

NON-NATIVE AYAHUASCA USE

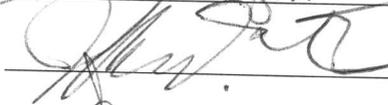
by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

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ABSTRACT

NON-NATIVE AYAHUASCA USE

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This thesis explores the use of ayahuasca, a hallucinogenic plant concoction from the Amazon, by people from the English speaking world. This thesis argues that there is no “original” or “typical” use of ayahuasca; it is a dynamic practice that has undergone massive change. In order to show this change, this thesis describes the different roles that shamans have had as a result of colonialism and modernization. Fieldwork was carried out at a healing center in the Peruvian Amazon. The motivations of informants and the effects ayahuasca had on them are compared with previous research on non-native ayahuasca use. The motivations of non-natives for taking ayahuasca are different from native motivations. The two main reasons are a desire for an end to alienation and a resolution of emotional trauma. Nearly all participants reported positive experiences from taking ayahuasca. The ayahuasca intoxication produces a liminal period, in which participants are able to reflect upon the issues affecting them.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This thesis will focus on non-native ayahuasca use, sometimes known as “ayahuasca tourism” (de Rios & Rumrill 2008), through an analysis of one business in Peru, Soul Vine. English-speaking people from all over the world travel to Soul Vine to participate in ayahuasca healing ceremonies in exchange for payment. Some consider this practice “as decontextualized as an indigenous basket on a suburban wall” (Beyer 2009, 352), while others consider it an “evil and exploitive enterprise” that “does harm to participants” (de Rios & Rumrill 2008, 70-1). This thesis argues that non-native ayahuasca use does have a context in “radical modernity” (Johnson 2003), that rather than being a form of empty self-gratification it can serve to alleviate the problems caused by the modern condition (Pinchbeck 2003). Rather than doing harm to participants, the results of this study agree with those of Winkelman (2005) & Schmid et al (2010), that ayahuasca has the capacity to heal patients both emotionally and physically.

The people attending Soul Vine are almost all white. They range in age from 15 to 60 years. Children sometimes accompany their parents. The professions of the patients vary from construction worker to doctor. An almost equal number of men and women were represented. People come for the minimum ten day package which costs \$1000. Eight of the days are spent in Magdalena and two of those days are spent traveling back and forth from Iquitos. Participants take ayahuasca five times over a period of eight days.

They take it two for two consecutive nights and rest one night in between ending on a single ceremony. Half of the participants were long term guests. They participate in consecutive eight day “groups.” Following an eight-day group, the guests and the staff take a week long break and travel to Iquitos. The staff uses this time to buy foodstuffs and ayahuasca vine. They rest for a few days and come back at the end of the week with the new guests for the following group.

While at the lodge, people spend most of their time relaxing, chatting, smoking cigarettes and recovering from the effects of ayahuasca from the night before. People discuss their experiences from the previous night in a common language. “Purge” is used to describe any sort of release, physical or emotional, tied to an issue that one is dealing with. Although the word spirit is used, issues are conceptualized mainly from a psychological point of view. Spirits are purged, but the spirit is tied to a traumatic event or emotional issue that one is trying to deal with. This differs greatly from the native concept of ayahuasca healing where one seeks an ayahuasca healer to rid oneself of the curse placed on oneself by another. The guests of Soul Vine frame their healing within a personal context focusing on psychological issues that have debilitated them in their lives.

Fieldwork

I arrived in the middle of a tumultuous eight day group the morning after one of the guests spent the whole night screaming and talking in tongues. Allison, the owner of Soul Vine, thought it best that I did not participate that evening in the ceremony as it

would “throw off the energy of the group.” This made good sense, especially since I had just arrived and wanted to settle in a bit before taking the world’s most powerful hallucinogen. Allison said it would be best to start fresh with the next group. Although I spent time eating and chatting with the guests at Soul Vine, initially, I spent more time with the town residents than I did with the lodge guests. In turn, the first half of my research was more influenced by the opinions and actions of the townspeople. I developed an outsider’s view of the practices of Soul Vine before I delved in and came to see the insider’s view.

I arrived on a Thursday, did not participate in the ceremony on Friday, observed the local discotheques and sampled the local beer that Saturday, experienced a hangover on Sunday, and therefore did not participate in the ceremony that night. The guests and staff of Soul Vine left that Tuesday for Iquitos. It was a week before I saw them again. In the meantime, I got to know better the townspeople’s points of view. I interviewed many people about ayahuasca use and their opinion of Soul Vine (SV). I began to form my own opinion of it as well. I spent a couple days in the jungle in order to observe the local natural environment.

I went into the jungle with one of the men from town and two guides from the community of Nuevo Progreso, located a half an hour down river. We spent three days in the jungle together at a lagoon a half a day’s walk and a half a day’s travel up river. I felt like an outsider among them. The two guides had grown up together and shared many experiences. While my friend from town did not grow up with them, he was from the same area. Together the three of them shared an understanding that I did not. When the

three of them would talk together I could not relate to what they were talking about. They would laugh and I would not get the joke. When I returned to town I went to the river with two of the people from SV, an Australian and an American. Despite all my experience traveling and my ability to speak Spanish, I could relate to my fellow gringos on a much deeper level.

Nonetheless, I still retained an outsider view of the practices of SV. It wasn't until my first ayahuasca ceremony that I began to understand why they did what they did. I participated in four out of the five ceremonies that week. The second ceremony I did not participate in because of how powerful the first one was. Those eight days were spent mostly with the people from SV. While I did not sleep and eat there, the rest of my time was spent with them. Sharing experiences with the subjects in the ceremony brought me closer to them. I never conducted a formal interview but had many conversations about their reasons for going to Peru, how the ayahuasca affected them and their personal lives at home. I have maintained contact by electronic means with many of the guests of SV, especially those who had been there for a long period of time.

Methods

I spent one month in the town of Magdalena in a rented room at the town's most visited guest house, apart from the Soul Vine lodge. While I might have gained a deeper perspective into the everyday lives of the guests of Soul Vine if I were to have slept there, this distance gave me a broader perspective on the relation between Soul Vine and the

town in which it is located. I wanted to situate the practice of non-native ayahuasca use within the context of the Peruvian culture.

The most valuable portion of my research came from the personal insights I gained. I participated in these rituals, drank ayahuasca, and felt its affects on me. Thus, in the approach of Edith Turner (1992) among the Ndembu, I have attempted to describe what I saw, my own reactions, and the reactions of others. My reactions are even more pertinent in this case due to the similarity between my own demographic profile and that of the subjects of the study. We come from similar places (the same place, in some instances), have similar life experiences, are of similar age and share the same culture. Subconsciously, my reasons for studying this phenomenon are the same reasons the subjects have searched it out themselves.

This particular methodology allowed me to feel what the subjects felt, which is quite different than asking what the subjects felt. I know this to be so because I experienced it firsthand. My analysis of the behavior of the guests of Soul Vine (SV) in relation to their desired results was quite different before and after my involvement in their ayahuasca ceremonies. I came to realizations that were the direct result of my participation in the ayahuasca ceremonies. In order to show this change within myself, as I came to terms with the practice as a whole I structured the paper in a way that shows my ideas before and after my participation. Not only were my conclusions of non-native ayahuasca use changed by taking ayahuasca but I also experienced change on a personal level. I had to confront my own fears and issues just like the subjects of the study did and as a result it has made me stronger and more aware of what is going on inside me.

I do not attempt to judge the authenticity of this practice as some have done (De Rios 2008; Beyer 2009; & Ott 1995). I simply attempt a description of non-native ayahuasca use, including the motivations of those who participated in the ceremonies and the effects it had on them. I have chosen to describe the practice in the subjects' own words, following the example of Jeremy Narby (1999), rather than analyzing their language and behavior and coming to conclusions as to what it means. Although this is an anthropological paper, the results I found and the conclusions I made are of a psychological nature. From the beginning, I never made a conscious decision to analyze the data in such a way. It was simply what I found fascinating in both the literature and the field. I presume my undergraduate training in psychology had much to do with this.

Although the conclusions I make have more to do with ayahuasca as an effective form of therapy, the fieldwork was conducted in a qualitative manner, which does not allow for the reproduction of results or generalization into the broader population, nor do I believe that similar results could be reached if the use of ayahuasca were to be investigated in a controlled study. Informants described the atmosphere of Soul Vine (SV) as “therapeutic,” “comforting,” and “a place to deal with my issues.” The ingredients in the ayahuasca brew were not constant between ceremonies. What kind of effect this had, I cannot say, but I noticed the difference in how it felt. By controlling the study one would lose some of the mystique of what brings participants to Peru in the first place, to leave the “rigid work environment of the west,” as stated by one of the participants.

By including myself in the study, some would argue that I compromised the objectivity of the research. I will not disagree with those that think this way. I remind readers once again that this is not a scientific controlled study searching for quantifiable results. I believe that the role of anthropological study, comprised by the sole researcher, is to capture a feeling. His or her role is to describe a practice, a phenomenon or a group of people to the best of his or her ability. Tape recorders and video cameras are good at capturing sight and sound but they are not able to get into the hearts and minds of those participating in said activity. By talking with the participants of the activity and participating in the activity personally, one can describe how one felt and compare that to the way others felt. The composite provides an insider's view of the object being investigated. If one does not desire to judge the practice on moral, ethical or scientific grounds, the fact that one becomes partial to the practice at hand does not affect the results of the study, rather it adds to them for it shows that the practice has the capacity to produce such a reaction within its participants. This method of research is not ideal in all settings. There are instances where objective controlled results are necessary to judge if a practice is effective for future applications. The resolution of personal trauma and emotional healing are subjective practices that pertain to the personality of the individual. What works for one might not work for another. Attempting to create an across the board solution to the problem of psychological issues does not address the idiosyncrasies present in each case. The human mind is not an organ like the heart or the pancreas. It is much more complicated. It functions on memory and previous experience that in many cases is not understood by the specific person in question. Ameliorating the symptoms of

a disorder does not address the underlying causes. That is a much more complicated issue. Ayahuasca does not work for everyone, but what I wish to show is that in this case, in this setting, in this time, it worked wonders for some people.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 will begin with my initial experiences in the city of Iquitos. While my fieldwork was not focused there, Iquitos is the worldwide center of ayahuasca. All guests of SV travel through Iquitos. The ayahuasca vine used at SV is purchased in Iquitos. There are many businesses like SV in and around Iquitos. It is the center of the whole ayahuasca business.

After describing Iquitos, I offer a description of Magdalena and the people who live there, their beliefs, experiences and modes of subsistence. Magdalena is a pseudonym I chose for a real town near Iquitos. Included in this section are a number of stories that people of the town have had with ayahuasca. Their stories show the way people in the town conceptualize ayahuasca.

The literature review is broken down into three parts, between chapters 3, 4 and 5. Chapter 3 will give a brief timeline of the multiple forms Amazonian shamanism has taken throughout the years. This will serve to situate the practice of non-native ayahuasca use in time and in relation to the other uses of ayahuasca. It begins with a review of the leading ethnographies concerning tribal Amazonian shamanism. It discusses the effects colonialism had on the role of the shaman before and after Spanish conquest and the shaman's subsequent acquisition of power. Following the discussion of colonialism, I

discuss the literature pertaining to the decline of the political power of the shaman as a result of global industrial capitalism. This section ends with a description of mestizo or urban shamanism.

Chapter 4 discusses the literature surrounding the motivations of non-natives to search out and take ayahuasca. Modernity produces a sense of emptiness in some people who, as tourists, try to fill that emptiness with authentic experiences. Some argue ayahuasca use is just another part of a society bent on consumerism, while others argue it is the antithesis of such a society. Those who think it is a reflection of consumerism argue that the ayahuasca tourists experience a decontextualized ritual. Their motivations are for self- fulfillment. This perspective more broadly is directed to a critique of new age ritual and foreign involvement in indigenous ritual. The reasons for this are also discussed in this section.

In contrast to the view that ayahuasca tourists are a sign of decontextualized ritual, this thesis argues that ayahuasca tourism does have a context although it is not the indigenous context. This chapter ends with the findings of two studies that offer a more nuanced understanding of the motivations ayahuasca seekers have.

Chapter 5 contains the third and final part of the literature review, which focuses on the effects that the use of ayahuasca has on non-natives, on the communities and on shamanic tradition in general. The benefits of intoxication are explored as well as the use of hallucinogens as tools. A number of theorists describe their opinions of the effects that foreign participation in ayahuasca ritual has on indigenous practice. Personal accounts of anthropologists' experiences with ayahuasca are given, their observed benefits, and the

general course of the hallucination. I close the chapter with a discussion of two studies that examine the effects of ayahuasca on non-native users.

Following the literature review is a discussion of the data collected in the field. This discussion is broken up into two parts: the motivations of ayahuasca users in chapter 6 and the effects of its use in chapter 7. The motivations of ayahuasca users at SV are similar to motivations cited in the literature. They include a desire for connection to nature (a product of alienation) help with emotional issues, and direction in life. The plausibility of informants' expectations are discussed as well as observations of informants' practices before and after my participation in ayahuasca ceremonies.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to explaining the effects ayahuasca had on the people that took it in Peru. It includes how the shaman views ayahuasca ceremonies and his explanation of dietary restrictions. I provide a description of the ceremony that includes my personal experiences, as well as informants' experiences. Themes of fear, openness and controlling the mind are patterns found in informants' experiences with ayahuasca. The ayahuasca intoxication provides a liminal period with the right setting and dosage, in which users are able to explore the sources of the problems that affect them.

Chapter 2: The Field site

Iquitos: The Capital of Ayahuasca

Iquitos is a city of some 300,000 residents. Ayahuasca is a big industry in Iquitos. Most gringos (Latin American term for people of European origin) in Iquitos are involved with ayahuasca in one way or another. It is the biggest source of tourist revenue, I was told. Most ordinary folk I encountered did not take ayahuasca nor had they tried it, although on my first day there I met five foreigners who did. Ayahuasca is administered by a shaman who guides the participants through the ceremony. There are gringo, mestizo, and native shamans. Allison, the owner of Soul Vine, explained that Iquitos is the “worldwide capital of Ayahuasca.”

Around the Plaza de Armas, un-muffled motor scooters fill congested streets lined with billboards advertising jungle lodges and the occasional healing center but ayahuasca remains hidden from the casual observer. Indigenous ladies in their typical dress sell arts and crafts. Jungle tours can be contracted that include “ayahuasca healing ceremonies” with “native shamans.” A gringo shaman was pointed out to me. He was dressed in a t-shirt and jeans, had short gray hair and wore glasses; his appearance did not reveal his involvement with ayahuasca.

Belen, the city’s poorer neighborhood, is a tourist attraction. I was brought there by a motorcycle taxi driver. It is constructed on stilts along the river’s flood plain. During

the dry season the houses sit on stilts 20 feet above the trash-covered ground. During the rainy season boats are used to travel between houses. In the Belen market one can find almost anything. I bought some rubber boots, a machete, a mosquito net, a knife, some string and some lighters from a Chinese shop owner. No one goes into *el monte* (the jungle) without machete, boots, and mosquito net.

There are not any roads that connect Iquitos to the outside world. In fact, it is the largest city in the world without connecting roads. The only way to get to and from the city is by river or air. It takes three days travel by boat along the Marañon River from Tarapoto in the north or five days along the Ucalayi River from Pucallpa near Lima.

My first day in Iquitos represented a microcosm of the month I spent in Magdalena. The conversations I had, served as an introduction to the subject of ayahuasca. It went as follows: I flew into Iquitos on June 29, 2010. The airport is small. I exited the plane, stepping down onto the pavement. I saw palm trees and green surrounding the paved runway area. Only a small propeller plane occupied the space with our modern jet. From the airport I boarded a motorcycle taxi. It has the front of a motorcycle and the back of a rickshaw. I asked the driver how much it would cost me to get into town. He told me 6 soles (3 soles = 1 dollar). I accepted and off we went.

“What brings you to Iquitos?” he said.

“I am here to study ayahuasca use by foreigners.” I responded.

Familiar with the topic he explained the problems many tourists have searching for ayahuasca.

“They put too much *toé* (*brugmansia suaveolens*) in it.” he said. “It is very strong and causes people to lose their minds. There is one girl here who has completely lost her mind. They called the French embassy to take her home.”

We arrived at the hotel. I put my things in my room, showered and rested for a few hours. I got up around noon to go to lunch. I asked the attractive girl at the front where the best place to eat was. She pointed me to the place across the street. Upon entering I noticed a table of hippy looking gringos and asked them if I could join.

I assumed they were off to the same place I was.

“Are you all going to Soul Vine?” I asked.

They had no idea what I was talking about, so I broadened my question.

“What brings you all here?” I asked.

The man across from me was from Australia. He told me he was here to take ayahuasca and had just taken it last night. He had been to Iquitos before to take ayahuasca and has taken it at home before by ordering it online. I asked him why.

“Society fills our minds with garbage. I come here to see reality,” he said.

“Where did you take it?” I asked.

“I took it here in Iquitos with a gringo shaman. He has 15 years of experience.”

“How was it? I asked

“It was very strong. I am in a daze now. I had a vision of the Peruvian culture’s addiction to petroleum and their addiction to meat. I saw them as a meat-eating ravenous culture. Our addiction to oil is connected to our addiction to meat,” he explained.

The man to my left had long curly hair put up in a bun with a chopstick through it. He was in Iquitos working on a project trying to instill the use of dry toilets in the outskirts of the city. He had taken ayahuasca a few times but was not sure why people found it so amazing.

The girl to my right was completely unresponsive to my inquiry. Later when she got up from the table, the other two explained to me her situation. She took ayahuasca days ago and since then does not remember anything. What a coincidence! It was the same girl the taxi driver told me about. The French man was taking care of her because he speaks her language. She has been here for two weeks and does not remember anything. He talked to her sister on the phone who explained that she has a history of psychological illness. She came here in a state of crisis hoping ayahuasca would help but it seems to have made things worse. Since her ayahuasca trip she has lost all sense of reality and all her possessions.

The French man, whom I will call Charlie, invited me to his house that evening. I showed up shortly after dark and found a whole group of young French guys in the residence. They were drinking French liquor and smoking cigarettes. I explained to them my research topic and we began to discuss the reasons why people take ayahuasca. Charlie's girlfriend was an English girl. She had taken ayahuasca while in the area. Most of the input was from her. She had four reasons.

The first is that people feel disconnected from nature. "Ayahuasca brings us back to nature," she explained. The second is that "ayahuasca is magic and meaning. It stands in opposition to the rigid work environment of west." The third is for psychological

cleansing and self help. “It cures the root of the problem.” And the fourth reason people take ayahuasca, she thought, was for life experience.

I asked her a little about her own experience. She explained that her friend went to apprentice with a shaman and she took it with her out of curiosity. It was a self exploring experience. There were 10 people in the ceremony with her. She feels that western society is lost, there is no more mystery. “There are no facts for spiritualism,” she said.” She had a vision of a wonderful world of plants. She flew through a universe of beauty and observed a “destroying army of force burning it. The medicine told me, you will lead the kids to reconnect themselves.”

This first day provided me with a representative sample of Ayahuasca use in the area. It is a very common thing in Iquitos, evident of the fact that on my first day all the tourists I talked to had tried it. The English girl described four reasons that people take ayahuasca, two of which, a desire to connect to nature, and psychological cleansing came to form two main themes within my fieldwork at SV. The French girl in trauma was the only such case I observed but one rather common if taken under the wrong circumstances. The Australian represented the typical ayahuasca tourist. He came to Iquitos for ayahuasca. Their responses exemplify the desire of ayahuasca users to search for an individual reality different from what society provides. They find western culture to be too structured and desire a slice of chaos. They see the destruction of the natural world before their eyes. Alienated from nature and without recourse, they come to an isolated city in the middle of the jungle to take one of the world’s most powerful hallucinogens in search of answers.

Magdalena

Magdalena (pseudonym) is a town of 5,621 habitants as of 2010. A 1993 census, which seems to be the most recent, shows roughly 50% of the population to be engaged in agricultural activities. When I arrived on the boat, I saw a large bare hill in between all the green jungle. The Ucayali River is big and brown, about as wide as the Potomac when it passes through the District of Columbia. The hill was composed of gray mud, a 1-2 foot wide drainage pipe ran down one side of it and on the other were wooden stairs. The boat pulled up to a metal barge floating on the water just on the shore. When the boat stopped, hundreds of people came running onto it with food and trinkets to sell. On top of the hill were hundreds of people that all stared at me as I walked up the stairs.

The town's commercial center is one block long. In that block is located the municipal market, three stores that sell everything from clothes to dry goods to cold beverages, a juice stand/watch repairer and a few food establishments. There are paved roads that stretch straight, left, and right from the town center for a few hundred meters in each direction. Houses are built right next to each other out of either wood or concrete. People may have a fruit tree or two in their back yards but for the most part all agriculture is done on what they call *chakras*, the Quechua word for field.

I visited two different chakras of the same family while I was there. One was up river, the other down river. Both were less than an hour's paddle away along the Ucayali River. The principal crops they cultivate are yucca and plantains. They also grow fruit trees, sugar cane, and rice along the river bank. The day's work starts in the morning after breakfast around 9 – 10am and runs until lunch around 2 or 3pm. The machete is the

principle tool for everything. Everyone that works has one and carries it with them as if it were an extension of their arm. It is used for clearing brush, digging, weeding and harvesting.

When I first arrived in town it seemed as though no one worked because people seemed to be hanging out all day. In fact most people do not work a 40 hour work week like we do except maybe farm employees. Those that have their own farms or work on their family's farm do not maintain regular hours.

There is a bustling morning market starting at sunrise and lasting till about eight or nine in the morning every day. It consists of yucca, plantains, fish, some fruit, bread, tamales, a hot food stand, and a couple of juice stands. People can be seen in town throughout the day having conversation or just hanging out. At around 4 pm, when the hot Amazonian sun begins to lose its vigor, most of the population participates in sports. The women, girls, and some men and boys set up their volley ball nets across the streets and on dirt courts. The men get together for soccer games that happen every evening. Each player bets a sol or half a sol and the winning team takes the share of the loser's. The matches are timed and taken very seriously. The courts are mostly dirt and the goals are constructed out of tied together sticks.

