs” abroad and disapproving forms of nationalistic Catholicism in Brazil, groups have actively sought recognition from states as religions to protect their use of ayahuasca as sacrament. While Indigenous and non-affiliated groups have historically used a variety of plant concoctions involving ayahuasca for a variety of purposes, rhetoric for religious exemptions has been successfully employed by non-Indigenous groups in the United States, ironically by appealing to Indigenous uses of plants and laws concerning North American Native religious practices. Similarly, ‘New Age’ and psychedelic advocacy groups emphasize frames of ‘healing’ properties of ayahuasca in more eclectic contexts, almost always as some sort of experience-based, individual ‘self-work,’ invoking universalized notions of spirituality but not necessarily seeking religious recognition. The rhetoric of healing, enmeshed within traditional practices of *vegetalismo* and *curanderismo*, presents itself as medical knowledge within state apparatuses, invoking “best practices,” oversight and licensure for therapists, and regulated use of ayahuasca. As ayahuasca religions and healing practices expand globally, they increasingly draw on both classical liberal political and religious freedoms and neoliberal entrepreneurial freedoms.

Preliminary Thesis

A genealogical and historical inquiry into the political-theological forces compelling the global diaspora of ayahuasca reveals what Luis D. León has termed ‘religious poetics.’ This means that new religious and new age movements *make* religion through conscious negotiations with state and international legal entities. León’s focus on religious poetics, situated in

Indigenous concepts such as Aztec concepts of *flor y canto* and *neplantism* or “in-betweenness” from borderlands theory, will inform my alternate take on genealogical methods usually employed in political theological discourse:

central to the following is the return of *poesis* as a viable method not only to study and understand the way people attempt to make sense of themselves, others, and religion, but also to do, make and achieve *religion* itself. Rather than constructing a genealogy of borderlands poetics as a “return” after an absence, [...] I construct it as an instance of the Nietzschean eternal return.⁸

Embedded in León’s conception of living and dying in borderlands spaces is the necropolitics of colonial efforts framing the self-formations subjectivating *mestizaje* concepts necessary for understanding how concepts of ayahuasca and ayahuasca religiosities are imbricated in the drama of ongoing colonization. While León’s work is not based on South American contexts, it is currently the best available religious theory capable for describing the phenomena underwriting ayahuasca religions.

The preliminary thesis of this project is: Arguments for the protected status of ayahuasca religions in diaspora, especially in the United States, perpetuate a long history of colonial genocide at the heart of the concept of ‘religion.’ The religious poetics show their necropolitical force by necessitating that Indigenous practices be either “translated” into Western legal frames of ‘religion’ and euro-christian culture or medicalized into regulated healthcare practices. Because these necropolitics show themselves particularly through new religious movements that seek state recognition and legitimation, ayahuasca users should reject claims for state recognition of ayahuasca religions and state regulation of ayahuasca. Instead, ayahuasca advocates should seek more ethical relationships with Indigenous groups threatened by attending to notions of

⁸ Luis D. León, *La Llorona’s Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004), 17.

Amerindian Perspectivism and equivocation as described by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Indigenous theorists. Moreover, national and international laws banning plant-based psychedelics ought to be revoked due to their own participation in Drug War politics of the twentieth century. Well-intentioned impulses to employ psychedelics for therapeutic use also need to be aware of the dangers of trying to force non-western medicines into their own biopolitical and (neo)liberal agendas.

Scope

The scope of this project is international in the sense that it deals with the historical development and globalization of ayahuasca religions, contextualized within the influence of Kardecist Spiritualism and euro-christian impulses toward universalism. However, the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances and ongoing attempts to have traditional uses of plants like ayahuasca specifically protected in international law must be historically contextualized by the hegemony of the United States with respect to the War on Drugs. Because of this, my *central* focus is on efforts to recognize ayahuasca religions in the United States, particularly through appeals to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and the First Amendment that rely on analogies to Native uses of peyote. The project simultaneously addresses a larger discussion about access to “the sacred” through the use of entheogens of “god-infused” substances, such as psychedelics. Among both ayahuasca researchers and psychedelic researchers, there are widespread impulses to advocate for deregulated approaches against various governing forces whose deep history in euro-christian colonization has produced slanted perceptions of “drugs.” Western attitudes have historically treated ecstatic and ritualized practices with suspicion and outright condemnation since the so-called “discovery” of the “new world.”