After the sun goes down the games die down and the electricity turns on. Songs can be heard blasting from the many stereo systems in the town. Nighttime is when people converge on the street. The heat of the day is gone and electricity illuminates televisions, kitchens, and stereos. On Saturday nights, generator powered discotheques blast tropical rhythms and serve cold beer.

There might have been one automobile in the entire town. People either walk or take a motorcycle taxi. The *motocarros*, as they are called, are rented by the drivers at a daily rate which they pay off by charging fares to passengers. Within this bustling but small town is located Soul Vine, one of the many lodges near Iquitos that provides ayahuasca healing ceremonies to non-Peruvians.

Shamanism in Magdalena

Within the town there are three shamans, all of whom are involved in administering ayahuasca to non-Peruvians. Shamanism is not a part of the townspeople's everyday lives, but they know about it and when asked, responded to my questions. Western medicine is the prevailing pathogenic mindset. I observed a nurse in the town center giving flu vaccines. It was a strong display of the power of western medicine: the professional, pure white coat, elegant lady with glasses and highlighted hair flaunting western modernity.

Although most people think in terms of western biological medicine, memories of shamanic folk belief still exist within the town. I learned about some of these beliefs and practices. *Enfermedad Maligna* is a sickness brought on by the ill intention of another; it must be cured by a shaman. *Chuyachaci*, the devil of the woods, has the feet of a deer. He captures you and leaves you lost in the woods. He presents himself like one of your friends or relatives. He gives you food but you do not eat, when you get free the shaman “*te sopla*” (blows on you) to return you to normal. *La sirena*, (the mermaid) lives in the Parnayali stream. She captures you and there you live below the water. People have gone

missing and their bodies are never found. The shamans when they take ayahuasca can see the lost person. When she falls in love with you she comes out of the water to talk to you. *La attwara* is a monkey who lives in the jungle. He rips out your heart and eats it. He sucks your blood but you do not die. The shaman cannot save you.

I had a conversation one day with Juan, a descendent of Jívaro. He explained the difference between indigenous and western medicine.

“There aren’t natural indigenous anymore.” He said. “They plant *pifio* palm. They use it to eat in the highlands. The winter is a difficult time. In the primary forest where no one has cut the trees there is no winter, only hours of rain each day. In the secondary forest there are three months of rain.

Ayahuasca is at the international level. We take it as medicine of the body. In order to be a shaman one has to diet for 2-3 months. My grandparents were *curiosos* (shamans). The trees have cures like the prescriptions from the hospital. Here the majority of the people fear the snake. The jungle is somewhere between good and bad – a lot of mystery – it demands respect. It takes a long time to become welcome. The medicinal plants demand respect. They require faith. You have to have faith! They are not of the moment; they are slow but they do cure. It depends on faith. The medicines of the pharmacy calm you but if you really want to be cured you have to receive attention from a curious one, one that knows medicinal plants.

It takes time and faith,” he said. “Modern medicine cures the symptoms only. Traditional medicine cures the body completely. But just like western medicine there are prescriptions and doses. One must know what plants to use for each illness and how much to give.”

In ancient times it took 1-2 years to become a shaman. Below are the ingredients of the ayahuasca brew that his Jívaro relatives prepare.

1. Ayahuasca
2. Chacrana
3. Tabáco Típico
4. Toé
5. Piñon Colorado

The preparation of ayahuasca described by Langdon (1992), Whitten (1985), and Harner (1972) includes only the vine and its catalyst *chacrana*. Toé is taken, but separately and for different reasons. It is common to use tobacco, but alongside the ayahuasca brew.

There are a number of local shamans in town. Francisco is the patriarch of the family whose farms I visited. Theirs is a reasonably powerful family in the area. He is not a full time shaman but knows medicinal plants and prepares ayahuasca. He explained to me the plants that he uses to make his ayahuasca brew. Notice the difference.

1. Ayahuasca Negra
2. Chacrana
3. Tabáco Típico
4. Toé Enano
5. Huayra Caspi
6. Ayahuma
7. Capiruna Negra

It seems the further removed the shaman is from the indigenous culture the more plants they use in their ayahuasca brew. Juan still speaks his native language while Francisco does not. Juan uses fewer plants.

Kike, the shaman of SV, treats gringos. He uses even more plants. Here is his recipe.

1. Ayahuasca
2. Chacrana
3. Sanango root
4. Tabáco Típico
5. Punga Negra.
6. Llesca
7. Catawa
8. Tortuga
9. Huaca Purana
10. Huayra Caspi
11. Doctor Cosby
12. Icoja

Both Juan and Francisco use toé, but Kike does not. In general, he uses more ingredients (excluding toé) than the other shamans in the village. He doesn't use toé, explained Allison, because it is a dark plant. Brews containing brugmansia (toé) increase the risk of psychological distress. "Brugmansia is known to produce piercingly strong and clear visions and is known among *curanderos* (curers) as an extremely powerful plant, if ingested in toxic doses, brugmansia causes convulsions, blindness, delirium and coma" (Lewis 2008, 111). The French girl from Iquitos who lost her mind had taken a lot of toé.

He explained to me in brief the philosophy of the plants that he uses. He explained the preparation of the brew. "Pure ayahuasca vine makes one dizzy." He said. "One must mix plants from the high jungle and the low jungle. Ayahuasca is from the low jungle, we are in the high. The mixture of plants ensures the opening of the third eye." Interesting to note here is his use of the term "third eye." The third eye is part of eastern philosophy, not the indigenous view of ayahuasca. He is what is considered a *palero* – one who works with tree bark. Kike has experimented over the years and learned to use the plants he does. He learned from his brother. An ex-coworker of his explained the function of the tree barks. "Tree bark in ayahuasca brew provides a stable structure for ayahuasca to climb. It gives the intoxication support. It has more grounding, thus making it stronger. It creates a more gradual process from sober to *mareado* (dizzy) to sober again."

Francisco told me two stories about successful cures he has administered. They match almost exactly the characterization of mestizo healing.

The Frenchman

He had three girlfriends, one French, one from Lima, and one from Chile. The Chilean wanted him all for herself. She invited him for a drink and from that moment on he felt a pain in his stomach. Two years passed and he didn't get any better only worse. The agency in Iquitos sent him to me.

He stayed 20 days with me. He couldn't eat, everything came up. I told him I was going to examine him. By his pulse I could tell that the Chilean gave him poison. I told him that we are going to take ayahuasca below in a lagoon.

At 7 we drank. I told him when you feel *mareacion* tell me. When he felt it I told him to throw up! But he didn't He was scared to vomit. We rested one night. The next night I gave him two. He became very *mareado* and he started to throw everything up. I began to *soplar* his head. I went to look at what he threw up and it looked like a liver, all ugly covered in blood.

Afterwards the Frenchman felt better screaming "I am hungry!" He ate well. In 9 days he drank ayahuasca 3 times. I took him to strengthen his body with tree bark. I boiled it and he took it to better his body. He took it and a month latter this woman will never bother him again!

The Frenchman's Friend

His leg was swollen and bruised. It became infected and no one could cure it. I washed his leg with tree bark of the *uvo* tree, the bark of the *sueldo sueldo* and the yolk of an egg. I boiled some *paicho* and *virvena* to wash. I applied the remedy and told him to stay eight days in a hammock. After six days there was not any infection.

I took him to look for the following plants: *uvo rojo*, *renaquia*, and *cuma ceva bark*. Then in the highlands we collected *sucarwayu*, *tawari*, and *huaca purana*. I cut them up and put them in cane liquor and let it sit eight days.

Francisco is mestizo. Being involved in shamanism, his idiom of healing comes from an indigenous tradition. A curse is the cause of misery in both of these examples. Both mestizo and indigenous belief systems frame illness in terms of the ill will of others.

Juan, the local watchsmith, told me a story of his experience with ayahuasca. His story shows the incorporation of both conceptions of illness. His eye was swollen and infected. He went to various shamans, and they told him people had sent him *maldad* (evil). Juan went to his shaman friend who said he would take *purga* (ayahuasca) by himself to see what the problem is. Juan comes by the following day and the shaman tells him that there is no curse. He sent him to the doctor.

“The shaman became sick one day and went to the jungle to diet. The diet purifies the body and converts it into pure medicine. He spent four years there taking medicine and diet. The body converts into so strong that if a mosquito bites him it will die. Some shamans say that even AIDS can be cured with years of diet.”

Not all illness is caused by a curse. The infected eye of the watch smith was just an infected eye that needed medication.

Not everyone’s story of ayahuasca is a positive one. Señora Villacencio had a horrible life-changing experience which turned her to Evangelical Christianity. The mestizo culture carries aspects of both indigenous and western beliefs. There are varying degrees of mestizaje. Some individuals retain more indigenous beliefs than others. Señora Villacencio has chosen western religion. She explained:

“When I was 8 months pregnant I went to visit my husband in Yanashi, an indigenous town. He was with another woman. They put a spell on him so that he would not be with anyone else. I arrived there and met with my friend. She tells me that my husband is cursed and offers me ayahuasca. She took me to meet the girl my husband was with. My husband went to Iquitos with the girl but I stayed in Yanashi. My parents were spiritualists and they didn’t believe in Ayahuasca. She went to see a shaman far from the town. The shaman introduced me to his wife and the wife was bitter. We took ayahuasca that night but did not see anything. The three brothers were shamans as well as the wife.

I had bad dreams from the moment I arrived there and I didn’t know why. She asked the shaman why she didn’t see anything.

“We only gave you enough to search your body. Tomorrow you will take more,” he responded.

My baby was beginning to take form. The wife of the shaman interfered and didn’t let me take ayahuasca that day. She asked the brother of the shaman to bless the baby. The wife told me to leave.

The day we were going to drink, the wife killed a black hen. She invited me to eat but I was not hungry. I sat in the hammock, it came undone, and I fell on my neck. It didn’t hurt any the next day but I felt a thread of pain in my neck. During the day the thread kept growing. By six in the afternoon it was large. By this time I had been there for 12 days.

“Today we are going to drink,” said the shaman.

I drank and asked for some more and they served me. All of a sudden there were many people, 10 or so. I lay down. Behind me was the brother of the shaman with his legs spread towards me. I waited for the vision but nothing came. I thought

that they hadn't given me enough. Like they read my mind they stood up with another cup. I did not vomit.

I started to see many women well dressed like princesses holding Japanese fans. They looked at the baby and laughed. Their mouths touched their ears and their teeth were like needles. One by one they came to sit around my baby.

"Uncover her stomach," I heard.

I took the shirt off the baby. They looked at him and fanned him. At that moment the wife of the shaman walks in with an evil look in her eyes.

"Cover him!" said the women of the vision.

They disappeared. I started to see an earthworm from far away. It came closer. When it got close I realized it was a boa with golden scales. It kept growing. It was huge! It opened its mouth and all of a sudden I was inside of its belly. I could see that I was in an abandoned garden full of weeds. There was a house below. In front of the house there were some men. One was a huge black Indian. He had a whip in his hand. They came out walking, carrying a small corpse. The ones carrying the corpse had no skin and blood was running from their body. They had hair and two horns on their head, feet like a pig and a tail like a lion. There were six of them, three on each side of the corpse. It was wrapped like a mummy but I could tell it was my husband. I screamed his name three times. He turned and looked at me and his head fell off. I could see into his body, his guts through his neck. Within his body I saw these same men with spears in hand.

I heard a voice say, "What you are seeing is the crap they gave your husband to drink. This is the blood that they have given him to prepare."

In front of me, two of the skinless figures appear and they carry away my husband's mistress.

"The girl is the cause of what you are seeing," said the voice. "Your husband has given her the blood of your son. You command us what to do."

"Heal them and clean them," I said. "Don't kill him! Punish the mother and the daughter!"

They picked up the two of them and put them next to the man with the whip. The huge black Indian whipped them brutally. At that moment I started to feel my neck move and a cramp develop. The back of my neck at the base of my head went numb.

"With me now!" said the brother of the shaman who was behind me.

He wanted me to be his woman. The mother my husband's mistress had paid to kill me. The feeling of death lowered itself upon me. I felt trapped. I had enough strength to pick myself up and approach the shaman.

"Why does your brother want to kill me?" I asked. From behind I felt projectiles hitting me. "Prepare a canoe and take me away. I won't stay a minute longer!" I said.

I started to leave and they said "Don't go out into the light!"

I tried to vomit but I couldn't. I gathered my things and returned to my room. I went to the toilet with violent diarrhea, after I lay down. I felt horrible.

"I will die here," I thought.

I started to pray. I fell asleep and was greeted by a horrible dream. I saw the brother of the shaman.

“Kill your son and I will give you all my knowledge,” he said.

I wanted to wake up but I couldn't.

“You are suffering because of me. Don't you know me?”

“No,” I said.

“I will remind you then. Remember when you were sick I cured you. In that moment I wasn't going to cure you, I was going to kill you more. It wasn't medicine; it was poison that I gave you.”

“I am dead for sure! There is so much evil that I don't see light,” I thought.

“Now I will cure you.”

He began to sing and that is when I saw him.

The next day I woke up in a horrible depression. I went to see the nuns. I doused myself with holy water. I drank holy water and the pain in my throat went away.

For two and a half years I suffered that sickness, a spiritual torture. The father of my children married that girl. I went from shaman to shaman but they could not do anything. I didn't know where to go. I found one shaman and talked to him.

“I am going to cure you,” he said.

At that moment a boy passed and said, “No more! You know what is going to happen!”

The shaman told me the devil doesn't exist. He wanted 200 soles, seven candles and a cigar. I had to leave my children and go alone. I had no money.

“God never wants money,” I thought.

I didn't know what to do. The shaman told her to come tomorrow. I went to look for money. I knocked on the door of the priest to ask for money. No one was home. I went to an evangelist church. The pastor started to explain what had happened.

“In hell this will be your punishment. Christ is the only one who can save you.”

He asked me how long I suffered. When I was about to respond I heard a voice say, “Don't speak to him!”

It took me a half an hour to say anything. The pastors started to pray and after a while I could talk.

“Your decision is to give your life to Christ. Here you can bring your children.”

I felt something come alive inside of me. They cured me with cigars and holy water. They started to pray and my body shook. It wasn't me but someone within me. I barked like a dog, meowed like a cat, and screamed like many different women. Within me lived a whole town. Gas came out of me. They blessed me with baptism oil.

“From this day on, this evil is no longer yours,” said the pastor.

From within my body I felt a balloon pop. A sense of tranquility came to me from far away alleviating all that I went through. From that day on I will never take ayahuasca again. It is a thing of the devil!

In a town of only 5,000 there are three evangelical churches, more than any other religion. Evangelism is able to conceptualize the shamanic practices that remain in the background of peoples' lives. It is practiced with the same vivacity and active belief in spirits that characterizes shamanic practice.

Foreigners use ayahuasca with a much higher frequency than do the people of Magdalena. A dance performed by the high school students explained this perfectly. I walked by the little stadium in the center of town and observed the high school students reciting a dance. On the bleachers sat a middle aged man who seemed to be the teacher, and a young man seated next to him. Both of them were playing western snare drums to a complex rhythm.

In the dance, spirits danced on the periphery. A guy swinging a machete was searching through the jungle for ayahuasca in the center. He found it and prepared it. In the center appeared a gringo taking photos. The devils attacked the gringo. His friend took him to the shaman for cure. The shaman sucked out the evil. The spirits helped keep the devils out.

The dance is telling because it explains non-native ayahuasca use in terms of the local culture. Clifford Geertz (1973) believes that members of a society communicate their worldview through ritual. Just like the ayahuasca dance, the Balinese cockfight "is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1973: 430). The dance is the Magdalena interpretation of the Magdalena experience. The rhythm of the dance is of indigenous origin, the people are of indigenous origin, although they wear western clothing while performing it. Illness is conceptualized

spiritually, as do the indigenous. But the one who is ill is not one of the locals. It is a photograph taking, camera toting tourist. The residents of Magdalena observe tourists visiting their town on a weekly basis. They know they are there to take ayahuasca, but they do not know why. The tourists do not mingle much with the locals. The locals do not have the opportunity to ask what it is that they are attempting to heal. According to the locals, ayahuasca cures “enfermedad maligna,” illness caused by the curse of another. In the dance, devils attack a tourist. The locals must think that the tourists visiting their town are the objects of many curses. They observe a practice, but conceptualize it according to their own cultural beliefs. This dance provides an explanation of a practice that previously did not have explanation. The performance finds non-native ayahuasca use a place in the local culture.

CHAPTER 3: Shamans through Time

The Basics of Northwest Amazonian Shamanism

Today, ayahuasca is used very differently at the tribal level than among westerners. Among the indigenous Amazonian populations, ayahuasca is only one part of an entire system of beliefs and medicines that anthropologists call shamanism. But shamanism is not practiced equally by all and it has not stayed constant over the years. Before colonial invasion, the shaman had a very different role than he came to assume afterwards. He has an equally different role today. One element that has persisted through constant change is the use of hallucinogens. Amazonians use a wide array of plant medicines of which Ayahuasca is one. In the face of change, ayahuasca has been the medium through which the indigenous worldview has redefined itself.

Anthropologists conducted much research on indigenous spiritual practices in the 1970's. A composite of their research would read as such. For indigenous Amazonians, ayahuasca is a catalyst that allows the formation of their worldview. It allows for the divination of disease, the increase in one's power, and the projectile of spirit darts. The brew is simple--ayahuasca and chacruna. Illness is always caused by another person or spirit and must be cured by placing the curse on the perpetrator. Shaman hierarchies exist that require a more powerful shaman to cure the curse of one who is less powerful than him. It is important to remember that it has not always been this way, but this is how it

was when shamanism was an important topic in anthropology. The following section deals with the seminal works of the decade. It serves as a basis of comparison to previous and post-states because of its richly detailed description of tribal practice.

Michael Harner (1972) worked with the Jivaro. He found that they have no formal political organization. Their culture contains a pervasive belief in shaman-induced illness and death. Conflict over women is common, while retaliatory sanctions and feuding are their main way of dealing with conflict. The leaders of society are the killers and the shamans. Each neighborhood has at least one or two killers and a few superior shamans (Harner 1972: 111).

The *kakaram* (killers) are the counterpart of the shamans. They gain respect and power through killing (usually members of a rival tribe). They are feared by their enemies but valued by their neighbors as a deterrent of attacks (Harner 1972: 112-13). The wife of shamans and killers are expected to be master potters or gardeners, strong man – strong woman.

The *uwisin* (shamans) are more numerous than the killers. There are two types of shamans, bewitching shamans (*wawek*, or *yahauci uwisin*) and curing shamans (*pener uwisin*) (Harner 1972: 117). Bewitching shamans gain their power through fear while curing shamans win the favor of their neighbors and are seen as an asset to the welfare of the group. The essence of the shaman's power is his *tsentsak* (magical darts), which reside in his body (Harner 1972: 119). He sends the *tsentsak* to bewitch and sucks them from a patient's body to cure.

In order to become a shaman the apprentice forms a relationship with an elder shaman. He gains his power through purchase and, in return, is given instruction and magical power (Harner 1972: 118). In order to see the supernatural world one must take *natema* (banisteriopsis vine boiled with leaves of *yahi*). This is the principal drug for curing because it produces hallucinations but is not as strong as *toé*, thus allowing the shaman to interact socially (Harner 1972: 152).

During initiation, the practicing shaman regurgitates a magical dart (*tsentsak*) and the novice takes it. Upon swallowing it, he experiences pain and remains in bed for ten days repeatedly taking *natema*. The apprentice must abstain from sexual intercourse for several months. After the first month the *tsentsak* emerges. If he casts the *tsentsak* he becomes a bewitching shaman. If he swallows it he becomes a curing shaman, but only if his teacher is a curing shaman. If his teacher is a bewitching shaman, then the *tsentsak* contains a strong desire to kill. After five months of sexual abstinence and regular takings of *natema* the apprentice gains the power to kill or heal. (Harner 1972: 155-56)

The Canelos Quichua, who are the subject of Norman Whitten's books Sicuanga Runa (1985) and Puyo Runa (2008), are considered by the Jívaro to be the most powerful shamans because they contain the white man's *tsentsak* (Harner 1972, 119). Among the Canelos Quichua, a person's *samai* (breath) is the source of one's power made manifest through *taquina* (song) or his *shungu* (will). A shaman's corporeal heart-throat-stomach area, his *shungu*, contains especially sharp and dangerous objects that protect him but can also be blown as projectiles to harm or kill (Whitten 1985: 109). More powerful shamans

have more powerful projectiles. Thus, if a shaman becomes sick he must consult a more powerful shaman than himself for a cure.

The Canelos Quichuan concept of *samai* exists outside of the shamanic node in its reciprocal realm of pottery. A master potter similarly must control the force of power with her breath (Whitten 1985: 109). Whereas the shaman travels outward to retrieve images from the supernatural world, his female counterpart, the master potter, solidifies the shamanic imagery with the power of her *samai* and her control over the earth (Whitten 2008: 67).

The shaman's song (*taquina*) is a proof of his strength. When a shaman is confident in his ability to ward off in-coming projectiles of all other shamans, he will sing his song aloud. When another shaman hears this song he will send his projectiles (*shitana*) back at the singer to test his strength (Whitten 1985: 114). During initiation it is a *taquina* (song) that the apprentice must acquire from the practicing shaman.

The *yachaj*, the one who knows, Whitten explains, "has attained a level of control such that he is sufficiently powerful to balance his knowledge with his visions, to relate his visions to cultural knowledge, and to relate his thoughts and reflections to knowledge and to his visions" (Whitten 1985: 117). He continuously looks out to know more within. He must cross cultural boundaries and converse with those that are not part of his culture, meanwhile constantly reproducing the cultural boundaries he transcends. To Whitten, the shaman is a "paradigm manipulator" (1985: 117).