Methodology

My methodology is interdisciplinary and draws on Critical Discourse Analysis. I see societal power-relations emerging through the ways discourse acts. I employ the language genealogical approaches informed by cultural theory. This means I ground discussions in historical narratives while being critical of normative historical narratives, drawing from cultural theory, literary theory, anticolonial theory, and Indigenous theory. What emerges is a rhetoric that begins as forensic (*dikanikós*) but that remains critically aware of the socially constructed nature of discourse and, to the extent that I am able, my own subjectivation. The logic is process-based and the proofs are highly artistic, in Aristotle's sense of the term. Let me illustrate.

Beginning with historical research and contextualization, I explicate Kardecist Spiritism and its spread to the Americas to frame religious recognition projects as seeking approval from European-derived legal, theological, and political frames. It is well-known that over the past five hundred years, many Indigenous Peoples adopted the veneer of Christianity as a mask to maintain traditional practices (and create new ones). Such successes in cultural preservation and determination, in spite of genocidal impulses, do not erase historical *injustices* of colonizing powers and the ongoing destructive effects of archaic racial hierarchies with respect to "mixed blood" and indigeneity. Through attention to legal history's relationship to eurochristian ideas underwriting attempts to protect religious freedom by treating it as a private belief, I articulate Eurocentric cultural frames of religiosity itself. I contextualize the illegalization of drugs within the legacy of eurochristian claims to the right to remove Native Americans from land and outlaw traditional practices. Drug laws since the Harrison Act have aimed to preserve white occupancy on Native territory. Claims to Christian theological, and particularly Anglo-Saxon superiority,

based on hoary discussions of race that remain discursively in effect today, unify the double impulse to stigmatize “drug” use as lawlessly ecstatic and “savage.” New Age claims to “archaic revivals” and neo-shamanism often unwittingly draw on these notions to sacralize themselves by “becoming other,” but I claim they merely reinforce and extend universalist Christian claims that are Eurocentric.

Because the race, identity, and religion issue is enmeshed within colonial history, I avoid a strict cultural appropriation argument by drawing in the scholarship of religious hybridity; for example, notions of *neplantism* and *mestizaje* described as ‘religious poetics’ by Luis León as a “recovery project.” Resonating with León’s work on border religiosities, Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús’s work on Santería’s growing transnational impulses alongside racialized and sexualized *assemblages* is a useful conversation-partner for the diaspora of ayahuasca religions from South America. Drawing on thinkers of religious hybridity, I argue that what gets recognized by the state for religious exemptions in ayahuasca religions is *precisely* their ability to play into “whitely” rhetoric of the state and eurochristianity.

I draw on Indigenous Studies discourse, where the notion of ‘possession’ is characterized as a whitely, colonizing form, related a process of what Barbara Mann calls Euro-forming, in which “universalist” and “archetypal” readings create facile readings based on analogy.⁹ Such abstractions reveal their real violence in growing instances of sexual misconduct by self-proclaimed ayahuasceros and explicit violent against Indigenous elders by Western spiritual seekers, which threaten to bring refracted liberal regulations to nations like Peru,¹⁰ where

⁹ Barbara Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 62.

¹⁰ Dan Collins, “Peru's brutal murders renew focus on tourist boom for hallucinogenic brew,” *The Guardian*, April 29, 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/29/peru-double-murders-ayahuasca-tourism-sebastian-woodroffe>

ayahuasca has been traditionally legal without recourse to religious exemption rhetoric. The specific *genocidal* threat of recognizing ayahuasca religions in the U.S. lies in the fact that the very concept of ‘religion’ used within Western legal traditions is inherently Christian, something almost never acknowledged in existing ayahuasca discourse.

Because part of my argument will rely on discussing Indigeneity in ways that exceed liberal politics of recognition, and because I am not an Indigenous person, my method also draws on anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s articulation of Amerindian Perspectivism as a discursive buffer.¹¹ According to him, “perspectivism supposes a constant epistemology and variable ontologies, the same representations and other objects, a single meaning and multiple referents.”¹² In contrast to the accepted language of multiculturalism and liberal utopia, Amerindian Perspectivism accounts for non-anthropocentric ways of being in the world. I follow Viveiros de Castro’s rehabilitated description of *equivocation*, to identify untranslatable concepts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups can help to articulate a non-anthropocentric approach to ayahuasca that allows for equitable simultaneity of practices. ‘Equivocation’ here occurs when two groups use the same words while meaning entirely different things, disrupting western legal conceptions of equivocation.¹³

¹¹ I **do not** argue that Viveiros de Castro’s descriptions of Amerindian Perspectivism are *sufficient* for communicating Amerindian ‘worldviews’ – and I do not expect Indigenous scholars to believe so either – employing his concepts helps me, as a non-Indigenous scholar, to avoid some of the very tendencies toward ventriloquism with respect to Indigenous Peoples that I am attempting to critique.

¹² Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Perspectival Anthropology,” *The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds* (Chicago: Hau Books, 2015), 59.

¹³ For example, sometimes people claim that ayahuasca religiosities asserting a view that the spread of ayahuasca interest is the “spirit” of the Amazon fighting back against historically colonizing forces. Westerners can easily read this as a license to indulge in ayahuasca “experiences,” neglecting the qualifiers that Indigenous People in the Amazon make about how important it is to use such “medicine” within traditional lineages. Even though some Indigenous groups may see the advantages of global interest in ayahuasca as improving their ability to survive, ayahuasca enthusiasts tend to remain fixated on ayahuasca instead of seeing it within a host of historically genocidal practices and *indios* even in spirit

Grounding of historically eurochristian roots of genocidal impulses toward Amerindians is informed by George “Tink” Tinker and Steven Newcomb’s analyses of hierarchical cognitive metaphorical frames, which draw on Critical Legal Studies to show how the imbrication of Christian thought in legal systems that have perpetuated the subjugation of Amerindians by conceptually reducing them to a “state of nature.” Along with their view, Glen Sean Coulthard’s critique of liberal politics of recognition revises Karl Marx’s concept of primitive accumulation of capital,¹⁴ entailing a description of genocide as having persistent duration rather than as an “event” or historical “stage.” I identify eurochristianity as a *force* unifying various different genocidal approaches through emergent European nation-states, following Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s claim that “[t]he existence of white supremacy as hegemony, ideology, epistemology, and ontology requires the possession of Indigenous lands as its proprietary anchor within capitalist economies such as the United States.”¹⁵ As scholars like Alexander G. Weheliye argue, what is at stake is a notion of personhood, “enfleshment,” or in his term, ‘habeas viscus’ *not accounted for by habeas corpus* and modern European notions of ‘Man.’¹⁶ Such scholarship helps us see that eurochristianity underwrites all claims to lands that later became nation states, something long expressed by indigenous scholars such as Tinker,

form are often the lowest form of theological hierarchies within recognized ayahuasca religions. See “AYA2014 - Ayahuasca: Indigenous. Juan Bautista Agreda, Sia Kaxinawa, Kajuyali (english),” *YouTube* video, 1:48:46, posted by ICEERS, May 23, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4I0I4_tenY

¹⁴ Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks, Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2014).

¹⁵ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015, xix.

¹⁶ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Durham: Duke, 2014.