Whitten (1985) explains how ayahuasca is used among the Canelos Quichua. The vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) is split and cooked with the leaves of *amarun yaji*. A shaman

recommends it to an adult man or woman in order to gain a deeper experience with a patient who has an illness. Seated on his bench in the woman's part of the house, the shaman drinks the brew. As he becomes intoxicated, he begins to "see." A master potter, usually the shaman's wife, who has been snuffing tobacco, clarifies the visions. The shaman shakes his leaf bundle and sings out his *taquina*. In come a barrage of images as the shaman travels through time and space defending against projectiles from other shamans as he flies. Upon returning to his bench, he is able to see the illness in the patient as a "cutting or stinging creature encased in blue mucous in the patient's stomach" (Whitten 1985: 137). He drinks again, and sucks out the illness, holding it for a while and then spitting it onto a tree outside of the house. After this dramatic episode he cleanses everyone with his leaf bundle.

Next he calls the under-soil spirits of the forest. They come to him under the house. He sits on top of them as a "unified killing force" (Whitten 1985: 140). Through him, they divine the perpetrator of the illness. He responds, sending a killing missile with a high falsetto sound to "break into the biological, social, and spiritual network of the agent and his shaman – into their bodies, protective shields, and into their *ayllus* (villages) – to do killing harm" (Whitten 1985: 140).

E. Jean Matteson Langdon (1992) studied among the Siona, a western Tukanoan group of the Putumayo – Caquetá River basins of Colombia. Their system of beliefs surrounding hallucinogenic healing and trips to the supernatural world are very similar to the two cases discussed above. *Yajé*, what the Siona call the brew of *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *amarun yaji*, is the bridge between worlds and a source of knowledge (Langdon

1992: 46). While it does not cure in and of itself, it assists in the divination of illness and increases *dau* (personal power). Song is what activates the healing properties in plants.

The Sionan concept of *dau* is a “shamanic substance that embodies knowledge and power” (Langdon 1992: 47). Through the use of *yajé* one can increase their *dau*. It enables the shaman to travel to other lands and provides the power to cure or cause misfortune. When it leaves the body it takes the form of a dart, stone, or a snake’s tooth. A person’s *dau* can be damaged by a bad trip caused by sorcery, menstruation, or an encounter with another shaman or spirit while not protected with *yajé* (Langdon 1992: 47-48). For this reason, many do not make it to the level of master shaman. Those that do are of “unique mental stability and strength of character” (Langdon 1992, 49).

Within the Siona community Langdon (1992) explains three designations of man. The first and lowest level is “only a man.” The second is “one who has left” – that is one who has experienced *yajé* visions. The third stage is “seer” or “one who knows” characterized by high levels of *dau* and years of *yajé* use (Langdon 1992: 53). Each stage of knowledge is characterized by culturally anticipated visions, therefore to achieve a stage of knowledge one is expected to have seen a certain vision. The visions experienced while under the influence of *yajé* are not random. Rather, explains Langdon (1992), “it is an ordering of induced visions into culturally meaningful symbols and experiences, thus gaining increasing control over the visions and events occurring” (53). Anticipated visions are well known and discussed.

Langdon (1992) explains that the visions one sees are dependent on the type of *yajé* ingested. The shaman sings of the visions they will see while preparing the brew.

After taking the brew the shaman guides his apprentices through the visions with his song, “naming the various abstract motifs and colors associated with each spirit” (Langdon 1992: 53). These same visions are located on pottery and painted on the faces of the elders.

One month of preparation is necessary to progress from “only a man” to “one who has left.” Apprentices leave the village between puberty and their mid-twenties. They remain sexually abstinent and follow a special diet. The diet cleanses the body to make it lighter for flight and prevents the ingestion of substances that attract evil spirits. The first three nights ingesting yajé produce vomiting, defecation and dizziness. Following this period, the apprentice begins to see visions. It is a test of strength – one must be strong to take yajé. (Langdon 1992: 55-56)

In order to become “one who has left,” the apprentice must pass through a series of visions. If he passes, he then stays with the shaman in the forest for two to four months continuously drinking yajé. He is guided through a particular vision for three to four nights and then rests and starts with a new vision. After the initial training period he returns home but maintains abstinent for a period of one to two years. Following this, he may study with other shamans from other villages (Langdon 1992: 57-58). Siona shamans pursue three specializations: hunting, curing, or communication with celestial beings. Langdon (1992) describes the Siona shaman as the “living embodiment of power” (59). This power can be used to the benefit or detriment of others.

The anticipated visions of Siona shamanism can be compared to the communication of *sacra* explained by Turner (1967) in Ndembu rites of passage. “The monstrosity of the

configuration throws its elements into relief” (106). The Ndembu symbol of a man’s head on a lion’s body allow the neophytes to think about the human head in the abstract. Turner (1967) explains, “There could be less encouragement to reflect on heads and headship if that same head were firmly ensconced on its familiar, it’s all too familiar, human body.” In the same way the visions produced by ayahuasca among the Siona and other tribes of the Amazon allow the apprentices to reflect upon the symbols of their culture in a different light. As I will explain later, unlike non-native ayahuasca use, indigenous shaman apprenticeship documented in the 1970s and 80s is a rite of passage. The apprenticeship period is liminal and the apprentice is injected into the prescribed role of shaman thereafter.

Shamanism and Colonialism

The period of colonial rule brought massive devastation throughout the American continents. The information provided above concerns shamanism after Spanish colonization. It is the most richly documented period in shamanic history. Using archival research and oral histories, theorists were able to reconstruct the effect of the colonial invasion on Amazonian shamanic practice. They were able to show that Catholic missionaries and Spanish conquistadors had a massive influence on the position the shaman took within indigenous culture thereafter. The information in the previous section is a product of that influence. Note the extremely combative nature of post conquest Amazonian shamanism. A shaman’s power is measured by the projectiles he is able to launch. We do not know how healing was conceptualized previous to the arrival

of the Spanish. The only ethnographic information on Amazonian shamanism comes 400 years after the arrival of the Spanish. The following section argues that the role of the shaman changed as a result of colonial rule. With a change in responsibilities, one can assume a change in practice to fit those responsibilities. The warlike idiom of healing described by ethnographers of the 1970s and 80s could possibly be a product of resistance to colonial power.

In late 19th and early 20th century Colombia, the owners of rubber companies murdered men, women, and children to achieve what Taussig (1987) calls the “space of death.” The Indians brought back sufficient rubber, and were killed nonetheless. Many were burned alive during festivities or starved to death intentionally. This seems counter intuitive, being that the rubber managers were destroying their labor. But, as Foucault says, “In the ‘excesses’ of torture, a whole economy of power is invested” (Taussig 1987: 27). What the Spanish were aiming for was a complete restructuring of reality, in order to make the natives totally subservient.

The managers of the rubber companies lived in a constant state of fear. They feared the Amazonians because they represented something wild and untamed. They held the same fear for the forest in which they lived. The forest was filled with savage beasts; vipers, jaguars, and cannibals. Although they feared it, they needed the wildness that the Indians represented in order to extract the rubber from the wild, untamed forest. The Europeans themselves were not capable of this labor in such a hot climate. They knew that the Indians did not need them for their subsistence, nor did the Indians have any use for their payment. In this respect, the Indians had more power than the Europeans- they

had the power of the forest. Even though the Spanish might have feared and despised the Indians, they needed them for their very survival. Their only way to maintain power was out of a total restructuring of reality, through a system of terror. They needed to inflict the same terror they felt from the Indians, onto the Indians. There was no perceptible logic to the carnage in the Amazon at the time. It seemed at times for sport. Death was a constant occurrence creating a “space of death” (Taussig 1987: 121-122).

As a result, the indigenous political structure experienced a complete restructuring. Langdon (1985) explained how the Siona shaman of the Putumayo came to power as a result of the changes brought on by colonialism. Prior to conquest, Siona political structure was kinship-based and the longhouse represented the primary node of power (Langdon 1985: 134). From the information that is known about the longhouse structure, it appears that the shaman was distinct from longhouse headmen and chiefs. Pre-conquest political organization was more complex. There existed a larger population organized around kinship and plagued by intergroup warfare (Langdon 1985: 134).

Pre-conquest longhouse communities were organized by a division of labor. The chief controlled the political-economic domain. The dancer controlled the metaphysical domain. The warrior defended the community against attack and waged war on other communities. The shaman ensured good hunting and metaphysical protection and the servant supported the physical existence through agriculture and hunting (Langdon 1985: 140). There existed a balance of power. The warrior’s physical power countered the shaman’s metaphysical power. The chief’s physical mediation countered the metaphysical mediation of the shaman.

Siona oral history alludes to a much larger indigenous population with a chief as ruler and a division of labor. The shaman was a spiritual guide not a political ruler. The shaman emerged as a form of defense against the Spanish. Early accounts of indigenous resistance depict armed combat and sorcery but, unable to match the power of Spanish arms, sorcery became the primary weapon of resistance (Langdon 1985:138). Sorcery became a weapon of the weak (Scott 1985).

Spanish missionization brought priests into the depths of the Amazon. Missionaries organized the Siona into centralized communities by bribing them with gifts. They introduced monogamy and European clothing, broke down the longhouse structure and introduced single family dwellings surrounding a plaza or church. They introduced a *cabildo* (town council) with an *alcalde* (mayor), councilmen and prosecutors (Langdon 1985, 132). The officers held annual staffs of office, which theoretically gave them power to adjudicate in intraindigenous affairs, “but because of their short tenure and the very small measure of authority invested in them, they seem to have acted mostly as agents in such functions as tribute collection and as enforcers of noncontroversial moral codes” (Salomon 1983: 414).

The dense jungle and expanse of the Amazon did not lend itself well to centralized government. The cabildo system failed in many areas, leaving the priests as the sole representatives of authority. But even the priests did not stay for long. The Jesuits left in 1769, and by 1848 all missions were abandoned and only small amounts of trade remained (Langdon 1985: 132).

The Spanish missions left a power vacuum to be filled by the shaman, for he most closely resembled the power of the Catholic priest. Similarly, the shaman's rituals incorporated Catholic practice. He used the chalice to administer yajé and built his bench to resemble the altar. Visions of master-shamans included journeys to heaven and entrances into God's house (Langdon 1985: 139).

Jívaro oral history depicts two types of rulers: the *kakaram* (killers) and the *uwisin* (shamans). Although no longer practiced, the *kakaram* would go on expeditions to neighboring tribes to obtain *tsantsa* (shrunken heads) (Harner 1972: 145). Possession of an *arutam* soul prevented death by violence and witchcraft, something very important when there was constant threat of invasion by another tribe. In order to acquire another *arutam* soul it was necessary to kill, while the possession of an *arutam* soul produced the desire to kill (Harner 1972: 140). The result was a dependence on killing, an endless cycle. When a *kakaram* murdered a victim, something that was necessary for acquiring more power (*arutam*), he must prepare a *tsantsa* (shrunken head) in order to prevent the *muisak* (avenging soul) from killing him or a family member (Harner 1972: 144).

The demand for firearms led to dependence on trading partners near regions of white settlement (Harner 1972: 200). The desire to acquire "white men's valuables" led to an increase in shamans and trading partners (Harner 1972: 201). Shamans demanded goods for their services and laymen feared to ask them for goods. The result was an increase in the socio-economic power of the shamans. The increase in the number of shamans resulted in an increase in the number of illnesses and deaths attributed to witchcraft and, in turn, a greater demand for their services (Harner 1972: 201).

The increase in the number of shamans led to the formation of shaman hierarchies. Formerly, there was only one shaman per neighborhood but with many in the area one could purchase *tsentsak* (magic darts) from any one of their neighbors. Jívaro considered the Canelos Quichua to be the most powerful shamans, thus producing the desire to obtain their *tsentsak* (Harner 1972: 120). Formerly, intertribal warfare prevented contact between tribes but with prohibition of intertribal warfare by the Ecuadorian government, the Jívaro began to visit the Canelos (Harner 1972: 202).

The northern Jívaro were the only ones capable of making the journey to Canelos territory. The power of the darts decreased as they were traded from shaman to shaman, thus a power hierarchy was created from north to south (Harner 1972: 120). The more powerful shamans provided *tsentsak* and the lower ones provided material goods. The lower shamans needed to remain on good terms with higher shamans out of fear of sorcery. Power had to be renewed every so often, ensuring a continual supply of material goods (Harner 1972: 122).

The power of the shaman became an unintentional byproduct of the Spanish conquest. Bishop Peña Montenegro was quoted as saying that the “Indian sorcerers are the principal obstacle to the spread of the gospel” (Taussig 1987: 377). They stimulated uprisings against the Spanish. He found it necessary to prohibit Indian dances and songs. He explained, “In these they have the memory of idolatry and sorcery” (Taussig 1987: 377). But according to Taussig (1987) these “memories” were “hegemonic fictions read into the past as an outcome of the ideological struggles of the present” (377). They were

an invented tradition. By trying to remove them, the church strengthened them as a new social force.

Before the colonial invasion, the Incas used the term *auca*, to refer to those who did not succumb to the power of the king. Usually referring to the lowland forest dwellers, it conveyed a sense of barbarism and wildness, as it is used today (Taussig 1987: 97-99). The *muchachos* (boys) were the Indian servants of the white colonists. They embodied the image of the *auca* by fulfilling the demands of their colonial oppressors. They murdered, killed, and tortured under instruction of the Europeans. They purveyed and created the concept of evil that the colonizers imagined in the broader Indian population. The *muchachos* served as proof of the “savageness” that the Europeans considered the Indian population to have (Taussig 1987: 122-23).

Ironically, present day Shamans in the Sibundoy valley of Colombia need the wild lowland Indians the same way the colonial powers did. They sing to the *primer tribu* (first tribe) for power and inspiration. Don Pedro, one of Taussig’s (1987) informants, sings over *yajé* (ayahuasca) invoking the ancient people and the *sacha gente* (forest people). The ancient and the savage are those with the power to heal but also those to be feared. They are the *huitotos* – mythical, lowland, savage devil figures. Like animals, they do not know right and wrong, but they are powerful, and like dogs they have sensibility and knowledge that humans do not (Taussig 1987: 379). Just as the colonial rubber tappers needed the labor of the wild Indian to extract rubber from the trees, so do the highland shamans call on the colonial defined power of the lowland savages to heal.

Taussig (1987) sees shamanic imagery as a manifestation of historical materialism – the flashing forth of history in a moment of danger. He explained, “The *huitoto* image in the highland shaman’s song embodies a narrative of redemption from colonial terror as an allegory tripping up the disorder of misfortune in its very disorderliness” (Taussig 1987: 390). These images reflect and condense the history of conquest to form analogies and structural correspondences with present-day hopes and tribulations. Just as Benjamin (1968) theorized, “to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ – it means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (255). These images are not accurate portrayals of the past but are influenced by the present situation. The rubber companies created savages in their *muchachos*, boys trained to kill. The shaman tames savagery, not to eliminate, it but to acquire it. The post-colonial shaman is a product of colonial aggression and power, a reaction to it. The Spanish broke down the functioning indigenous political structure based on kinship and a division of labor with the intent of introducing their own rule of law. The sparsely populated jungle did not lend itself to central rule. Upon its collapse the shaman took on the role of the political ruler armed with the atrocity felt by his people.

The Political Power of the Shaman

After the colonial invasion, the shaman took on greater power due to their occult forms of resistance. Rather than eliminating shamanic practice, Spanish efforts solidified it as a means of resistance and social control. Frank Salomon (1983) found that during the colonial period shamans and their clientele formed factions capable of adjusting power

relations. Shamanism adapted quite well to colonial power. He says, “They counteracted and immobilized jural authorities by forming adverse, but not always overtly mutinous factions; or, they infiltrated and preempted colonial offices” (414). Shamanic power relations were not visible and, therefore were perceived as magical by colonial institutions. Colonial officials tried shamans in the same way as they tried witches back in Europe. Weak colonial governments could not tip the balance of power by removing individual shamans, such that “the net effect was to reinforce shamanism as a technique for acquiring office” (Salomon 1983: 414).

Salomon (1983) uses the trial data of four cases brought against individual shamans by the colonial authorities to exemplify the political power shamans wielded. The first is a case in which a curer was able to “execute in mystified form a collective aggression against the person perceived as a threatening killer” (Salomon 1983: 417). The court log does not explicitly say so but it leaves open the possibility that the curer planted disease bundles to frame the alleged sorcerer.

The second case concerned the present indigenous ruling mechanism versus an incoming immigrant rancher population. Shamanic power formed a mode of resistance to incoming highland power. In the third case, a shaman named Sebastian Carlos “involved himself directly in colonial institutions and used them for unsanctioned ends” (Salomon 1983: 420). Colonial powers considered Indian groups to be leaderless, thus producing confusion when leaders did emerge. The indigenous groups’ failure to submit to colonial governance contributed to their magical character. The fourth example depicts the success indigenous groups had in maintaining power at the peripheries of the colonial

empire. Solomon (1983) explains, “The shaman stands in opposition to the statesman as an exponent of a contrary kind of power” (422). Shamanic power arises out of a situation that colonial power is not equipped to rectify. The periphery was a place inhabited mainly by indigenous and mestizos, groups that a shaman with slight familiarity with Spanish culture would be apt to lead.

Europeans did not equate witchcraft with political power. Their perceptions were based on European practitioners, thereby overlooking the possibility. South American shamans differentiate themselves from the rest of the population by their overt display of *sami* (power). They are proud, potent, and influential; characteristics that lend themselves well to European conceptions of political leaders. Further, Europeans discredited magic as the power of the weak whereas on the intra-Indian plane it represented the powers of the strong.

The lack of governance in the peripheral areas led to the formation of an intra-indigenous shamanic political process. Its direct contradiction to reigning ideologies of political power gave the powerful shamans a sense of mystique, at once backward and primitive but powerful to those at the center of colonial power.

Shamans became powerful people. G. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975) noticed this power among the Tukano of southern Colombia. In Tukano society there is no chieftain, no council of elders, “no organized means whatsoever for solving conflicts for settling discords arising from the social order, the rules of exogamy and reciprocity, or the personal animosity between individuals” (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975: 103). Shamanic healing addresses illness on the social level. Hallucinatory states provide communication

with ambivalent spirits who are specialized versions of living beings. Drugs are the key to the sphere of knowledge. Illness is caused by the ill will of people or spirit helpers. To cure illness the *paye* (shaman) must inquire into the patient's social relationships, diagnose the dysfunctional ones, and reestablish workable relationships. He is a spokesman and intermediary, not a mystic, but a "practical specialist in communications" (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975: 104).

In Siona culture, the leader of a community is the most powerful shaman (Langdon 1985, 133). In the years following colonization, the *cabildo* was maintained but the shaman took precedence. Communities of several families align with master shamans. Their authority contains a religious role and a political role. As a religious leader they lead communal rituals with *yajé*, contact spirits for good hunting and affect weather for farming (Langdon 1985: 133). Their power in the metaphysical realm legitimizes their power in the physical realm. As a result they are responsible for organizing communal work activities, initiating festive gatherings, coordinating marriage agreements, redistributing food, and punishing and reprimanding socially disruptive behavior (Langdon 1985: 133). Sorcery functions as a form of social control.

That is not to say that the political role of the shaman goes unchallenged. Rather, according to Michael Fobes Brown (1988) they exert only provisional, contested control over their patients' understanding (103). Their power is granted grudgingly by the population. Brown bases his findings on a textual analysis of the "rhetoric and counter rhetoric of an Aguaruna healing session. The Aguaruna occupy the Alto Mayo Protection Forest of northern Peru. He finds the healing session to be a "highly charged event

involving elements of struggle, uncertainty, ambivalence and partial revelation;” an *agonism* in the words of Michel Foucault (Brown 1988: 103); a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides.

It is dangerous to be an *iwishín* (shaman); a profession characterized by regular use of hallucinogens and vulnerability to attack by other sorcerers. Their reputation stretches only as far as their allies, at any moment to be accused of sorcery themselves. Suspicion usually includes declining to treat people, a reluctance to heal, or too many patients who die. A shaman must continually demonstrate his healing power through commitment and willingness to heal, the intensity during sessions and recovery of patients (Brown 1988: 114).

The Aguaruna healing session is not a unidirectional display of power from shaman to patient. Rather the session provides a theatre for the expression of the patient’s strength and dissidence to sorcerers. In one instance, Katan, the husband of a patient, threatens the shaman should his cure not work. But by calling on the shaman the patient validates the very system of shamanic power that threatens the patient in the first place. The healing session is a “constant renegotiation of autonomy and dependence” between patient and healer (Brown 1988: 115).

The rhetoric of the shaman is a manipulation of reasoning based on public opinion. He must persuade of his ability to heal and his good intentions, while the patient’s family responds with “oblique counter-rhetoric” (Brown 1988: 116). They represent the power of the community over sinister schemes of sorcerers.

Whereas Levi-Strauss (1963) sees shamanic ritual as the ordering of the chaos of illness (197), Brown grants it the ability to achieve provisional order at best. The shaman offers understanding of physical discomfort but raises and leaves unresolved and alarming questions. The shamanic performance is incomplete and subject to public scrutiny. His knowledge is contested. Shamanism is more than cosmological principles and spiritual ideology. Brown (1988) considers it a form of social control with opposition and discontent.

Mediation of Change

Despite massive changes to the cultural practices and beliefs of indigenous peoples of the Amazon, shamanism and the use of ayahuasca enabled groups to mediate incoming cultural forms and actively reconstruct their worldviews. Multiple authors refer to the cultural importance of the shaman. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975) considers the Tukano shaman a mediator between worlds: social and animal, supernatural and natural, sickness and wellness. Whitten (1985; 2008) considers the Canelos Quichua shaman to be a paradigm builder, continuously reproducing cultural knowledge. In both cases, the shaman communicates between two different worlds. In the Tukano world they are the only members of society who have the ability to communicate with the master of game animals upon whom success in hunting and fishing depends.

Whitten (2008) claims the shaman to have the power of syncretism. He is the one who communicates between cultures and translates and adopts new knowledge from other cultures. He is the one responsible for keeping the appropriate distance between

cultures and maintaining boundaries. He must maintain the native paradigm while expanding it with knowledge from other sources.

Ramirez de Jara and Castaño (1992) argue that it is the shamanic structure of mediating opposites that has allowed the Sibundoy culture to survive.

“Sibundoy strategy for cultural survival consists of integrating foreign elements without denying their own beliefs by establishing mediations that match native thought structure, which is based on a movement of complementary opposites. This integration yields a great cultural plasticity, whose fundamental principle achieves a dynamic equilibrium in those institutions, such as shamanism, on which their cosmic vision is based. It is the shaman who mediates the diverse contradictions experienced by the Indians” (Ramirez de Jara & Castaño 1992: 287).

The role of the shaman is the mediator between worlds, supernatural and natural. With the arrival of the Spanish, the shaman became even more powerful by serving as a mediator between their world and his. Not only does he mediate between the supernatural and natural worlds, he mediates between the modern and ancient worlds, thus increasing his realm of power.

The Sibundoy valley in southwest Colombia experienced an intense Catholic missionary campaign from 1547 until 1975, marked by the arrival of the first *doctrineros* (doctrinaires), and the exit of the Capuchin monks (McDowell 1989: 188). The Sibundoy natives were successfully converted only on the surface level, but they maintained “aboriginal patterns.” They do not realize the holy trinity, they continue to practice reciprocity, they believe that God punishes and rewards in this life, not the afterlife and they continue to mystify the saints, whose statues are seen as actual physical embodiments of spirits (Marzal 1985, in McDowell 1989: 189).

The result is the formation of an Andean folk religion. The Sibundoy natives practice a catholic religious life, while maintaining a pan-Andean cosmology. In some instances these two are complementary to each other, and other times contradictory. Not all elements of their pan-Andean religion remain, nor have all elements of Catholicism been adopted. What occurred was the “infusion of catholic beliefs, but in forms adapted to Andean religious sensitivity” (McDowell 1989: 193). One particular element that has not been eliminated is the practice of shamanic healers. This is due, in part, to the Indians’ fetishization of nature and the colonist’s association of nature to evil. The jungle was associated with the chaos that the Christians associated with the devil. The shamanistic mastery of nature became a mastery over evil. Sorcery became a vehicle for resistance.

The ayahuasca ritual has allowed the survival of indigenous culture in its ability to mediate between the sacred and the profane (Durkheim 1912). It is a tool for experiencing the mythic tales and beliefs of indigenous cosmology in contrast to the Christian religions that preach of miracles, saints, and prophecy that its followers never experience. These stories are bound in a book and blind faith is requested to believe in them. Ayahuasca provides a vehicle for experiencing the spiritual. Under the influence of ayahuasca, the shaman is able to “travel wherever he wants, to meet and dominate those supernatural forces spoken of by the missionaries” (Ramirez de Jara & Castaño 1992: 294). A shaman explains his trip to heaven, aided by the ingestion of *cielohuasca*, “Heaven Yagé.”

“I’ve flown up to heaven where there are benches, just like those we have here. There were a lot of remedies, as well as a man standing in the entrance, who might

have been a saint. He came out while I was looking at him and asked, "Why have you come here?" I told him, "Well, I've come here to visit, that's all." He replied, "It isn't time for you to come here. It seems to me that you know many remedies. There are many here and you can choose what you want. Come." He showed me the whole garden divided into big and small sections where there were all kinds of remedies. He collected some and gave them to me to bring and plant here on earth. In heaven our Lord sits as if enclosed in a cupboard surrounded by genuine crystal (Ramirez de Jara & Castaño 1992: 294).

Not only does ayahuasca allow for the experiencing of indigenous cosmology, it is constantly shaping it and reshaping it. The cosmology is not a static one. It is based on the visions of the shamans under the influence of ayahuasca. It is a constant dialectic of mediation between opposing forces. Shamanism's primary purpose is to mediate different realities. The opposing ideology of the Spanish and the Indians is an example. Langdon (1979) gives such an example of Siona ritual, "The Siona worldview derives much of its authority from the renewal and reaffirmation given to it by the ritual. Without the authoritative experience of the ritual, the system as an ordered whole will not persist in the face of increasing contact with Western culture" (Ramirez de Jara & Castaño 1992: 296). With the use of ayahuasca, shamans have, therefore, been able to mediate all the multiple influences impacting their lives.

The Decline of the Shaman

Although Shamanism might have served as a filter for information during the colonial era, allowing indigenous culture to maintain a certain level of autonomy, state power and capitalism created change at a much more alarming rate. Indigenous populations depended more and more on whites for survival. Their lands decreased in

size, making subsistence activity impossible. As a consequence state representatives replaced shamans as leaders of indigenous groups.

Among the Siona the practice of shamanism is incompatible with white contact (Langdon 1985, 146). The outside world drains their *dau* (shamanic power). Dependent on the whites for survival, they cannot maintain seclusion. The following is a case of the Siona of Putumayo, Colombia as observed by Langdon (1985). As a result of Spanish conquest the shaman became the sole leader of Amazonian indigenous groups. The long training and isolation it requires to become a shaman could not withstand rapid changes. State power had usurped indigenous autonomy. In Colombia, the government elects indigenous leaders. These leaders tend to be younger, more acculturated individuals who identify more with white values and norms. They must be able to read and write. They do not identify with the typical power base that elder shamans did. A similar generational fission is explained by Brysk (1996).

It is inherently difficult for culturally distinct communities to designate leaders who are both representative of the group's values and effective in the wider political arena. This creates cleavages within indigenous groups (which often coincide with generational splits) between traditionally designated and internationally recognized authorities (51-52).

“How can the Indians be both ‘authentic’ and ‘state managers’?” asks Alcida Rita Ramos (2002: 264). She is referring to the indigenous groups of Colombia that were finally given rights as citizens after the 1991 rewriting of the constitution. Ironically, the acquisition of newfound rights brought newfound responsibility. “Whereas indigenous affairs were previously part of the state’s responsibilities...the state almost entirely delegates those responsibilities to the Indians themselves” (Ramos 2002: 264). The result

is a decline in indigenous resistance to “structural problems inherent in the relation between ethnic minorities and the nation-state not contemplated in the new constitution, such as indigenous autonomy to manage natural resources in their territories... These new Indian officials can find themselves drowned in things non-Indian” (Ramos 2002: 262-68). Essentially the Colombian state has outsourced their responsibility as a state to look after its citizens and placed this responsibility onto the citizens themselves.

As Brysk (1996) and Nash (2001) have found in Colombia and Mexico respectively, the inclusion of indigenous voices into the state political discourse has created a fission between the younger and older generations. Like the situation in Chiapas, Mexico; it is the Colombian Indigenous youth that speak Spanish and are most apt to be representatives of government, undermining the power of the older traditional leaders. The state law is imposed on the indigenous population as they are required to participate in it for their autonomy. It is a great advance for indigenous populations to be recognized as citizens of the state and thus receive the same rights as everyone else, but the manner in which they are included by mandatory participation in state governance is inherently contradictory to their desire for autonomy and maintenance of a distinct internal structure and decision making process.

During the colonial period the Siona maintained economic and political autonomy. Now many aspects of the shaman’s authority are handled by external forces such as priests, police and government office. The Indians are subordinate people in the state. Economic development is the policy of their territory. They are dependent on the state for survival. Without land they cannot maintain subsistence. They make their money

from cash crops and wage-labor and are relatively unable to influence state power structures.

Whitten (2008) notes how the size of the township affects the influence a shaman has. A strong shaman node exists in the *llacta* (village), but disappears as the population grows into a *caserio* (town). As the shaman comes into contact with the modern world he must decide which information to include into the indigenous cultural system. Many cultures are faced with the same decisions. Modernity has benefits but these have to be incorporated in a way that does not undermine the indigenous worldview. Here are some examples of the melding of tradition.

Brown (1988) finds elements of western medicine in the Aguaruna healing session. The shaman, in Brown's textual analysis of a healing session, uses "mestizo medicine" as an exterior source of power, more powerful than the local. It is free from constraint of local political life, making it uncontestable. Joaquin, a shaman in the Darién of Panama, defines himself in relation to the ever more present presence of western medicine. In an area that has remained relatively isolated for the last hundreds of years, the shamans that Stephanie Kane (2008) has observed serve to mediate and explain the change that has been brought on by global capitalism.

Joaquin's framework of healing divides sickness into two domains: one of "natural illness" that has no spiritual component, and "*brujería*" (witchcraft) that is caused by devils (Kane 2008: 114). Kane explains, "Thus he lays out a cooperative rather than competitive model of Emberá and Euramerican medicine based on the idea that there are two different but necessary kinds of practice corresponding to two kinds of

disease, a division of labor of sorts” (Kane 2008: 114). Joaquin gives himself a position of superiority by attributing himself the true power to diagnose. He is the one with the ability to decide whether a certain illness is of natural or spiritual causes, making a place for himself in modern medicine.

This is the fate of many indigenous shamans nowadays. They no longer maintain cultural autonomy and must adopt the traditions of the dominant culture. Like Juan the Jivaro from Magdalena said, “There aren’t any natural indigenous anymore.” All indigenous cultures have adopted elements of western belief and practice. If an indigenous group adopts too many practices of the western world they cease to be categorized as indigenous and become mestizos.

Mestizo Shamanism

As a consequence of the encroaching commodity market and capitalist land use, the level and intensity of shamanic practices within indigenous groups declined. As political leaders they were replaced by state representatives. The level of master shaman became obsolete due to reliance on capitalist modes of subsistence. Despite these changes, healing with the use of ayahuasca or yajé found a new home within the urban populations of the Amazon.

Mestizos are Spanish speaking people with Indian surnames who wear European clothing and live by hunting, fishing, and slash and burn agriculture. They do not sleep in

a *maloca*, or large communal house in the jungle, but, rather, in a smaller, open, thatched single-family house on stilts by the river's edge (Beyer 2009: 294). They are also classified as *ribereños*, or river dwellers. The religious beliefs of the *ribereños* are a mix between folk Catholicism, ayahuasca shamanism, and a belief in spirits that inhabit the jungle (Beyer 2009: 296).

The mestizo stands between the Indians and the whites, and between civilization and the jungle. The city is the home of knowledgeable whites, the commercial and cultural center: the source of manufactured goods. The jungle is the home of the Indians, uncivilized, but skilled in magic and jungle lore. The river, the home of the Iquitos mestizo, connects these two spaces as the mestizo mediates them. They gain their knowledge in the jungle but use it in the city.

Beyer (2009) traces the advent of mestizo shamanism back to the Amazonian rubber boom. Mestizos were drawn into rubber tapping by the promise of quick profits only to become hooked into debt peonage. Isolated in the jungle, they turned to indigenous healers when they became sick, sometimes becoming apprentices and bringing their knowledge home.

Marlene Dobkin de Rios (1972) researched Amazonian manifestations of shamanism within the urban slums of Iquitos, Peru. Modern Indians, or *cholos*, inhabit floating slums on the river's edge. They trace their roots back to the Amazon but find themselves making a living by selling jungle produce or fishing. Most consider themselves Roman Catholic but the mystical beliefs of the jungle have not left them totally. Inadequate access to healthcare and the lack of psychological help leads the

inhabitants of Belen to turn to shamans for cures. The destitute poor find the shamans more effective than the indifferent upper class medical personnel. The psychological assurance and warm manner of shamans contrasts enormously from the disdainful disinterest of medical doctors. The shamans use an array of plants, store bought medicines, and vegetables to cure.

The cholos of Belen conceptualize illness the same way the Emberá of the Darién do. Colds, sore throats, or skin infections are treated with store bought medications. Formal medical consultation is too expensive and the city hospital is a place to die, so residents go to *sanitarios* (clinics) where poorly trained medical personas administer cures from purchased books (de Rios 1972: 78). If symptoms do not clear up, the afflicted considers bewitchment as the cause of their illness. A curse is characterized by a sudden onset of pain, and usually in a particular part of the body. The sources of spiritual illness are either envious neighbors or jungle spirits like *yacu mama*, the mother spirit of the river (de Rios 1972: 78). But most causes of illness are attributed to evil by another person, examples are *susto* (fright) and *daño* (harm). *Susto* causes the soul of the person to become separated from body (de Rios 1972: 83). *Daño* is caused by the envy or vengeance of another. Any good luck in life can bring forth anger from others (de Rios 1972: 85).

Dr. Oscar Rios, a Peruvian psychiatrist, says that 85% of the patients he treats have psychosomatic illnesses (de Rios 1972: 91). Psychological studies by Kiev (1968), and Plog (1969), show that native healers are most effective with psychosomatic illness (de Rios 1972: 91). They are predisposed to attribute emotional or cultural causes to

illness. They remove agency and responsibility from a decision by a sick person and cast it upon the heavens. Finally, they have the ability to come to a social understanding for the cause of strife.

As in the jungle, not all shamans who use ayahuasca in Belen use it to cure. There are *brujos* (witches) who use it to harm and who are sought out by men and women motivated by envy, vengeance, or hatred. Sometimes these people have been bewitched themselves and turn to a brujo to put a spell on the perpetrator of their curse. Most will not admit to being a *brujo* but all shamans have to learn to kill as well as heal during initiation. (de Rios 1972: 93-95)

Healing with ayahuasca among the mestizos of Belen follows similar procedures as at the tribal level. The screening of patients is important and they have most success with curing psychological issues. The healers practice *icaros* – whistling, singing, praying and reciting orations. These actions are preventative. They keep away evil and envy. The shaman then blows *mapacho* (cigarette smoke) and sucks at afflicted regions of the body to extract thistles. Finally, herbs and remedies are prescribed after diagnosis takes place. (de Rios 1972: 130)

De Rios (1972) considers shamanism in Belen to be primarily functional. Shamans ameliorate and relieve daily pressures, results which differ from other situations where healers are constantly working to protect sick patients from others. Healing with ayahuasca is a means to an end. It provides entry into the culturally important area of disease causality. Not quite psychotherapy, which involves personal adjustment, it is focused on the relief of present and immediate problems (de Rios 1972: 139).

Stephen Beyer's book Singing to the Plants: a Guide to Mestizo Shamanism in the Upper Amazon (2009) focuses on mestizo shamanism in the Iquitos area. He considers mestizo shamanism a mix of indigenous shamanism of the Upper Amazon, folk Catholicism, popular plant lore, traditional Hispanic medical theories and diagnoses, and the images and symbols of European biomedicine (Beyer 2009: 281).

Although mestizo shamans might find their inspiration from the indigenous world, their practices are blended with elements of their own culture. Their form of healing has strong influences from their Hispanic heritage. Mestizo healing incorporates the vomiting and purgation characteristic of indigenous ayahuasca ceremonies but adds the use of *limpias* (cleansing baths) and sweat baths. The method of plant recognition used by Iquitos mestizo healers is borrowed from the European 'Doctrine of Signatures,' where the plant's appearance correlates with its use (Beyer 2009: 325).

The mestizo system of shamanism practiced by Beyer's (2009) two main informants, Don Roberto and Doña Maria, contains the same 'cultural syndromes' found in the mestizo culture at large. These are sicknesses found strictly in the Latin American community. These include *susto*, *empacho*, *mal aire*, soul loss and evil eye (Beyer 2009: 326). These are the same illness documented by de Rios (1972). The mestizo shamans are from the mestizo culture. They treat the illnesses that are part of their culture. The European influence of humeral medicine is no exception. Mestizo shamans prescribe plants deemed to have cold properties to conditions deemed to be hot and warm plants for cold conditions (Beyer 329). Catholic influence is also evident in the healing practices of mestizo healers. Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary are evoked as powerful healing and

protecting spirits. Healers also use prayer books and spell books to remove evil and ensure safety.

The shamans discussed in Beyer's book are river dwellers living on the brink between modernity and antiquity. Their shamanic practice, characterized by *icaros* (shaman songs), special diet, magical darts and ayahuasca use, comes from the Amazonian tradition, but the mestizo beliefs are characterized by folk Catholicism. Their practice must fit their patient's needs. Living on the edge of the city, the aspects of modernity are right in their back yard. Increasingly, aspects of bio-medicine work their way into the shamanic discourse. Spirits wear surgical scrubs, shamans fly jets to attack other sorcerers, and Doña Maria and Don Roberto are visited by Martians who speak computer language (Beyer 2009: 339).

Mestizo shamanism was learned from the Indians. Post-colonial shamanism (the only shamanism we know) is the product of massive change as a result of Spanish rule (Taussig 1987; Langdon 1985; Salomon 1983; Harner 1972). The mestizo is the mediator between the whites and the Indians just as the shaman during the colonial period was the mediator between the Indians and the Spanish. Shamanism has changed massively through time, incorporating new customs. Indigenous cosmology has always been dynamic, reproducing itself through the means of ritual. Ayahuasca use has remained constant, if not increased, in the face of ongoing and dramatic change. Now, as more tourists venture into the jungle in search of ayahuasca, shamans are the mediators between the Third World and the First World.

CHAPTER 4: Motivations for Non-Native Ayahuasca Use

The Context

While some authors challenge the authenticity of non-native ayahuasca use based on the participants' lack of understanding of the "traditional" forms and the differences in practice between the tribal and the modern, others have situated the practice within the modern condition and can accept it as a new and distinct cultural form. It is decontextualized from the indigenous world view, but this does not signify that non-native ayahuasca use does not have a context. The following section will explain the context in which non-native ayahuasca use is found.

Modernity has given rise to quick, easy travel and exchange of information. Tourists from Europe and North America have access to anthropological and popular texts concerning Amazonian shamanism. De Rios & Rumrill (2008) describe the post-modern period from which these tourists come. It is an era where people no longer produce their own food, family has relatively little importance and there is no community tradition or shared meaning. People feel emptiness, and it needs to be filled with something.

Are non-native ayahuasca seekers simply tourists in search of thrill or the sick in search of alternative healing? Berg (2003) describes the tourist as "an individual in search of authenticity and the exotic" (de Rios & Rumrill 2008: 77). He flees the unpleasant

aspects of modernity in search of the authentic and real. The tourist does not find authenticity but pseudo authenticity geared to his or her expectations. More important is the enjoyment of the experience and its difference from the tourist's everyday life.

Tourists travel to a part of the world where, it seems to them, modernity hasn't changed things as much, searching for reality, a meaning to life. Whereas the natives use ayahuasca for divination and healing, urban tourists seek self-actualization and growth (de Rios & Rumrill 2008: 70-74). They believe that spirituality lies within the individual, that within oneself there lies one's authentic nature underneath all that society has conditioned.

These tourists are mostly white, urban, relatively wealthy, well-educated and spiritually eclectic outsiders (Beyer 2009: 353). Their beliefs fit into a category called New Age spirituality. They believe themselves to stand alone in the world, not as a part of society. They rely on an inner source of authority and seek the discovery of the self. From ayahuasca they wish to gain creativity and personal growth. Hallucinogens are a quick way of accessing the realm of the inner self.

The gringo tourists "apply a great deal of pressure on mestizo shamans to produce ceremonies and interact with clients in ways consistent with their own expectations" (Beyer 2009: 347). Most are very unfamiliar with indigenous culture and the belief system from which the ritual originates. Their concern lies mostly in fulfilling their own personal spiritual quest. In fact, the experience occurs outside the context of any long-term involvement with the indigenous community, usually without any involvement at all (Beyer 2009: 353).

One can find brochures promising personal cleansing and transformation, a deep connection to nature and personal growth. Beyer (2009) compares the marketing of ayahuasca tourism to the marketing of “Amazonian household goods at Macy’s...as decontextualized as an indigenous basket on a suburban wall” (352). In fact, Ayahuasca Shamanism is becoming a booming business. Shamans have agents abroad who earn thousands of dollars a week. Tourists pay up to around \$1000-1500 a week to take part in a week-long spiritual excursion.

Beyer (2009) states, “These concepts downplay the importance of traditional shamanic interventions, such as sucking and blowing tobacco smoke” (354). The tourists view ayahuasca as autonomously healing, as proving insight and authentic realization. They have concern for personal transformation over cultural understanding. De Rios & Rumrill (2008) consider it an evil and exploitive enterprise” (70). They compare the new healers to drug dealers, who lack experience, appropriate personality, and training to accurately diagnose illness. They state, “Drug tourism causes harm to participants, it also changes and effectively destroys traditional urban and rural hallucinogenic healing that has roots in the historical past” (de Rios & Rumrill 2008: 71).

Whereas de Rios & Rumrill (2008) consider the culture of the natives to be in danger because of non-native ayahuasca use, Pinchbeck (2003) believes that ayahuasca tourism can help preserve indigenous tradition. He finds it important that after years of colonial rule, abuse by western governments, and corporate greed, there are groups of rich westerners that value indigenous knowledge and history. He observed, “with the exception of a few elders, the tribe (Secoya) has stopped following shamanism over the

past thirty years” (Pinchbeck 2003: 160). Even the son of one of these elders became an evangelist, converted by the missionaries. What de Rios & Rumrill (2008) leave out of their analysis is that decline in shamanic practice began long before ayahuasca tourism started. Langdon (1985) observed a decline in Siona shamanism due to increasing pressure from market forces on Siona land. Siona shamanic tradition requires long periods of seclusion to become apprenticed. Dependent on the whites for survival they cannot maintain seclusion. Among the Siona the practice of shamanism is incompatible with white contact (Langdon 1985: 146).

Beyer (2009) acknowledges that tourist dollars allow the shamans to support themselves. He nevertheless questions whether they simply allow for a privileged few to abandon their communities for a more affluent way of life. The shaman who has trained for years has to compete with the tour guide who can make ayahuasca and learned enough *icaros* (shaman songs) to get through a ceremony.

But not all those that treat tourists are charlatans. Don Roberto, one of Stephen Beyer’s informants, treats tourists as well as mestizos. “He extends existing techniques to embrace new problems,” says Beyer (2009, 348). Don Roberto says most gringos come with mental problems or for spiritual reasons. Donald Joralemon (1990) wrote an article about his trusted shamanic informant, Eduardo Calderon, participating in New Age shamanic ritual. Joralemon (1990) expressed embarrassment and betrayal after seeing a trusted informant engaged in such ludicrous proceedings. He began to question the practice of Peruvian *Curanderismo* (urban shamanism).