Newcomb, and Robert A. Williams, but little acknowledged outside of Indigenous scholarly circles.

Rationale

My research has an ethical impulse. Genocide underwrites all discussions about ayahuasca but is minimized by efforts to focus on psychedelic “healing.” Deregulating or refusing to regulate ayahuasca use alone will not stop ongoing genocidal impulses, but delaying politics of recognition might at least allow for the *survivance*¹⁷ necessary for Indigenous peoples to sustain and articulate traditional practices without competing against “recognized” ayahuasca ‘religions’. The discussion of ayahuasca can also serve as a venue for teaching Westerners about genocidal impulses of which they are unaware by opening an alter-politics of decolonization and relation.

Significance

‘Psychedelic studies’ tends to be an overarching discourse framing current ayahuasca discussions. Deeply indebted to the New Age tradition and largely oblivious to recent Religious Studies scholarship, the discourse of psychedelic studies hearkens back to outdated notions of ‘phenomenology of religion’. Perennialist notions echoing the “world religion” models of Huston Smith and Mircea Eliade persistently frame discussions, even for researchers working in the “hard sciences.” Nicolas Langlitz’s *Neuropsychedelia*, for example, details how even in the most “hard science” lab environments, researchers’ discussions turned theological, suggesting a return to some of the early 1960s discussions spearheaded by Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner. William A. Richards, who famously ran the recent Johns Hopkins studies on psilocybin and palliative care, based in the tradition of Leary, Alpert, and Metzner’s

¹⁷ Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

“translation” by way of Aldous Huxley of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* as *The Psychedelic Experience*, boldly claims: “In case you had any doubts, God (or whatever your favorite noun for ultimate reality may be) is.”¹⁸ Psychedelic studies *constantly* perform uncritical uses of Western monotheistic terminology of ‘God,’ ‘religion’ as a static transcendent concept, and ‘the sacred’ / ‘sacrament’ with respect to multiple substances. This is evident as well in the recent best-selling book by Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*, which inadvertently spreads a lot of uncritical thinking while exciting people about the *potential* for psychedelics to grant forms of personal salvation. All of this discourse remains ignorant of perspectives from Indigenous Studies and critical genealogies that inform my project.

Contribution to the Field

Religious studies in the United States has recently reflected on the ways Protestant Christian thought has informed static and transcendent notions of ‘religion.’ Similar conceptions underwrite notions of individual “experience.”¹⁹ Indigenous scholars such as Vine Deloria, Steve Newcomb, and Tink Tinker, have unpacked the historical legacy by which Christian missionizing efforts accompany the genocide of Indigenous Peoples. Such scholarship has problematized the universalizing and classic “world religions” approach that theoretically underwrites the theological articulations of ayahuasca religions and discourse on psychedelics. Simultaneously, genealogical accounts offered Carl Raschke and Giorgio Agamben have worked in a post-Foucault tradition, invoking ethical responses to genocidal traditions informed by the larger politico-theological history of Christian domination. But the discipline has been

¹⁸ William A. Richards, *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

¹⁹ Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

ambivalent about the relationship between psychedelics and religiosity and contributed to the temporal gap between religious theories employed by “hard sciences.”

Cultural frames such as ‘religion’ and ‘drugs’ affect both the set and setting of psychedelic experiences. As Beatriz Caiuby Labate argues, culture’s affect is rarely accounted for in the robust pharmacological research being done on the plant. Much of the research on both Amerindian “shamanism” and psychedelic studies carry outdated constructs from “world religions” perspectives that perpetuate euro-christian impulses directed at elimination of Indigenous Peoples through assimilation. Part of psychedelic religious rhetoric rejects what it sees as restrictions on the liberty for individuals to practice their religious beliefs “of choice,” especially since esotericism thrives on “choice.” Embedded within this conception is the idea that psychedelic experiences give access to “transcultural” experiences. By bringing religious studies scholarship to this subject, I work to end the perpetuation of eurochristian dominance and find ways to more ethically interact with Indigenous Peoples.

Proposed Chapter Layout

1. “Owning” the Past: The Long Story of Religion and Genocide in the Americas.

This chapter lays out key theoretical and historical frames necessary for understanding my approach to the subject of ayahuasca as it relates to Indigenous genocide and necropolitics, including an account of whether the concept of genocide is merely a rhetorical construction based on nineteenth-century ideas of race. It also covers some of the recurring themes in literature about ayahuasca religions and briefly addresses discourse on comparative genocide. I introduce León’s religious poetics and argue its theoretical benefits for studying ayahuasca religion.

2. Ayahuasca: ‘Religion’ vs. Practice

Chapter two discusses the emergence of ayahuasca religions within Kardecist Spiritism and the diaspora of ayahuasca uses in the 20th and 21st centuries. It also includes a discussion of the history of the ‘New Age’ movement in the context of liberalism and discourse on new religious movements.

3. Euro-Christian Legal Frames and Religious Freedom

This chapter particularly explores legal decisions in the United States, pointing out where Protestant conceptions underwrite thinking about religion. It especially discusses laws relating to Native Americans and peyote and how ayahuasca religions used RFRA for religious recognition. I claim the laws perpetuate colonial ideas even while well-intentioned people argue for religious exemption.

4. Political Theology, Subjectivation, and Cognitive Liberty

This chapter examines the classically liberal roots of cognitive liberty, tying them to Charlotte Walsh's current legal work on psychedelics. It situates emphases on personal experience within euro-christian-derived concepts of personhood. This chapter also deals explicitly with Protestant underwriting in Lockean notions of religious freedom and calls for separation between church and state.

5. Conclusion: Deregulating Practices as Decolonizing, Not Neoliberal

In my concluding chapter, I make the case for an ethically informed way of thinking about deregulation of ayahuasca with attention to sovereign practices among Indigenous groups. I contextualize this within the recent shift to regulate both ayahuasca and other psychedelics, as well as discourse on psychedelics and religious experience.

Statement on Research Methods

In library databases, I tend to begin with ATLA & Religion databases at Iloff and Academic Search Premier / Complete. I then move toward JSTOR and Communications Studies databases, then Science Direct. I generally start with 'ayahuasca' (also yagé) and 'religio*' as search terms, but you will notice quickly that lots of other categories show up when you type in 'ayahuasca.' So, sometimes 'ayahuasca' and 'law' or 'legal*' are useful.

I'm on a list-serve for ayahuasca research curated by Bia Labate, the most prominent current academic researcher on the subject. We have a private library available to us, and almost daily I see posts about current research in the field. Because of potential legal issues, we agree not to share anything from posts, but so long as the research in our library has been published elsewhere it's available for citation. It is hard to emphasize just how informative the list-serve is for me. The list-serve draws my attention to articles published in French, Spanish, and Portuguese. I am currently in intensive French lessons and have done minimal amounts of Latin American Spanish that will increase once I've passed my French exams. French anthropology is important in the field. Spanish and Portuguese are obviously important. My rudimentary Latin training helps with this, and many current conferences on ayahuasca are quickly translated, but I aim to be literate if not fluent in Spanish by the end of my dissertation, despite my focus on ayahuasca in diaspora.

I read a lot of popular books on ayahuasca. I also look at books others have purchased when I order books online. It regularly produces some good results. This is no substitute but rather an accentuation of scholarly study. Finally, I mine others' bibliographies. When I can look at another person's bibliography and recognize almost all works cited entries, I know I'm

on the right track. I look for the anomalies outside of anecdotal citations. A lot of times this means me annotating books, which means I buy a lot. I arrange my books at home from the “beginning of time” to now by publication date. What this means is that when I’m staring at my bookshelves I am always reinforcing historical context. I’ve found this to be crucial to my writing.