His initial reaction was strong. Why did it produce such repulsion in him? Peruvian Curanderismo is practiced by urban shamans, using a wide range of folk Catholic beliefs. De Rios' (1972) mestizo informants were practicing a similar mix of indigenous beliefs and folk Catholicism. Why such a strong reaction to a shaman who heals tourists? Even after beginning to see tourists, Calderon continues to see Peruvian patients and treats them as he always has, based on the Peruvian "idiom of distress" (Joralemon 1990: 110). In one single ritual, Joralemon (1990) observed Calderon curing in both New Age and Peruvian philosophies. Calderon explained the service shamans give to their patients. They give "guidelines to the patient in regard to his problems, always in accord with his beliefs, particularly his religion, whatever it may be" (Joralemon 1990: 113). His new age rituals are correlated to the "cultural community in which they are employed" (Joralemon 1990: 114).

Used mainly for its healing properties, according to Soul Vine, ayahuasca "allows people to see deep into their souls, as well as the Universe/God, in order to realign them with their Highest Self, purging out any negative blockers that are in the way." Through the purgative process it is described to promote self-healing within the body, aligning chakras and auras. The third eye opens, allowing visionary insight, which can improve psychic abilities.

Chakras, auras, enlightenment, insight and psychic ability are not part of the shamanic complex described by Whitten (1985), Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975), Langdon (1985), and Harner (1972). The participants are not indigenous of the area and do not participate in the tribal life. The shamanic complex found at Soul Vine falls under what

de Rios (2008) calls “commercial shamanism” where “foreigners are given a powerful plant psychedelic for \$1000-\$1500 per week during a visit” (71).

Paul Johnson (2003) makes a comparison between tribal shamanism and what he calls Neo-Shamanism, as practiced by Michael Harner at his “Foundation for Shamanic Studies.” He defines Neo-Shamanism as the “Unilineal appropriation (from them to us) which is structured by modern strategies...but which never the less does not preclude its potential to effect genuine healing” (Johnson 2003: 337). Whereas shamanism in the traditional context is embedded in the cultural memory of the people and psychoactive plants are a catalyst with the true world for resolution of issues in the social world, neo-shamanism is culturally non-contingent, can be used for the needs of the individual, and functions as a form of therapy (Johnson 2003: 345).

Neo-shamanism might not be part of the indigenous context but it is part of a context, namely “radical modernity.” Johnson (2003) explains radical modernity as “the explosion of a single coherent worldview into multiple fragments, none of which carries any necessity and all of which must be chosen from a situation of plurality” (348). In other words there is no necessity to neo-shamanism, or to any activity that people choose to do, except for the obvious biological necessities. Neo-shamanism exists in a time of fragmentation and diversity, “an extreme form of self-reflexivity, relativism and subjectivity” (Johnson 2003: 348). It has become a cultural manifestation of ours, but unlike tribal shamanism, it is not the pervasive belief system of the people. It is real to the individual but not socially binding.

Eleanor Ott's article Shamans and Ethics in a Global World (1995) conveys strong opinions about contemporary shamanism. She states that many do not belong to a culture or community embedded in shamanic perspective, rather they come from the "present generation of those trying to find themselves" (Ott 1995: 280). They are not equipped to cure illness, she explains. She states that traditional indigenous shamanism is a part of a cosmological tradition that gives meaning to illness and the curing process. The new shamans are not connected to a system of knowledge that gives their actions meaning. According to her, they learn from second or third hand sources. She closes her article stating, "Without a community that recognizes the new shamans as an integral part of the culture, what makes him a shaman?" (Ott 1995: 282)

What she seems to overlook is that the culture does not have to be grounded in the indigenous milieu. There is a culture surrounding contemporary shamanism although it might not be the dart blowing kind. Daniel Pinchbeck (2003) sees contemporary shamanism from a different point of view. He first explains what he sees as the modern condition. "Everything is designed for our comfort or entertainment but nothing satisfies" (Pinchbeck 2003: 138). He sees ayahuasca as an antidote to the modern condition. Like a white shaman said to him once, "White man medicine make you feel good first, bad later. Indian medicine make you feel bad first, good later" (Pinchbeck 2003: 139). Modern life minimizes discomfort, ayahuasca ceremonies are the opposite of this. They are hard and uncomfortable at first but produce a feeling of well-being afterwards.

De Rios & Rumrill (2008) explain that westerners suffer from a condition called the "empty self." Namely, individuals are soothed and filled up by consuming food,

consumer products and experiences. She places the consumption of ayahuasca in the same category. Pinchbeck (2003) agrees with our present condition but feels differently about the consumption of ayahuasca. He writes, “At our core, we remain insatiable, constantly on the prowl for new commodities and pleasant sensations to fill the void. ‘Life tastes good,’ proclaims an ad for coca-cola. Yajé, on the other hand, tastes extremely bad” (Pinchbeck 2003: 138). Whereas de Rios and Rumrill (2008) see ayahuasca as another commodity to satiate the masses, Pinchbeck(2003) considers ayahuasca to be the antithesis of the modern condition.

Motivations

Two qualitative experiments based on participant observation and interviews are examined. They attempt an objective investigation of the reasons non-natives take ayahuasca. Their responses are compared and conclusions are drawn that place non-native ayahuasca use as an alternative to the dominant western cultural syndrome.

Based on a series of interviews at an eleven day ayahuasca retreat, Winkelman (2005) concludes that, “While it may be easy to dismiss westerners who seek such experiences of ayahuasca as drug dilettantes, their own motivations for participation in these experiences and the personal outcome suggest very different orientations” (215). The participants in his study were Americans and Europeans ranging from 26-71 years of age. The retreat consisted of night long sessions with one or two days rest in between making up four ceremonies in all. Academic presentations on ayahuasca were given between ceremonies by the researcher.

Winkelman (2005) defines seven motivations that bring participants to take ayahuasca. They are spiritual relations, spiritual development, emotional healing, purpose and direction, drug abuse issues, scientific knowledge and hedonistic purposes. I found it useful to organize these motivations into four main categories: spirituality, healing, alienation and hedonism. Spiritual relations and development become one category. Emotional healing and drug abuse issues form the category “healing.” Purpose and direction are products of “alienation.” The fourth category is hedonism. The desire for scientific knowledge in this study was a product of the academic component of the retreat, and while it might be the reason a participant chose this exact retreat compared to another, it does not explain why someone would take hallucinogens. It does not generalize beyond the specific study in question. Therefore it is omitted from my analysis.

Winkelman (2005) gave examples of participants’ responses that led him to categorize them accordingly. For purposes of analysis I will provide these same responses but organized under the four categories that I created. The responses that fall under the ‘spirituality’ category are the following: “to become god, find something greater than myself, to connect with spirits, find out who I am, develop spirit mediumship, the power to see inside myself” (Winkelman 2005: 212). Responses that fit into the category ‘healing’ include desires to “stabilize the mind, calm fears, enhance intelligence, mental clarity and enlightenment, deal with unfinished stuff, deal with ayahuasca and learn to let go, deal with personal problems and obtain a wider mindset” (Winkelman 2005: 212). Responses that fit into the category ‘alienation’ include: “a

desire to connect with nature, a new direction in life, a big blast to overcome the blockages, and answers as to what to do” (Winkelman 2005: 212). Responses that fit into the category ‘hedonism’ include one participant who wanted to see visuals.

Schmid et al (2010) conducted a ten year biographically oriented project investigating ayahuasca use to heal specific diseases among Europeans. Participants were contacted every six months for interviews. Participants ingested ayahuasca in three main environments. Seven participants drank ayahuasca in Santo Daime rituals. (Santo Daime is a Christian based church that uses ayahuasca as its sacrament.) Seven participants took ayahuasca in neo-shamanic rituals while one participant took it at home. There were fifteen participants in all, their ages ranged from 27-61 with an average age of 44.5 years. Participants were part of all social classes from unskilled workers to academics.

Similar to Winkelman’s (2005) categorization of motivations for ayahuasca use, Schmid et al (2010) organizes participants into “types of users (194),” of which there are seven. The ‘event type’ has a loose connection to an ayahuasca network. They attend workshops or take an occasional trip to South America. The ‘therapy type’ is searching for an alternative cure for a specific medical disease. The ‘seeker type’ is searching for a philosophy, concepts of identity, or an affirmation of his or her reality. The ‘healer type’ believes they have the capacity to heal and use ayahuasca for such means. The ‘spiritual type’ is searching for a transpersonal or spiritual experience. The ‘substance abuser type’ consumes ayahuasca in a way that is very similar to use of other psychoactive drugs. Finally, the ‘alternative type’ has an ecological orientation, identifies with indigenous rights, and uses ayahuasca as a part of their ongoing identity formation.

Schmid et al (2010) describe seven types of ayahuasca users and Winkelman (2005) defines seven motivations for ayahuasca use. For purposes of analysis I reduced Winkelman’s (2005) seven motivations into four categories. The seven user types documented in the study by Schmid et al (2010) can also be placed into the same four categories which I will call the “principal motivators.”

Table 1: Principal Motivators

Principal Motivators	Winkelman (2005)	Schmid et al (2010)
Spirituality	spiritual relations spiritual development	Event type Spiritual type
Healing	drug abuse issues emotional healing	Therapy type Healer type
Alienation	purpose and direction	Seeker type Alternative type
Hedonism	hedonistic purposes	Substance abuser type

The category of “spirituality” incorporates Schmid’s event, and spiritual types. The category of “healing” incorporates therapy and healer types. The category of “alienation” incorporates the seeker and the alternative types. The category of “hedonism” incorporates the substance abuser type. The “event type” refers to frequency of use and not to motivation of use. It can therefore fit into any of the categories.

Conclusions

Westerners turn to ayahuasca for an opportunity to escape from their own cultural syndromes. It serves as a last resort or a drastic measure for desires that are not met

within the culture. Spiritually, ayahuasca is a way of transcending the ordinary western spiritual experience. Medically, it represents an alternative cure for illnesses not dealt with by western medicine. Directionally, participants turn to ayahuasca to make a decision that western society provides too many options for. Hedonistically, it represents the ultimate drug unsurpassed by any found in the civilized world.

In the case of ayahuasca use among westerners, participants frame ayahuasca in terms of their own culture. Biomedicine and psychology are the dominant pathological mechanisms for explaining illness. Ayahuasca fits into their present system of pathology as an alternative form of medicine to cure an illness defined within their own culture. Ayahuasca helps users reach deeper levels with their religion or outside their religion and into the New Age movement. Users ask ayahuasca for a life purpose, but not for one in the indigenous community but rather within their own community. Those who see ayahuasca as an alternative type of drug see it through the eyes of a westerner, and their experience stops there.

CHAPTER 5: Effects of Non-Native Ayahuasca Use

Liminality

Now that non-native ayahuasca use has been established as a culturally distinct practice from tribal shamanism, it demands investigation as a cultural phenomenon, I will proceed by investigating the course of the ayahuasca hallucination and its argued ability in providing alternative perspectives for the purposes of education and healing.

Walter Benjamin describes the process of intoxication among the 1920's surrealists. "In the world's structure, dream loosens individuality like a bad tooth. This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the domain of intoxication" (Pinchbeck 2003: 115). Altered states allowed the thinkers to escape (temporarily) the overwhelming intoxicating dream world of capitalism.

Antonin Artaud ventured to Mexico in 1936 to partake in Peyote rituals. He yearned to recover "that sense of the sacred which European consciousness has lost...the root of all our misfortune" (Pinchbeck 2003: 116). He expressed "I am not here and I never will be." He wrote, "Peyote revives throughout the nervous system the memory of certain supreme truths by means of which human consciousness does not lose but on the contrary regains its perception of the infinite" (Pinchbeck 2003: 119). Much like

ayahuasca users today this is an early example of Europeans who found release from European culture through use of hallucinogens.

Kenneth Tupper (2002) argues for the importance of entheogens as cognitive tools. Entheogen is a term used by scholars in place of psychedelic to refer to “substances used as a spiritual or sacramental tool” (Tupper 2002: 500). He compares aspects of shamanism to Garner’s (1993) theory of existential intelligence. Existential intelligence involves “having a heightened capacity to appreciate and attend to the cosmological enigmas that define the human condition” (503). Garner laid out eight criteria to identify types of intelligence, to which existential intelligence applies to six. Tupper (2002) uses these six criteria to show how the use of entheogens might develop existential intelligence.

Without going into too much detail about theories of intelligence, Tupper’s criteria include a “neural substrate to which the intelligence may correlate” (Tupper 2002: 504). DMT (N,N-Dimethyltryptamine) a component of Ayahuasca, has shown to activate the pineal gland. The second is “the existence of individuals of exceptional ability within the domain of that intelligence” (Tupper 2002: 504). He cites shamans as an example. The third is “an identifiable set of core operational abilities that manifest that intelligence” (Tupper 2002: 505), for which he offers the example of spontaneous mystical experiences of the 1960’s experiments with psychedelics. The fourth is “identifying a developmental history and a set of expert “end-state” performances for it” (Tupper 2002: 505), which he considers analogous to the demanding process of imparting shamanic wisdom. The fifth is an evolutionary plausibility of an intelligence for which he cites

McKenna, who postulates that the “ingestion of psychoactive substances...may have helped stimulate cognitive developments such as existential and linguistic thinking in our proto-human ancestors” (Tupper 2002: 506). The final criterion is “susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system” (Tupper 2002: 506). As an example of this, Tupper (2002) cites the symbolism of the Tukano Indians based on ayahuasca visions.

While these analogies have similarities to Garner’s theory of existential intelligence they seem to miss the important question, whether psychoactive substances have the ability to help individuals in developing other aspects of their selves. The fact that psychoactive substances will heighten one’s ability to attend to cosmological enigmas seems rather obvious. Nonetheless, Tupper emphasizes entheogens as tools. He cites the novelist Aldous Huxley expressing his belief that psychoactive substances have educational value.

In such a system of education it may be that mescaline or some other chemical substance may play a part by making it possible for young people to “taste and see” what they have learned about at second hand...in the writings of the religious, or the works of poets, painters and musicians (Tupper 2002: 509).

In Huxley’s novel Island a psychoactive substance gives youth experiences that produced profound reflection and self-actualization. Tupper (2002) emphasizes that entheogens are tools in the same way that Vygotsky (1978) views a tool as a “symbolic and or cultural mediation between the mind and the world” (Tupper 2002: 509). Tools can be helpful or harmful just like a knife. According to Vygotsky (1978), the use of a tool requires three safeguards: respect for the tool, a cultural system surrounding its use, and people to teach how it is used. When dealing with mind altering substances, Zinberg (1984) reminds us that they require similiar safeguards like setting, dosages, and mythocultural respect.

Victor Turner (1967) explored *rites de passage* among the Ndembu. During the circumcision ritual initiates experience a period of “liminality” between their previous state of boyhood and the newly endowed state of manhood. He describes the benefits of this liminal state, “During the liminal period, neophytes are alternatively forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them” (Turner 1967: 105). It provides them a moment of reflection, similar to the way that intoxication provided surrealists an escape from capitalist thought, according to Benjamin, and how peyote was an escape from European thought, according to Artuad, and how psychoactive substances have educational value, according to Huxley.

Neo-shamanic ritual and indigenous rites of passage are not the same thing. Neo-shamanic ritual does not contain the communication of esoteric knowledge and use of cultural symbols in the way that indigenous ritual does. Non-native ayahuasca users are not relieved from a previous state to be introduced into a culturally prescribed role. Although, Turner (1967) does not limit his definition of rites of passage to small scale societies; he states that rites of passage are, “not confined to culturally defined life-crises” (95). His definition encompasses “any change from one state to another” (Turner 1967: 95). States can be periods of war or agricultural abundance. Similarly, rites of passage, according to Turner (1967), can include membership to groups that do not include the whole society. Whereas rites of passage are most richly performed within small scale societies, they are not confined to them. Initiation into a college fraternity is an example of a rite of passage in our society.

After their time abroad non-native ayahuasca users are not reintroduced by the society or even a group of the society into a new culturally prescribed role, but they do experience two of Van Gennep's three "rites of transition" (Turner 1967: 94), namely separation and limen. The three are separation, margin (limen), and aggregation. By leaving their country and going to a secluded all inclusive lodge, non-native ayahuasca users separate themselves from society and the obligations that they have within their society. Furthermore just like Ndembu neophytes, they are "secluded, partially or completely from the realm of culturally defined and ordered states and statuses" (Turner 1967: 98). They are secluded from their own culture by sheer distance, and from the Peruvian culture through dietary restrictions that keep them within the confines of the lodge.

The liminal period is characterized by Turner (1967) as a "realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner 1967: 94). State is defined as a "relatively fixed or stable condition" (Turner 1967: 93). This includes "legal status, profession, office or calling, rank or degree" as well as a "physical, mental or emotional condition in which a person or group may be found at a particular time" (Turner 1967: 93). Therefore, if a person finds themselves in a emotionally traumatic state and for a period of time is able to leave that state, has few or none of the attributes of the traumatic state, and following this period of time they enter a new state of emotional health, of which during the previous period of time they had none of the attributes of, this person would have passed through a period of liminality. This is also true, according to Turner (1967), for a period of unemployment or vacation being that "profession" is a state and

while on vacation or unemployment they are in a state different from their previous state defined by their profession. Therefore, according to the definition by Turner (1967) non-native ayahuasca users are in a state of liminality simply by being away from home and suspending their professions and lifestyles.

I would like to argue that on the basis of the same assumptions, the ayahuasca intoxication is also a liminal period. Turner (1967) wrote that a state can be a physical or mental condition. A liminal period is a period between states, therefore the ayahuasca user enters a liminal period upon taking ayahuasca because their physical and mental condition under the influences of ayahuasca has “few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (Turner 1967: 94). The ayahuasca intoxication is a liminal period. The person is different before, during and after the intoxication. Turner (1967) describes the liminal period as one marked by reflection, as is the ayahuasca experience. It is a time where the user is taken away from life, in the mundane sense, and is able to see things from a very different perspective.

Sara Lewis (2008) investigates a phenomenon she calls the “spiritual emergency.” This happens when, “the process of growth and change becomes chaotic and overwhelming” (112). The person’s sense of identity breaks down; their old values no longer hold true, the ground beneath their personal realities is radically shifted. They are left with fear, confusion, and tremendous anxiety. They have difficulty coping with their daily lives, jobs, and relationships. She explains, “western ayahuasca users have little cultural support and guidance within which to contextualize their powerful experiences” (Lewis 2008: 110). Informants in this case feared they had become mentally ill as a result

of the distress they failed to understand, whereas indigenous apprentices have a cultural support system built around these experiences. Van Gennep's third phase of rites of transition is aggregation (Turner 1967, 94). Non-native ayahuasca users are not reaggregated back into society with a newly prescribed role.

Traumatizing experiences are not always negative in nature. Profound positive experiences can be traumatizing as well. An experience can be so profound that "one is unable to cope and might develop distressing psychological symptoms as a result" (Lewis 2008, 112). The author compares these experiences to the "liminal phase" as described by Victor Turner in *The Forest of Symbols*. Victor Turner is describing rites of passage whereas one passes through three phases, separation, liminality, and reaggregation. The liminal phase occurs when one is neither who he was nor does he have a new place in the social sphere.

This state of liminality is marked by vulnerability. Turner (1967) explains that the person is stripped of his or her "familiar structural position, and consequently from the values, norms and sentiments, and techniques associated with these positions. They are also divested of their previous habits of thought, feeling and action" (Lewis 2008: 118). The author gives examples of subjects' experiences that are so powerful as to literally shake the foundation of their own view of reality. Here is one such example:

Things I thought were impossible were suddenly possible, only I didn't know what to make of it all. It was as if I was suddenly infused with a power I just didn't have before. I took certain norms for granted, you know, like everyone else. Cultural norms, I guess, and things proven by science. I suddenly had all these new ideas and feelings about the universe, and about myself. These ideas just became available, like I had access to a body of knowledge that I didn't have access to before. It was hard to take it in and know what to do with it. I literally felt like my mind had been blown, this knowledge was so immense. Even while dreaming I felt

I was constantly analyzing and coming to understand things about the universe, in fact, my consciousness while dreaming seemed more analogous to what it feels like drinking ayahuasca, than “normal” dreams (Lewis 2008: 118).

Western concepts of normalcy do not include shamanic experiences. One having clairvoyant experiences could risk being diagnosed as suffering from mental illness. Experiences which are inconsistent with cultural norms risk being classified as crazy. Sara Lewis (2008) argues that the spiritual emergency is a product of the lack of cultural support associated with this vulnerable state of mind. She cites an example of one of her informants whose “distress was exacerbated by lack of cultural support” (Lewis 2008: 126). His wife divorced him because she disapproved of his use of ayahuasca, describing it as “odd and abnormal.” He did not have anyone to turn to in his vulnerable state.

Whereas the study observed real distress in the subjects, the author concludes that spiritual emergencies “can lead ultimately to personal growth and positive transformation” (Lewis 2008: 115). The verification of their experiences is not important. Their visions can be rich metaphorical lessons. She remarks, “Some do not believe they actually communicate with spirits but experience profound and symbolic lessons none the less” (Lewis 2008: 125).

Lewis (2008) considers the distressing period following an ayahuasca experience to be the liminal period. I argue that the liminal period is the ayahuasca intoxication proper. In order to reduce distress in participants, aggregation back into society should follow the ayahuasca intoxication. The intoxication is the liminal period, I argue, because this is the time when one is truly in a different “state” and when one is truly able to analyze society

and their selves. The following section will explore the physical effect of ayahuasca on the taker.

The Ayahuasca Experience

A number of anthropologists have had profound experiences taking ayahuasca while conducting their fieldwork. Benny Shanon took ayahuasca 67 times within a wide variety of settings and wrote a book The Antipodes of the Mind: Charting the Phenomenology of the Ayahuasca Experience (2009), which describes in detail from a cognitive psychology perspective the ayahuasca experience and its effects. He opens the book describing in brief his own personal experiences. “I was actually entering a school” (Shanon 2009: 8), he felt, “where the teacher was the brew, the instruction took place during periods of intoxication, and grades were given, and at the end “each series of sessions centered on a topic or a problem” (Shanon 2009: 8).

He describes the ayahuasca intoxication as a struggle. He suffered very harsh physical and mental experiences. Many times after a ceremony he would say to himself, “Never again!” but was always driven to continue. “I had to confront the difficulties and learn how to handle them” (Shanon 2009: 8), he explained. Overcoming these struggles changed him. He described how one aspect of the ayahuasca experience is profound self-analysis. “One is cruelly confronted with oneself and one finds oneself having no other option but to address issues that are often neither easy nor pleasant to handle” (Shanon 2009: 8).

Franklin Ayala Flores took ayahuasca 30 times over a three year period while living in Iquitos, Peru. From his experiences he dissected the ayahuasca intoxication into 4 levels of hallucination. As the brew begins to take effect, “darkness becomes a vast spiral” (Flores et al 1978: 155). Those with emotional problems experience continual retching and tingling which he attributes to the departure of evil spirits from the body. Following this the second level of hallucination is reached and “faces of people are often imagined” (Flores et al 1978: 155). He describes them as “blue masked specters, often assuming grotesque forms.” These faces sometimes appear more lifelike with equally frightening forms. In this time alarming animals also appear. One lady saw a massive boa constrictor which slowly crawled towards her and coiled around her. These “visions of horror,” as he describes them, last for about 20 minutes.

The second level of hallucination also has marked differences in hearing as well as physical symptoms. Hearing becomes acutely sensitive. An animal howling in the distance will feel like it is right next to you. The songs of the shaman sound loud. One experiences a lack of motor coordination, one moves like they are drunk. One feels tired, hot and may experience profuse sweating. Salivation and spitting are common as well as vomiting and diarrhea.

After vomiting, one reaches the third level of hallucination. Flores (1978) describes this as the last level of hallucination for most. It lasts 10-30 minutes and is characterized by sensations of flying while observing beautiful, often spectacular sights. “Exultation sweeps over the body and all physical discomforts are forgotten” (Flores et al 1978: 156). He described flying from the jungle to an American city experiencing

everything in vivid color and with an acute sense of sight. “Eventually concentration diminishes and suddenly one is home again” (Flores et al 1978: 156). The period of liminality ends. Normality returns. He says that this level is reached only one out of three times.

Few ever reach the fourth level of hallucination, according to Flores (1978). It involves telepathy, which requires serious concentration while taking ayahuasca over long periods of time. The shaman and a few others were the only ones he observed who had reached this level. They had been taking ayahuasca for ten years or longer. During this level of communication they were able to communicate with friends and relatives both alive and dead. Even for the most seasoned ayahuascero these experiences are rare.

Shanon (2009) emphasizes the difficulty of the ayahuasca experience. “It comes on like an internal invasion,” he explains. It feels “wavy and viscous crawling throughout one’s inner parts, pressing and eventually taking possession of one’s entire body” (Shanon 2009: 56). Forty minutes after consumption a force strikes and vomiting ensues. He describes it as a vomit like no other, “pouring out the depths of both their body and their soul” (Shanon 2009: 57). Some see snakes coming out of their mouths. This is the purge that the shamans proclaim. Vomiting marks the point of transition between “a situation one can hardly stand to one of coming to terms with the ayahuasca experience” (Shanon 2009: 57). A great relief is felt.

The harshest symptoms last 90 minutes from the onset, in this time period the visions can be very strong and the entire experience may be tough and even frightening. The drinker has no control. People can have an intense struggle, they lose their senses,

feel like they are going mad and sometimes like they are going to die. “It seems that what is happening is irreversible and that one will never return to one’s normal self” (Shanon 2009: 57),” he explains. But with experience, fear is managed more easily and one develops more control.

Following the 90 minutes of intense hallucination one experiences a period of “strong but manageable” hallucinations which last between one and a half to two hours. In this period the subject comes to terms with the experience and might even enjoy it. It is a moment of exhilaration and great wonderment.

The last phase is mellower. One is filled with sentiments of serenity, peace of mind and bliss. Visions diminish and one is left with feelings of happiness, harmonious well being, love for their fellow men and women and a deep affinity to nature and all existence. The experience lasts about four to six hours total. The person usually remains uplifted for another day but exhaustion soon kicks in due to the exertion of staying up all night.

Under the effects of ayahuasca, the participant is in a state of mind where the attributes that formed their ordinary sense of reality are no longer present. They are replaced by an entire world of visions and thoughts that one has never had before. While in this state of mind, the participant is confronted with thoughts and feelings that pertain to their life, but over which one does not have control, the liminal state of mind produced by ayahuasca forces participants to confront these sentiments.

Results

In the following section I discuss the results of two studies that investigated the healing effects of ayahuasca on participants. The researchers of these studies found the effects of ayahuasca to be generally beneficial by providing insight into one's own circumstances which can aid in the identification of the cause of illness and the resolution of issues. Physical healing was described by some participants but regardless of quantifiable physical healing, participants described positive experiences with ayahuasca.

Winkelman (2005) describes the benefits people felt after an eleven day ayahuasca retreat. The participants' responses were organized into five categories,

1. self awareness and development
2. emotional healing
3. physical healing
4. spiritual experiences
5. direction in life

Participants who experienced "self awareness and development" expressed "access to deeper levels of the self, help in understanding fears and resistance, enlightenment and shamanic power, what it is to be human, how to be yourself, greater sense of control and strength, insights into childhood, insights about oneself, and the ability to cope with anxiety" (Winkelman 2005: 213). "Emotional healing" was expressed by a number of participants, stating an "end to perpetual anxiety, less fear, less anxiety, a resolution of pain from the past, and/or worked though death issues" (Winkelman 2005: 213). One informant said, "Now I can embrace life in a new way. I came to a sense of who I really am. I had given myself away early in life, losing control to others who induced feelings

of guilt. Now I am recovering myself from a deeper place that never really fully unfolded” (Winkelman 2005: 213).

A few had “spiritual experiences,” expressing “contact with astral space and other dimensions, and a belief in the spirit realm” (Winkelman 2005: 213). Healing at the physical level was achieved by many. In this case participants expressed effects of a “stronger body, mental experiences were repairing damage to the body and a resolution to personal issues” (Winkelman 2005: 213). A few received a direction in life sending them in a positive direction and giving them knowledge of what to do in the future. Some had bad experiences initially, referring to the vomiting and nausea but later expressed positive outcomes (Winkelman 2005: 213).

In general, Winkelman (2005) found that people experienced an increased and enhanced self awareness as well as personal insights. “Spiritual and personal development emphasized in motivations were not as clearly expressed in their assessment of their experiences” (Winkelman 2005: 214). A number expressed emotional and physical healing but very few received the personal direction they expressed in their motivations. Based on the qualitative results, it seems that the aspirant who will find the most success is the one searching for emotional healing and personal insight.

Shanon (2009) provides a good description of the general effects Ayahuasca has on participants. The conceptualization of the ayahuasca intoxication as a liminal period helps to explain the effects it has on participants.

The impact Ayahuasca may have on its partakers need not be confined to the time of the intoxication proper. Having experienced the extraordinary effects that the brew induces, many drinkers feel that they undergo deep personal changes. Indeed, it is very common to hear drinkers testify that having partaken of Ayahuasca they

underwent major personal transformations and that their lives were no longer the same. The changes mentioned pertain to new psychological understanding and personal insights, modifications of belief systems, perspectives on life, and world-views, as well as religious and spiritual conversion. Not infrequently, these effects may result in actual, and at times radical, decisions and actions-becoming a member of a religious group using Ayahuasca is one of the most common examples (Shanon 2009: 65).

Shanon (2009), who took ayahuasca 67 times, is very familiar with the effects it causes. It produces “deep personal changes” resulting in “lives” that “were no longer the same.” In the words of Turner (1967) the result of the liminal period “is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being” (102). Participants are “forced to think about their society, their cosmos and the powers that generate and sustain them” (Turner 1967: 105). The period following the liminal is “aggregation.” This involves the adopting of a new state whether a profession, or “membership to a group which does not include the whole society” (Turner 1967: 95). Earlier I argued that participants of non-native ayahuasca ritual do not experience aggregation in the way Turner (1967) described. But this does not mean that they cannot aggregate themselves on their own accord. Shanon (2009) explains that the ayahuasca experience can produce “actual, and at times radical, decisions and actions - becoming a member of a religious group using ayahuasca is one of the most common examples” (65).

The acquisition of a new position of membership or group of responsibilities defines the aggregation phase of Turner’s (1967) rites of passage. In order for non-native ayahuasca use to be considered a rite of passage, participants would need to be aggregated into a new position within society. Participants in this case must search out a new position for themselves or return to their previous one. In indigenous ayahuasca

ritual apprentices are ushered into the role of a practicing shaman, or among the Ndembu they adopt the social responsibility of men. Therefore to consider non-native ayahuasca ritual a rite of passage is not appropriate. It is not a culturally sanctioned means of changing from one state to another. With that said, non-native ayahuasca ritual does produce a liminal period in which participants are able to analyze the issues affecting them. Schmid et al (2010) describe the psychological process behind the liminal state of ayahuasca intoxication.

They found that “therapeutic effects could occur in any kind of ayahuasca ritual” (Schmid et al 2010: 191). Antonovsky’s concept of “salutogenesis” provides the lens through which healing is conceptualized. He defines it as a “global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring feeling of confidence in the predictability of one’s internal and external environments” (Schmid et al 2010: 192). The researchers believe that ayahuasca can contribute to this feeling. It enhances one’s “generalized resistance resources.” They are resources that are “effective in avoiding or combating a range of psychological stressors and can therefore lead to ‘unspecific changes,’ enhancing an individual’s well being” (Schmid et al 2010: 192). This enables an individual to make sense of and manage stressful life events.

The researchers organized the effects of ayahuasca on participants into specific effects and unspecific effects. Specific effects refer to a desired positive response to a diagnosed illness. Five people experienced complete recovery from Hepatitis C, tumor or influenza. Six people experienced a lasting decline in reported symptoms. Two people experienced a remission in their asthma symptoms for about a week. One person’s

myoma worsened, which could be considered the normal course of the illness. There was no reported effect on the condition of five people who suffered from migraines, prostate cancer, fibromyalgia, or aching knees. One participant “felt” a remission of cancer but this was not confirmed by a doctor (Schmid et al 2010: 196).

While not all participants received improvement of the specific disorders they suffered from, all participants reported a positive effect from ayahuasca. Some reported it improved their “conduct of life” and that their experiences were “profound and life changing” (Schmid et al 2010: 196). The researchers found that “these positive effects of ayahuasca were described independently from a positive or negative healing experience and contributed to well-being in general” (Schmid et al 2010: 197). Whether diseases were cured or not participants felt that their experience with ayahuasca was beneficial. These benefits included “a change in health behaviors, enhanced clarity, recognition, and sensibility, increased physical well-being, energy, power, and strength, better coping with problems and daily hassles, confidence and tranquility, a renewed sense of happiness, love and joy, a change in life-orientation and improved social competences” (Schmid et al 2010: 197).

Most participants did not refer to ayahuasca as a drug. They preferred to use the term entheogen, a plant with “god” inside. All considered ayahuasca a therapeutic device or medicine. They considered vomiting and diarrhea to be visible signs of a healing process. Vomiting played an especially important role, as it “contributed or initiated a healing process through ‘cleansing the body and soul,’” and contributed to “physical, emotional, or spiritual healing” (Schmid et al 2010: 198). Nearly all participants referred

to ayahuasca ceremonies as “works” not rituals owing to the fact that the experience is not always fun but “hard and demanding.” None of the participants used ayahuasca for recreational purposes only.

The researchers presented two case studies of exemplary recovery from specific ailments during the course of their ayahuasca use. In the first example the subject suffered from chronic retinal detachment requiring yearly laser treatments. “In one ceremony she envisioned a spider that “taught” her how to weave her retina. Ever since then, no more surgery or laser interventions had been necessary” (Schmid et al 2010: 199). This brought her to realize that “she herself is the creator of her realities” including illness and healing. Another subject suffered from Hepatitis C. During a ceremony the leader said “Now is the moment for everybody to concentrate on something you want to be healed from” (Schmid et al 2010: 200). He concentrated on healing his Hepatitis C and two weeks later his doctor could no longer detect the disease.

The researchers attempt an explanation of ayahuasca’s healing effects.

By ingesting ayahuasca, a person reaches a state of mind in which the etiology of the courses of illness or symptoms can be discovered, worked on, or influenced. Ayahuasca can be seen as a catalyst for psychotherapeutic process (Schmid et al 2010: 201).

They conclude the article with the following observation.

Our participants reported that ayahuasca enhanced their emotional and mental states, so that they would not only be able to “see” the true cause of their illness. Some also stated that ayahuasca had supported them in actively influencing their illnesses and life conduct in many different ways. For most of them the positive changes related to their disease were just a sideline of the intended process of changing their self-concepts or conduct of life. From a salutogenic point of view, this may actually result in positive effects on the quality of life (Schmid et al 2010: 202).

Ayahuasca allows one to think in ways that one normally does not. In the words of Turner (1967), “Liminality here breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation... There is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence” (106). The ayahuasca intoxication provides a liminal period to ayahuasca users allowing them to reflect on their own lives, the situations that affect them and the experiences they have had. Schmid et al (2010) give a psychological explanation for the benefits that ayahuasca produced in participants. Theirs is based on the concept of “salutogenesis” which involves a greater understanding of the processes affecting oneself in life. The liminal period is the catalyst for this understanding by allowing for the analysis of one’s life.

CHAPTER 6: Motivations of the Ayahuasca users in Magdalena

Based on the research by Winkelman (2005) and Schmid et al (2010) in Chapter 4 I was able to compose four “principal motivators” that drove people to take ayahuasca. In this chapter I will discuss my findings in Magdalena. Responses from informants in Magdalena coincide precisely with the “principal motivators.” When asked, most people expressed desire for an end to alienation. I use Marx’s (1844) theory of alienation to explain the sense of “disconnect” that informants expressed. After participant-observation with the subject population I came to realize that many of the informants who were not eager to talk to me initially were attempting to overcome emotional trauma; they see ayahuasca as an alternative form of therapy.

Motivations of Informants

On my first night in Iquitos I was invited to the house of a group of French volunteers who were organizing a dry toilet campaign in the outskirts of Iquitos. I explained to them my reasons for being in Iquitos and they found my topic quite interesting. A conversation ensued concerning the reasons people come to Iquitos to take ayahuasca.

These are the reasons I was told. The first is that people feel disconnected from nature living in the modern cities of the west. Ayahuasca has the potential to bring us

back to nature. The second is that ayahuasca stands in opposition to the rigid pragmatic and empirical environment of the west. It produces magic and meaning. The third reason is for psychological cleansing. Ayahuasca cures the root of the problem. The fourth and last reason is for life experience.

Well into my stay in Magdalena an ex-coworker of Kike’s (the shaman of SV) arrived at my hotel. She had worked in one of the other shamanic healing centers in the area. I asked her why she thought people came to use Ayahuasca. She explained to me there are three types of ayahuasca users: those with emotional problems, those who are lost, and those who are spiritual. Winkelman (2005) categorized the motivations of ayahuasca users into seven categories. I organized the motivations into four main categories “the principal motivators” (page 70). They are: spirituality, healing, alienation and hedonism. These categories with the exception of hedonism are exactly the same as the reasons the English lady addressed. The English girl in Iquitos explained 4 reasons as well. The reasons they explained are displayed side by side in this chart for purposes of comparison.

Table 2: Informant Motivations

<u>Principal Motivators</u>	<u>Co-Worker</u>	<u>English Girl</u>
Spirituality	those who are spiritual	Ayahuasca stands in opposition to the rigid pragmatic and empirical environment of the west.
Healing	those with emotional problems	Psychological cleansing
Alienation	those who are lost	People feel disconnected from nature living in the modern cities of the west
Hedonism		Life experience

Alienation

A number of participants expressed a desire to overcome emotional problems as well as to have spiritual experiences, but the most frequent seemed to be a desire to connect with nature, in response to a feeling of disconnect or emptiness. Here are some responses I gathered from participants.

- Interest in reality and unexplained experiences. “This is a gateway to things I have wondered about. I will be able to see alternate reality. My expectations were not specific. My experiences were wonderful, blissful I feel born again. I wanted to connect with nature. I am an apprentice in plant spirits in the U.S.”
- “I felt disconnected and empty. Ayahuasca is a connection to nature. My journey here is a search for the self. I am not looking for meaning in life.”
- “I was bored of life. I wanted to enhance my life creatively. I was bored, one reason out of many. People desire intensity. One guy became a professional musician over a period of ten years. He completely revolutionized his life. I heard about it and wanted to do it. You hear stories and it became a no brainer.”
- “I hit a ceiling in life. I wanted to open it. I was emotionally shut down. I wanted to experience it again. I just didn’t give a fuck.”
- “People are just drawn to it. It was foreign to me like from the Incas and Aztecs. I didn’t understand it until I arrived. Discovery prone people are pulled to it. We tried it in Cusco. My understanding of it was that it was something that gave one a life’s purpose. I was scared and had reservations. I thought of it as a drug. It wasn’t so bad. The experience was not so intense. My initial understanding was not accurate. I didn’t get my life’s purpose but I got over fear. My husband had a significant experience and decided to come to SV. He told me to come. I had fear and wanted to confront my issues.”

Evident in all these responses is a feeling of disconnect, whether from nature, one’s emotions or a purpose in life. There is a void felt within modern culture, what Marx called “alienation.” Karl Marx (1844) attributes the feeling of emptiness to the alienation of one from the product of their labor. He explains, “The worker is related to the product of his labour as to an alien object...the more the worker spend himself, the more

powerful the alien objective world becomes which he creates over-against himself, the poorer he himself – his inner world – becomes” (Marx 1844: 31). By putting one’s energies into building an object that once completed is sold, Marx theorizes, one loses the part of their selves that they put into that object. “His life no longer belongs to him but to the object” (Marx 1844: 31).

Although the natural world provides the raw materials for man’s subsistence, the wage-laborer does not interact directly with nature for his subsistence. “The sensuous external world more and more ceases to be an object belonging to his labour – to be his labour’s *means of life*; and secondly, that it more and more ceases to be *means of life* in the immediate sense, means for the physical subsistence of the worker” (Marx 1844: 32). Man no longer depends on nature for his subsistence but on the payment he receives for the product of his labor, thus he becomes separate from nature. Many of the ayahuasca users expressed a desire to connect to nature. As a part of the massive economic machine that compromises the western world, most do not see the connection between their subsistence and nature while few interact directly with nature for their subsistence.

The third level of alienation, is alienation from one’s self. “Labour is external to the worker...it does not belong to his essential being...The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself” (Marx 1844: 32-33). This is due to the fact that labor is a necessary part of survival, thus making labor forced labor; it is not the fulfillment of one’s desires. “The external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else’s that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another” (Marx 1844: 33). The laborer

sells his labor to his employer. “It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self” (Marx 1844: 33). A large part of the rhetoric of SV is the finding of one’s self, which involves purging negative energies to uncover the self. A quote in the orientation manual of SV says, “the closer you get to who you really are, the more clear things become as to why you are on this earth, at this time, in this body, in this situation to begin with.” Put into Marx’s terms this means breaking down the walls of society to regain possession of the self.

“Man lives on nature – means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die.” Man is a part of nature. By separating man from nature and himself, “estranged labour estranges the *species* from man. It turns for him the *life of the species* into a means of individual life” (Marx 1844: 34). It makes the individual life the purpose of life. Beyer (2009) stated that modern life has no shared meaning. One must define purpose to their life based on their own individual experience. When one cannot even claim ownership to the product of their labor, nor find connection between their self and nature, where is one supposed to find meaning? “*Life-activity, productive life* itself, appears to man merely as a *means* of satisfying a need – the need to maintain the physical existence. Life itself appears only as a *means to life*” (Marx 1844: 34). As a product of alienated labor, life loses purpose.

“An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labour, from his life-activity, from his species being is the *estrangement of man from man*” (Marx 1844: 35). He continues, “The proposition that man’s species nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from other, as each of them is from

man's essential nature" (Marx 1844: 34). By estranging man from his labor, in turn he becomes estranged from nature and other men. From a materialist perspective, participants turn to ayahuasca as a means to cure their condition of alienation. But alienation, as Marx says, is a product of the position in which one places themselves in relation to labor, nature, and other humans. The cure for alienation is then a change in the relationship between one and their labor which will bring about a connection to nature and others.

I noticed this response in the participants early on and observed their behavior. I did not participate in any ceremonies my first week, but, rather, spent my time talking with the guests of SV. They left after a couple of days and I spent a week there hanging out with the locals before I ever participated in a ceremony. In turn I developed my own set of opinions about the guests of SV before I had a chance to see their experiences up close.

I had dinner with the SV crew one night. Afterwards I reflected on my experience with them. "They are a bunch of tourists," I thought. "They know nothing about the culture in which they find themselves. They travel in a pack. Their rhetoric is completely separate from the indigenous or local view of ayahuasca. They are looking for something – a meaning that is right in front of their faces. Their lives are easy, boring and structured. They share no communal meaning. Alienation I say – separation is what they say. They think ayahuasca will cure them from their alienation, like it will reconnect them with nature."

I had read the literature by de Rios & Rumrill (2008), Beyer (2009) and Ott (1995) before coming to Magdalena. They characterize ayahuasca tourists as self-centered individualists searching for personal growth. Tourists travel to a part of the world where modernity has not changed things as much, searching for reality, a meaning to life. Their search is a product of the empty modern condition.

Obviously influenced by their points of view I continued my analysis of the situation. “There seems to be something primal that is lacking from the modern condition. People frankly feel disconnected. The way they live here, ironically, is very alienated from the Peruvian culture. I have not seen one of them out to watch the World Cup or to go dancing. They stay to themselves. Part of the guidelines of SV is to maintain separation from the town while they are on a diet. If they feel disconnected from reality or that which is primordial, why do they not they embrace the people who do not feel separated?” The responses of the participants painted a similar picture. They spoke of boredom in life and a desire to connect with nature.

In town, the chicken I ate for lunch was brought into the kitchen alive at breakfast. Agricultural people are connected to the products of their labor. I helped harvest yucca and ate that yucca that very night. Participation in the town culture is a sure fire cure for alienation. It changes the relationship one has with nature and their labor.

Several days later I had a conversation with my neighbor concerning the charlatan nature of shamans. I felt it too. He explained, “At kilometer fourteen on the highway Iquitos- Nauta they take ayahuasca and charge \$60 a piece for up to 30 people at a time.”

He took ayahuasca once because someone put a curse on him. He took it to see who was responsible. His business was going bad. He never saw who wronged him.

Success is a question of the mind, he explained. People take ayahuasca because they believe someone has done them wrong. The shaman convinces the person that they have a problem. I don't believe in it anymore. The shaman does an invented ritual maintaining the people in the place. The people don't leave the place to experience anything else. It is a Mafia! They make an agreement on how much they are going to charge. It is the lowest thing in my country!

Having never tried it personally I took his opinion to heart and wrote. "It is as if the people who stay with Kike (the shaman of SV) are under his spell. They stay in the lodge all day and only leave to buy things. The diet they are on requires them to stay there.

Allison explained that while on a diet you are very open to energies. The energy of the town's people would be too much for the guests."

I could not help but feel the irony of their situation. They complain about separation but when it comes down to it they maintain separation from the town. I played volley ball and watched a soccer game the other night. Every night the people get together and play sports with their neighbors. They do it every night as if it were a custom. They do bet money but the collective activity is absolutely beautiful. It is healthy physically and mentally. There is community here. In community one finds connection. The opposite of alienation is connection. The locals here do not experience alienation. Participation in the town's activities seemed a much better way of overcoming alienation than going to a country that is foreign and enclosing oneself apart from its people.

Ivana is from Poland and was there to watch the children of one of the participants, her friend. She stayed in my hotel and did not take ayahuasca. She found the practice to be kind of strange. She expressed to me how she didn't identify with the

takers. “They just sit around all day smoking cigarettes and talking about the ceremonies from the night before,” she explained. She interacts much more with the people of the village but is held back by her language deficiency. It seems that the more one takes ayahuasca the more one retreats into the ayahuasca community – the more they become alienated.

The day I was supposed to participate in my first ceremony I met with a local shaman named Don Francisco. He explained to me his success stories about curing people with ayahuasca and explained to me how he prepared it. A couple of days before, I had spent two nights in the jungle with three local guys. When they talked amongst themselves I did not relate to the things they were talking about. When I talked with them we exchanged words relating to our different experiences in life.

I remember one night the two guys my friend from town and I hired as guides had an hour long conversation and I understood barely a word of it. They were speaking Spanish but it was as jungle slang about experiences of theirs that I had no connection to. When I returned from the jungle, I met with a couple of the guys from SV, one from Australia and one from the US. We talked in a very different way. Our conversation flowed effortlessly. We share similarities in life experiences. Looking back on this, sitting in the hut of the local shaman as he boasted about his successful cures I realized a little of why the gringos hang out with each other.

Emotional Trauma

On the night of my first ceremony (the effects of which I will explain in the following section) most people left the ceremony house to go to sleep, but a bunch stayed around for a while. I talked to Claudia who was next to me.

“I have felt imprisoned my whole life with fear.” She explained. “Ayahuasca allows me to confront my problems for the first time in my life.”

She had suffered trauma and was not able to overcome it. Because of this trauma she felt bound by it. “Unresolved trauma is the root of all human misery and evil doing. In ceremony I confront the trauma that has haunted me my whole life,” she said. Later I overheard her mention this trauma was the suicide of her mother. During the last ceremony she was invited to see her mother but declined out of grief and fear. Her mother appeared to her sad and grieving.

It was not until after my first ceremony, my participation with the subject population, that I began to see things from their point of view. I wrote, “They come here specifically for ayahuasca. They have issues to address or questions they want answered. Ayahuasca is therapy for them. They do not have much time. They must take it as much as they can while they are here. In order to do so one cannot do much else. It takes a lot out of you. You do not sleep most of the night. The next day you must rest. Food is provided, their friends are there, and they do not speak Spanish. Hanging out in town is neither easy for them nor beneficial. If one is on a shamanic diet, it is advised not to leave the compounds at all. It is not that they do not want to integrate with the rest of the town but that is not why they are here!”

I had passed judgment on the actions of the tourists for never leaving the hostel. Most of them do not speak Spanish and they do not have friends outside of the lodge. Not to mention as I argued in chapter 5, the ayahuasca experience is a liminal period and as Turner (1967) explains that comradeship develops as a result of “interstructural liminality.” The ayahuasca intoxication is a tough and trying experience, as a result those that share in these experiences together become closer as a result of them.

In conclusion, responses from subjects revealed desires to find connection and meaning in life as well as to deal with emotional issues. My initial reactions were similar to those of De Rios (2008), Beyer (2009) and Ott (1995). I observed the participants’ lack of involvement in the Peruvian culture without investigating further their actual state of circumstances. Upon further inspection through participation with the subject population I realized why the participants behave like they did and their motivations for doing so. Some are searching for cures from emotional trauma, while others are searching for an end to alienation. The next chapter will address whether the subjects found relief from their emotional trauma and whether they found an end to alienation.

CHAPTER 7: The Effects of Ayahuasca on the Participants of Soul Vine

The previous chapter explored the reasons people search out ayahuasca. I have organized responses into four main categories: healing, alienation, spirituality, and hedonism. Participants desire to be healed from emotional trauma. Others desire a connection to nature, labor and to fellow man, they feel empty, their life has no purpose, they are alienated. A few desired a connection with a higher being, they desired spiritual relations.

Participant-observation, interviews and follow-ups displayed that ayahuasca provided relief from emotional trauma in participants, gave participants direction to overcome their alienation and in one case produced miraculous physical healing. In this chapter the explanations of how ayahuasca works are provided by the SV staff. The ceremony is explained in detail including my experiences as well as comparisons to indigenous and mestizo shamanism. The general effects ayahuasca had on the group are explored including what specifically informants are dealing with. These include overthinking, anxiety, and fear. The chapter ends with four exemplary cases of informants that were interviewed after returning home.

Ayahuasca

One day before a ceremony Kike explained to me how ayahuasca works.

The body is full of little spirit figures that grow over time. Most people go through life with these spirits inside them. They do not address their issues and suffer because of it. Life is beautiful. Ayahuasca helps remove those spirits. I do not consider myself a maestro,” he explained. “I am just a human with faults. The ayahuasca is the true maestro. The shaman is only the guide. Each person is on their own journey.

According to Allison, the job of the shaman is to create and protect the space. He manages the spirits of the medicine. During a purge he holds the space, helping you pull it out, but sometimes the spirits will not leave until he does.

Allison was a psychology major in college. She explained that the more energies we have inside the more they call the shots. They take over. “Losing it” to anger is an example. “Most of us walk around every day, thinking we are the ones running our lives. But like the anger entity, there are tons and tons of energy patterns, crossed energies and spirits literally along for the ride, hidden inside like internal luggage.” Ayahuasca purges the body of low frequencies to get back to the true self. She compares it to the red pill in the Matrix, allowing us to see reality. Contrary to eastern traditions which take time, it works fast, physically pulling stuff out of you. For westerners the vast majority of the problems come from the mind.

Allison, who is the co owner of SV, explained to me how ayahuasca helps people. “DMT is a natural chemical in the body. People that do better in life might have higher levels of DMT. These plants are old and hold wisdom. Mushrooms are new; they belong to a different category. Ayahuasca realigns you with the earth. It purges out other drugs. It is the antidrug.” To put it in other words, it is the antithesis of the modern condition.

The antidrug, that which is opposite other drugs that characterize consumerism. It is old, our culture is new. Luna (1992) describes how among the mestizo shamans of Peru ayahuasca belongs to a series of plants called doctors, because if ingested under certain conditions, they teach shamans.

The Ceremony

The ayahuasca ceremony at SV starts at 10:00 pm when the electricity goes out in town. Kike sits in the center of the row of chairs, Allison sits to his right, and Esteban, his son, sits at the end of the row next to the door. In front of each person is a roll of toilet paper, a bucket, and a cup of water. People bring a flashlight, a blanket, and a pillow. The room is full with about 20 people sitting in a circle. A third of them are on mats, the rest in chairs.

Kike the shaman has a small 2'x2' cloth laid out in front of him, his *mesa*. On it are an assortment of stones and crystals. Ayahuasca is served out of an aluminum thermos. Also part of his *mesa* is a bundle of dried leaves that, when shaken, create a percussive sound similar to a maraca. The rhythm is constant, and when he is singing the energy in the room seems to rise. During some ceremonies he sang the whole time and others he mainly kept silent. I asked him why sometimes he sings and other times he does not.

If I am singing, I can scare the spirits from coming out. A patient might have a spirit inside that they want removed but it is scared of the shaman and will not come out in his presence. When I am singing the patient feels calm and pleasant and might not have to deal with his own negative energy. That is why I leave at 12:00. To let the people be free. You notice that as soon as I leave multiple people vomit. Those are the energies that were scared to come out in my presence.

A few of the participants were deaf. I asked them if they were able to sense the *icaros*. Mitchell said he feels the energy. “It rises when there is singing and lowers when it stops. He has taken ayahuasca 36 times. The first ten times were beautiful images, now internal emotional work. Claudia explained her experience. “The first time I took ayahuasca I had no purging or visions. The second time I had some emotional purging but no visions. During ceremony I hear a ringing sound that stops and starts. It might be the *icaros*.”

Similar to the experience of the deaf participants, Luna’s informants claim that *icaros* can modify the hallucinations produced by ayahuasca. There are *icaros* for increasing and diminishing the intensity of visions as well for changing the colors perceived, for directing the emotional content of the hallucinations, or for bringing specific visions (Luna 1992: 241-42).

In the indigenous milieu *icaros* are the proof of a shaman’s power. Whitten (1985) explains how the *taquina*, or shaman’s song, is the living embodiment of the shaman’s power among the Canelos Quichua. The shaman shakes his leaf bundle and sings out his *taquina*. Among the Siona, the shaman sings of the visions they will see while preparing the brew. After taking the brew the shaman guides his apprentices through the visions with his song, “naming the various abstract motifs and colors associated with each spirit” (Langdon 1992: 53).

Luna (1992), in his work with mestizo shamans, observed that powers are acquired mainly through the memorization of magic melodies or songs. The number and quality of his *icaros* is the best gauge of the knowledge and power of the shaman. The shamanic diet consists of smoked fish and plantains without salt, sugar or other spices, including

sexual abstinence. Luna (1992) notes that the mestizo shamans consider it necessary to follow a diet in order to learn *icaros*. Plantains and fish are high in serotonin. The hallucinogenic properties of ayahuasca affect the serotonin receptors (Narby 1999: 60).

Many people at SV follow shamanic diets which are modeled on tribal ayahuasca use. Those that are not are recommended to abstain from sugar, fruit, sex, and strong spices for the day leading up to the ceremony. No food should be consumed after lunch. I asked Kike about the diet restrictions associated with Ayahuasca. “Diet purifies the body which helps the ayahuasca work. You can eat a little sugar, a little *aji* (hot pepper) and some alcohol but one thing you must respect is sexual intercourse.” This philosophy is consistent across all milieus: indigenous, Mestizo and non-native.

One day I was scorned by Don Pepe, my neighbor. He runs a timber business and was in town extracting wood from a nearby forest.

“You should not be having sex for three days after taking ayahuasca or you will become lazy and to that there is no cure.”

“The Shaman said it was alright the next day.” I said.

“He will say anything as long as you pay him.” He said.

Kike told me a story of a time when he drank something like 40 beers between him and his friends before coming to an ayahuasca ceremony with tourists. He had a horrible reaction and swore he would never mix ayahuasca and beer again.

“Sex,” he explained, “is dangerous. For this you must respect the plant.”

Specifically he was referring to the moment after the ceremony is over while still *mareado*. One is ejecting tons of negative energy. This energy can be passed along to a

sexual partner, causing problems with friends and family as well as other aspects of life. Furthermore, “sex while *mareado* can increase the *mareacion* and intensify it to uncontrollable levels.” He attributed this to the increase in physical exertion involved in sex.

Ceremony 1

The SV lodge is located in the far corner of the town beyond where any paved streets reach. I walked through the town over to SV around 8:00. I was nervous. I was told that the ceremony starts at 10:00. I chatted with the people for a while. I went into the ceremony house. It is a large circular building with a tall conical thatched roof and cement floor. On one side are two bathroom stalls with curtains as doors and plywood as walls. From the bathroom stalls following the circular walls around are small foam mats on one side of the circle and rocking chairs made of rebar and rubber tubing on the other. I had signed up for a bed. I brought a sheet but no pillow. I used my backpack and a towel instead. I laid down. Claudia next to me had tried Ayahuasca in California. I had tried it once in Colombia but only a little. It was basically my first time.

Around 9:00 more people started coming in. Brad offered me a blanket and Meredith a towel to use as a pillow. Stephanie offered me a mapacho cigarette. The lights went out and shortly after Kike came walking in. He had a flashlight on his head, sat there for a while and then lit a cigarette. He blew on the ayahuasca that was contained in a silver thermos. I presume he was blessing it.

He began to pour portions into a small glass the size of a tea cup. As he went around each person stated the quantity they desired. Most chose half a cup but a couple chose a quarter and a couple chose a full cup. Before drinking each person would say, “Salud!” and the rest would respond, “Salud!”

It was my turn. I chose a half cup said “Salud!” and downed it in one gulp. The taste was bitter, earthy and syrupy in texture. I quickly rinsed my mouth out like all the others did and lit my mapacho cigarette. The strong tobacco flavor served to remove the bitter taste from my mouth.

Kike began to whistle a tune. I desired legitimization of his shamanic powers. The whistling became singing in both Quechua and Spanish. I moved to the music while seated on the mat. I remained seated for 20 minutes or so and then all of a sudden I had the urge to lie down. That is when I began to feel the effects. I saw colorful shapes changing and moving and the sound of the shaman’s song felt ever more intense.

Initially I resisted. “Why did I do this?” I thought. “This is not what I expected.” The more I resisted the worse it got. Red demonic figures appeared in front of me changing to blue and yellow more pleasant shapes as I calmed myself down. I moved around a lot in a state of near agony, but every time I began to panic I was able to calm myself down.

I was lying down and with no warning a strong nausea came over me. I grabbed the bucket and heaved into it. The shaman’s singing became more intense.

“Clean your body, come out dark energy!” He sang in Spanish.

I sat there for a while over the bucket. The sensation of vomiting made me feel very human again but at the same time produced great fear. I wondered if it would ever stop. His singing helped my state of mind. I felt his care and compassion. The words of his song gave the vomiting a context. I dry heaved multiple times and finally something came up that felt like a chicken heart. I knew that was the last of it. I sat there for a while to be sure.

I laid back down and listened to the shamans singing. He sang strong, loud and beautiful. I felt his healing energy traveling from him to me. Up until that moment I had a lot of doubts about his authenticity and his ability, due to his involvement with tourists and people's jealousy of him in town. I asked myself whether to trust him. But he proved himself by carrying me through the purge. I was in such a vulnerable state that surrender was not an option.

As I did I went off on a journey leaving my body behind. First, I saw a series of three-dimensional letters and words that changed like the numbers on a digital clock. As if through an electrical plane and laser light display, I saw a glowing outline of an Indian wearing a tall feather headdress. He was very strong, muscular and holding a bow and arrow cocked back ready to shoot. The direction he was in and the presence he had led me to believe it was the spirit of Kike, the shaman.

From there, the whole place became covered in brain synapses glowing in the dark night. White electrical charges flowed through them. I looked within my chest and observed a spherical object glowing like the sun. In the same way that I knew that the

figure I saw was the spirit of the shaman I realized that this spherical object was my “self.”

Up until that moment I never bought into the idea of the “true self” as an entity separate from the person. But what I was looking at was just that. I examined it and compared it to the person I was. Although there were inconsistencies I felt much in line with that self.

I examined my role with the townspeople and felt I had the ability to bring people together. I saw the importance of being open to new things and the ability to let go, not always remaining in control or being right. It is ok not to know and it is very important to admit it.

After about an hour or so I began to feel my hand touching my stomach and heard rustling in the room. Up until that moment I was totally unconscious of my body and in a different place. Once back in my body I still could not open my eyes. When I tried I saw a whirling rush of colors and it made me feel very dizzy. At times I could not tell if my eyes were open or closed, I saw the same things either way.

As I came about, I felt relief that normalcy had returned. I became increasingly aware of what was going on around me. Before, I could hear the *icaros* or shaman songs but they remained in the background, unconsciously, like music in a dream. The song served as a guide to my visions keeping the course of my travels.

I battled throughout with my rational mind. I had to let go of thought in order to remain calm. I made myself panic many times because of my tendency to think ahead in

an anxious manner. I felt the adrenaline kick in many times causing my heart to speed up. Somehow I remained calm throughout maybe because of the singing of the shaman.

As things became calmer, people started to laugh and a few words were exchanged. Kike asked if anyone wanted more and two people responded, “Yes,” Claudia, who was next to me, and Omar. Kike had stopped singing. Claudia was breathing heavily and as if Kike saw her distress he began singing again. He sang the same cleansing songs as he did to me and as if on call she began to vomit. After she finished things calmed down and soon after he announced his departure. By that time I felt comfortable handling it alone. I no longer felt *mareado*, only a little dizzy and I was grateful. According to Flores’s (1978) classification of ayahuasca hallucination I reached level three.

Discussion

Others explained significant experiences and in fact all conversation in the morning concerned the ceremony from the night before. At dawn it is required that all go swim in the river, so we all went. The range of peoples’ experiences varied greatly. Some did not see visions, some did. Some vomited, others did not. Of those that did vomit, some associated their purge to issues that they were dealing with. Just like the participants in Schmid et al (2010), those at SV see vomiting as beneficial.

Despite strong accusations by de Rios & Rumrill (2008) that shamans who treat tourists are charlatans, de Rios’ description of a mestizo healing session in Visionary Vine (1972) resembles almost exactly the healing ceremony provided at SV. Participants sit in a circle. The ceremony starts at 10 pm. Ayahuasca is served out of a communal cup.

The Shaman recites an oration and whistles a spell for each person who drinks. The last one to drink is the healer. People get up to vomit or defecate off to the side. If effects are not felt patients can ask for more. The songs contain Spanish, Quechua, and whistling. The shaman cleanses each patient with tobacco smoke and his *schacapa* (leaf bundle).

Here is an excerpt from my journal documenting the same healing described by de Rios (1972).

Kike came around later and gave each person a *venteado*. It seems to be the tradition of the last ceremony of each group. He approached me, did the sign of the cross on my forehead a couple of times with his fingers, and did the same on the base of my throat. Then he grabbed his leaf bundle and sang an *icaro* while shaking the bundle near my body. The leaf bundle produces a wind and a sound, both of which increase the *mareacion*.

After the *icaro*, he lit a *mapacho* cigarette, instructed me to lower my head, took a drag and blew the smoke through the crown of my head, making a buzzing sound while he blew out. He blew the smoke in the front and back of my shirt and then asked for my hands. He placed them together in the form of a prayer and blew smoke through the tips of my fingers. I say through rather than on because he does not blow at a distance, rather very close and with a force as if blowing into or through the parts of the body to be covered. He did the same to every person sitting in the room.

The Canelos Quichua do the same thing. Take this excerpt from *Sicuanca Runa*, “He drinks again, and sucks out the illness, holding it for a while and then spitting it onto a tree outside of the house. After this dramatic episode he cleanses everyone with his leaf bundle” (Whitten, 1985). While Kike might not physically suck out the illness, he removes spirits from his patients through song and at the end of the week he cleanses everyone with his leaf bundle.

Over the next few days I asked the guests what ayahuasca has done for them. Cathy has been there since May, it was mid July. “Purging was initially hard on my body,” she

explained. Over time my body would handle it better. I was clenching, I needed to relax, I learned to talk to my body and tell it to let go.”

She continued, “At SV I have had had to deal with jealousy. One night I said to myself, “You don’t believe in me.” The environment gave me a place to deal with my issues. I was observant of my actions. My pain and bodily sensation has decreased as my tolerance to jealousy grew. I had pleasant sensations initially. My sensations allowed for the realization of personal issues.”

Allison explained what to do if one begins to feel their old patterns returning. “If another energy or entity begins to creep up and take over (as with anger, judgment, ego, doubt, etc.) consciously choosing to ‘unplug’ or not feed the energy, and ‘plug in’ to your true self, the energy has less fuel to run on and becomes weaker over time.”

Isabel noticed a physical change in Mike from the time she went away until she came back. His eyes were brighter and he looked younger. He had been at SV for three months and has taken ayahuasca 30 times. I asked him how he has changed.

“I was a general contractor back in the states but I am retired now. My body was full of aches and pains due to the work I did. I no longer feel those aches and pains. I did a *sanango* (root) diet for three days. I attribute much of my physical transformation to this. You keep the sense of well being. It pulls the memories out of your cells and out of your mind so you don’t have that jerk reaction.”

At SV, long-term participants follow a special diet for three days, taking a root called *sanango*. The purpose is to totally rebuild the body at the cellular level. *Sanango* burns when it goes down. You sit over a puke bucket and saliva pours out. It takes days

to get over. One partially loses their vision and feels debilitated. You feel like a 90 year old man for the first day. After the three days Brad explained that he felt like he was ten years old and dreamed of his childhood. Jeremy Narby (1999) was completely cured of his lifelong back pain the same way.

“This place is better than any mental hospital,” said one of the participants. I was having a conversation with Claudia, one of the guests. She is a psychologist and was explaining her work with schizophrenic patients. “We all have the same issues but theirs are just more. If we keep on pushing them down they get darker and worse,” she continued.

I began to see a connection. This place functions as an alternative kind of mental hospital. Claudia explained a patient she has. “I have a therapy patient who is schizophrenic. It is very hard. I am used to asking questions but not requiring responses just venting. I wondered if therapy was making her more psychotic by making her think more. I asked my supervisor if she could just drawl.”

A recurring theme from many of the guests of SV is the desire to *shut off the mind*. Claudia described her work with the schizophrenic patient. Her therapy was just making him think more. What he needed was to think less. Patients come from a world where thinking is given full priority. Typical psychological therapy does not seem to deal well with problems that are caused by over thinking.

Here are some comments from participants:

- “After my first ceremony I had to shut off my judgment. I learned to just feel and stop thinking. I have a lot of walls to break down.”
- “Over time my body would handle it better. I was clenching and needed to relax I learned to talk to body and tell it to let go.”

- “I had a very powerful ceremony. I helped to kill a pig. I asked the man to kill the pig quickly. A moment before he swung I moved and I realized that I was the pig. But it was too late. “Oh well just kill me,” I said. After the blow I felt no pain. I went through hundreds of doors and afterwards I felt like I was a different person. The feeling of who I am came from my heart not my brain.”

I myself over the course of my time there dealt with the same problem. My initial reactions to ayahuasca were anxiety and fear. I wanted to rationally explain the sensations I was feeling and the things that I was seeing but this only produced more anxiety. I had to learn to just accept the effects of the substance, not explain it. Allison explains that thought spirals are a common form of purge among “heady westerners.” She explains, “This is going to help put the mind and heart back into balance and is literally a re-wiring process.”

Informants in Winkelman’s (2005) study experienced similar benefits. They described.

- “Help understanding fears and resistance.”
- “Ability to cope with anxiety.”
- “Resolution of pain from the past.”
- “My body felt stronger, my mental experiences were repairing damage to my body, resetting my neurological system.”

My second ceremony was relatively flat compared to the first. I took the same amount but the brew had all the tree barks in it whereas the first time it was just ayahuasca and chacruna. I still felt it but I did not have visions. When it first came on I felt anxious and scared. My heart began to beat and I went into panic mode. Kike did not sing that night so it was all in my head. I dealt with fear and acceptance. Every little sound bothered me. The fact Kike was not singing bothered me. The effects of the medicine bothered me.

Shortly after drinking the brew I felt a dizziness and strong physical sensation of slowness, heat and numbness. This caused anxiety in me. Kike was not singing that night so every sound I heard was extremely amplified. Wind was blowing and rattling the leaves of the thatched roof, giving it an animated quality as if the wind were a spirit. My initial reaction was a desire to figure out what the sound was. I had to convince myself that it was not necessary to explain it, just accept it.

I talked with Claudia later about the amount she had taken. “There must have been a block inside me. I felt it but not enough. It is not always about having an intense experience. There is a lot to be learned with a mellow experience. Sometimes during a mellow experience one’s emotional issues are addressed even more,” she realized. Evident of that is her experience the other day. She was angry for not being given the doses she wanted. She asked for $\frac{3}{4}$ cup and said she only received half. Disappointed, she accepted it but later she asked for more. I heard Kike say something like “Anyone want more?” She said “yes.” I heard him respond “Here it is.” in Spanish. She did not hear it. In the morning she said “I did not come all the way here to have a flat experience.”

I found myself wanting Kike to sing during my second ceremony, especially when the brew was having effect. He sang only one or two *icaros*. I wonder how I would have dealt if I had been more *mareado*. I think mostly it bothered me because of my unfulfilled desire to hear songs. Just like Claudia who did not get the dose she wanted. Those of us from the western world have to accept not getting what we want. Pinchbeck (2003) for similar reasons believes that ayahuasca is the cure for the modern condition.

Ayahuasca does not affect everyone the same way. Stephanie takes large quantities but has never seen any visions nor vomited. Allison says she has a mental block and in order to feel the medicine she needs to open herself up to it. I told her my experience of accepting ayahuasca as medicine and she said that is what she needs to do.

Most of the issues that participants seemed to suffer from dealt with problems of the mind. As I mentioned earlier, shutting off the mind came up as a recurrent theme many times. Fear was another recurrent theme as a participant explained his experience confronting the fear of death. He took it with the Santo Daime church in Oregon. It is a Christian based church that uses ayahuasca as a sacrament. The ceremony starts at 6 pm and goes till daylight. There are repeated takings all night up to six times. The ceremony is based on music and hymns received from the medicine. There are instruments and singing. He sang as well.

“Singing produces liberating, elating emotional place – like a funnel, you go into a place,” he explained. “Atonal music produced a horrifying experience. Some of the music is spooky. The vine of death deals with the primary fear of death. Life is fear. In war you have adrenaline, you can run and hide or fight, you have your ability. In ayahuasca you have to deal with your inner fear. I never knew it existed. It was an Apocalypse Now fear. This was about consciousness. Not about being killed. It was a sinister internal fear. They call it a dumping or a purge so you don’t have to deal with it anymore. I felt like a king for two weeks. It dissipates. You feel so strong afterwards.”

In the conversation as well was Mike. He chimed in, "I remember that state of fear. I thought when I opened my eyes they would disappear but everyone looked like demons," he said.

"My friend didn't have the same reaction of fear," continued the other about his experience with Santo Daime. "I stayed in the circle. The priest thanked me. We really appreciate that. Send out your healing strength. I felt proud. I lived through it. I told myself I would never do it again. But the next day I was drinking again. If you don't deal with it now, then when?" he proclaimed.

Ceremony 3

I had to deal with that same feeling of fear in my third ceremony. I had to surrender control. I decided I would take $\frac{3}{4}$ cup. I arrived late, at around 9:30 or so. The door was closed and I hollered so that Simon would let me in. I entered and realized that many people were sitting out. I chose my bed. Meredith gave me a blanket. Kike was serving the brew. Most people were taking small doses. I had doubts about the quantity I had chosen. It seemed like I was the only one taking a large amount.

It became my turn. "I am thinking of taking $\frac{3}{4}$," I said.

"Go for it!" he said.

"If I need help will you sing well for me?" I asked.

"If you need help I will throw you into the shower, much faster," he said jokingly.

He poured it and it seemed more than $\frac{3}{4}$. I downed it and realized how much I had really taken. I sat up for a while. He sang beautifully. As I began to feel the effects I laid

down. It did not take long and it came on strong. My initial feelings were fear and anxiety but this time I had learned to accept it as medicine. I no longer felt it necessary to vomit it out. I did not reject it, I thought of it as medicine, a substance that will help my body, not a poisonous hallucinogen that needs to be removed.

I laid back, opened my arms and to the medicine said “Take me away.” It did. Immediately I felt bodily sensations of tingling and throbbing. Visions began to appear but were not pleasant. Kike was singing hard and all of a sudden the nausea hit me hard. I sat up and immediately I heaved.

“Clean, clean the body,” he sang in Spanish.

I heaved violently over and over again but nothing came out. His singing became more intense. He rattled the leaves strongly. A heavy heave brought up something. And with every heave afterwards more came up. Never really a lot but I was surprised any did after all that unfulfilled effort. Once I thought it was all over a deep heave came from within my body and a bunch came out. I knew that was the last of it. I sat over the bucket for another ten minutes or so. All the while Kike sang vigorously as he shook the leaves.

I lay back down and was taken off into a world of which I had no control. It was a dark world filled with long, slender shapes.

“Ayahuasca is a vine. These shapes resemble its shape.” I thought in an attempt to console myself.

I saw many visions but really only remember one. I am standing outside of a building, looking through a doorway. The building is to my left side and the open air to my right. The door is at the end of the right side of the building. I am looking at the

entire façade of the building. Another building is connected to it behind me. There are two figures inside. One in the background, whose face I cannot see. He stands behind a pool table carrying a pool cue. The other is just inside the door back to the wall. His left hand is wrapping around the door frame in front of me. His fingers are one foot long and slender. His knuckles pronounced and his fingernails brown and long.

The image was a still frame but I saw it many times in repetition as I kept peeking in the doorway and without retreating I was outside again. Then I moved back in like a repeating video clip.

I do not remember any more of the visions but none were pleasant and beautiful like the first night. I snapped out of it eventually and thought it was over. I was on my back feeling extremely dizzy still but now conscious of my body. I listened to others vomit and go to the bathroom. For the remainder of time that Kike remained I felt calm and relieved.

Eventually he left. I hardly was conscious at that point. I kept drifting into sleep and when I did I was met with horrifying dreams. I shook myself out of sleep each time. I was still really inebriated. I had expected to feel better at this point. I got up to urinate and I could hardly walk. This troubled me a little. I wondered if the effects would wear off before dawn. The thought raised my heart rate and caused me to worry. Someone lit the candle, people began to converse around it but I was still too dizzy to move. My panic became more intense and it lasted a while. I felt a brick forming in my intestines accompanied by putrid gas. Defecation was inevitable.

I grabbed my flashlight, stood up, and swayed back and forth to the bathroom. I sat on the toilet in the dark. Shapes and colors flashed themselves before my eyes as watery diarrhea erupted from my bowels. As I stood up I could barely remain standing. I was scared. It had never lasted this long before. I stumbled back to my mat, crawled into fetal position and lay there. I still felt nauseous, which increased by every slight movement. My trip to the bathroom did bring relief though and marked the start to my recovery.

I heard Meredith next to me ask Ivana about her experience. I chimed in as well. I could barely talk but interaction with other people brought sanity and tranquility to my mind. We talked for hours about a number of topics and eventually I fell asleep. I was woken at dawn for the ritual morning swim. It was a frigid morning and the thought of the river was not at all appealing. I arose and wrapped myself in a towel shivering. I still felt very cloudy and dizzy. The dive into the river was invigorating like throwing a hot match into water. It shocked me back into reality.

Discussion

According to Allison, “everything you see in ceremony is purging out of your own body.” One can purge even when not vomiting. When vomiting one may not know what they are purging. There are multiple types of purges. Emotional purges are characterized by extreme emotions during ceremony like, fear, doubt, anger and sadness. Thought spirals help put the mind and heart back into check- characteristic with heady westerners. Physical discomfort cleans out trapped energy in the physical body. Visions look

different before and after the big purge of the night. They are darker before and lighter after.

According to Allison's explanation, this ceremony must have been more curative than my first. My visions were much darker and my experience more uncomfortable. According to the rhetoric of SV the harder the experience the more beneficial it is. This does not sound like the consumeristic fulfillment of the empty self that de Rios & Rumrill (2008) describe. Shanon (2009) describes the ayahuasca as a very harsh physical and mental experience. "I had to confront the difficulties and learn how to handle them," he explains. It forces one to deal with their issues.

Victor Turner's (1967) theory on liminality provides an explanation as to how the ayahuasca experience forces people to face their issues. The heart of the liminal matter is what Turner (1967) calls the *sacra*. It is communicated as "exhibitions – what is shown, actions – what is done, or instructions – what is said" (Turner 1967: 102). The *sacra* of a ritual are communicated by three processes in parallel:

1. "The reduction of culture into recognized components or factors.
2. Their recombination in fantastic or monstrous patterns and shapes.
3. Their recombination in ways that make sense with regard to the new state and status" (Turner 1967: 106).

"The communication of *sacra*," explains Turner (1967) "both teaches the neophytes how to think with some degree of abstraction about their cultural milieu and gives them ultimate standards of reference" (108). The ayahuasca ritual at SV does not contain the prescribed visions of indigenous ritual that more accurately resemble the communication of *sacra* explained by Turner (1967). While there are no prescribed visions the rhetoric of the institution does serve to reduce the western culture into "recognized components or

factors” (Turner 1967: 106). SV conceptualizes one’s experiences in life in terms of energies. “The more energies we have inside, the more they call the shots. Dense energies such as fear, doubt, control, etc, may be purged to open the person up to receiving. Ayahuasca purges the body of low frequencies to get back to one’s true self.” The purging process is reduced into vomiting, emotional purging, thought spirals, physical discomfort, temperature, yawning, and shaking. These are the “recognized components or factors,” which Turner (1967) discusses.

The ayahuasca hallucination recombines these components into “fantastic or monstrous patterns and shapes” (Turner 1967: 106) through the medium of visions. While the visions might not be prescribed they are directly dependent on what one is “purging.” Allison explains, “Visions look different before and after the big purge of the night,” beforehand they are dark and afterwards they are lighter. I cannot stress more literally how these components or “energies” are transformed into “fantastic or monstrous patterns and shapes,” such are the visions produced by ayahuasca. SV does not give the specific visions meaning based on their content, this is up to the individual.

Months after my experience in Peru I have started to make sense of some of my visions and how they relate to my own issues. The visions did not always make sense at the time but the experiencing of the visions put me in a state similar to life experiences I have had. Partly participating and partly observing, my feelings during the ayahuasca intoxication were more easily analyzed than they are in an actual real-life event.

As a result, participants are able to make sense of their experiences “with regard to the new state and status” (Turner 1967, 106). The new state is something more inline

with the “true self.” Allison explains that “ayahuasca purges the body of low frequencies to get back to the true self.” Participants are provided with language that helps them makes sense of what is their “true self” and what is not. Allison explains, “If an entity begins to creep up or take over, consciously choosing to ‘unplug’ or not feed the energy and ‘plug-in’ to your true self, the energy has less fuel to run on and becomes weaker each time.”

Turner (1967) explained that the rites of transition are carried out in three phases: separation, margin (limen), and aggregation. If the ayahuasca intoxication proper is considered a liminal period then the three phases of transition apply to the course of the intoxication. The phase of separation is marked by a separation from the previous functioning of the mind characterized by the presence of dark energy. The phase of liminality is the ayahuasca experience. “The state of the ritual subject is ambiguous” (Turner 1967: 94). Their very mental state is ambiguous. That which characterized normality in their previous state no longer does. The final phase of rites of transition that Turner (1967) explains is aggregation. In this case aggregation could be conceptualized as the new outlook the participant has as the result of the ayahuasca experience in combination with the communication of the rhetoric (*sacra*) of SV. The experience of the non-native ayahuasca user does not as clearly fit Turner’s (1967) description of aggregation as the other phases. To describe the aggregation phase he states that the neophyte returns to a “stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and “structural” type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards” (Turner 1967: 94). The

non-native ayahuasca user is given an alternative explanation of their reality but they are not given a new position or group of responsibilities. After their period of hiatus they are thrown back into their previous lives and expected to readjust or make changes with little or no social support. This is why some non-native ayahuasca users experience “spiritual emergencies” as described by Lewis (2008). This is because “western ayahuasca users have little cultural support and guidance within which to contextualize their powerful experiences” (Lewis 2008: 110). The community with which they shared their experiences and formed comradeship is no longer a part of their everyday lives.

Case Studies

People who spent longer periods of time at SV seemed to have truly benefited from it. I provide four case studies to exemplify the benefits participants felt. I contacted the following subjects three months after all of us returned to our respective homes. Their responses exemplify a deeper understanding of the things affecting them in their lives. The study by Schmid et al (2010) describes this feeling as “salutogenesis.” The ayahuasca intoxication provided the liminal period for them to analyze what was bothering them in their lives. They were not provided with a new, culturally prescribed state as Turner (1967) describes among the Ndembu. They had to find a new state for themselves, using the new conceptual framework they learned while at Soul Vine. This conceptual framework provides a new state of mind but the material conditions affecting them must be managed alone. It is difficult for many due to the fact that their experiences are not part of a cultural ritual, understood by all as in the case of the Ndembu. Upon

returning home most of the patients' friends and relatives do not understand the experiences that the participants went through.

Sara

Sara had a powerful experience in Peru but she did not understand what she was purging. "Things became clearer upon returning home," she explained. She did what Allison told her. That is to go into nature, do stuff she loves, reach out to others and talk about what is happening with her. She gained insight through that.

Looking back she realized she "purged loneliness" in her first ceremony. Having worked in corporate America for sixteen years, "I felt disconnected from people and the world which produced loneliness inside me despite my loving husband and friends. I also purged depression. I am a lot less prone to feeling sad about everything. Before I felt stuck and couldn't see how and what to change. I had no motivation. I felt numb."

Recently though she feels a renewed strength within herself. "I feel more capable and motivated. The fog of confusion is gone and now I feel better. I realize now it was making room for the number one thing I've wanted in my life: to change my career, find my life's purpose. I feel a greater sense of calm and presentness. No longer do other people's fears get to me."

I talked to Sara since she has been back. She quit her job and plans to go back to school. Because of ayahuasca she changed the relationship she has with the product of her labor, by quitting her job, effectively dealing with alienation in the Marxian sense and entering a new state in the theory of Turner.

Meredith

During her last week at SV, Meredith's heart started to open and her true self started to emerge. "Before going to Peru my heart was closed," she explained. "I hadn't been in an intimate relationship in years. My last week there my heart completely opened. I felt my doors open. Ideas about my career and what I wanted out of life became more clear. Since being home I feel lighter emotionally and physically. I have a greater ease in handling chaotic situations. I feel more balanced."

Mike

Here is his experience in his own words.

In one of the ceremonies my body arrived at such an elevated frequency it actually vaporized before my eyes leaving me to experience the vastness of my infinite self and to explore the expansion and wonder of all that is of which I am a part of; the micro experiencing the macro.

The knowledge of who I actually was gave me an arsenal of understanding and the tools to begin to reinvent myself. Now with no filters, I can begin to allow the true pure light, love and life to come streaming forth into the wholeness of wellbeing.

My perceptions began to change helping me to see everyone and everything differently as in a different light. Situations and circumstances which before sent me into a rage of anger are now wisps of fleeting momentary annoyances I can interpret coming from afar rather than having to deal with after becoming lodged in my body and mind.

I have through the experience with the medicine plant spirits of Ayahuasca accomplished in three months what I have been striving to do for over 30 years.

- I no longer suffer from bouts of depression, confusion, and years of PTSD (post traumatic stress syndrome) or panic attacks.
- I cease to consider death as a solution for anything.
- I no longer wish I was dead.

- I stopped entertaining the idea of hatred of myself or despise the fact that I am imprisoned in this body against my will. After all I am the one who chose this life and now I am grateful and joyous.
- Boredom is not something I must dread each morning I awake.
- I love my life and continuously live in a state of gratitude and joy.
- I love and appreciate my body and the health I enjoy every day.
- I love life and the process of allowing the unfolding of the universal “All That Is” in order to bring all blessings Light, Love, and Life through me each and every day.

Joy

I walked in one night and Joy was sitting on the walkway grunting, rocking and flailing her arms. The others were sitting next to her urging her to let it out and supporting her. Joy was moving her arms away from her body as if forcing something out. She was doing really well for the past week but for the past couple of days she had been feeling sick and very self loathing, she told me.

“I don’t deserve to be happy!” She said. “For the last week or so I had not been feeling good. This is the month that I would have gotten sick.”

Afterwards she went to Kike. He performed a *ventead*o on her. When I talked to her later that night she explained how she had some demons in her that needed to escape. The *ventead*o, she said, made them hide deeper within her but seemed to rattle them loose for purging in the ceremony. What she just experienced, explained the guests, was an exorcism. The shaman gave her a *ventead*o or a cleansing. Later she told me that the *ventead*o did not remove the spirit inside of her, rather she felt it hide further inside of her. It was scared of Kike. Later that night in ceremony she drank a full cup and as soon as Kike left she puked and said it finally came out.

She had been living on disability at home, unable to work. Her diet was restricted and she could not pursue physical activity due to chronic illness. It has been that way for ten years. She suffers from an immune disorder that attacks her body, manifested within her reproductive system as an inflammation of the ovary and uterus. She was ready to hand herself over to medical research and if her problem was not resolved she was prepared to end her life. She explained this to a friend over the phone that happened to spend time at SV as an apprentice. Her friend told her to try ayahuasca. She went to the website and right away knew it was the right thing for her to do.

She had not shown any symptoms since arriving at SV. She had been there for two months and had not gotten sick yet. That week, she was tested with the cause of the illness. It must have been time for it to manifest, but she seems to have been able to control it.

She has been able to get over a lot of her food restriction. In her time at SV she has been able to eat meat, flour and other foods that she could not eat before. For the first time in ten years she feels strong and healthy. Her profession was conflict resolution, spiritual readings, and kitchen design. Her true passion is music and she has the voice for it.

I got in touch with Joy through electronic means three months after my departure. I asked if she would tell me her story. Here is her story in her own words.

I went to the Amazon Jungle to work with the medicine in a shamanic tradition thousands of years old. My reason was that I was tired of being sick, and I had nothing left to lose. It was either that, or go to Stanford and get organs removed, and/or end my life. When the opportunity came my way, it was a resonant "yes" on levels I cannot explain. It came from within. Sure, there was hope involved, but there was something more that felt much like what I have heard

described as a "call". I looked forward to deeper inner work, as I'd been on that path for a while already. I also looked forward to spiritual advancement, though my main focus was to heal.

To put my experience in a nutshell would be impossible, so I will share the results instead. I am not sick anymore. I used to get sick with an endocrine related problem manifesting in my female organs every other month, like clockwork. I had Endometriosis, and a debilitating two weeks at a time. That did not occur once in the jungle, nor has it occurred since.

Also, I went to the doctor recently to get a checkup. It turns out that once diagnosed with Crohn's Disease, having almost lost my life to it some years ago, there is no sign at all that it ever existed in my body. The doctor even said he thought I was previously misdiagnosed, until I showed him the scar for the port site on my chest, where I had medication for cancer infused into my body regularly because there was nothing else that could be done for me. I explained to him that I had three different doctors try to treat, with the same diagnoses, and test that revealed the genetic marker. The doctor did not understand how he could be looking at the test results of the person in front of him with such a history, but resigned to consider it a mystery. He said I was finished needing his services. I agree.

In addition, while I was in Brazil visiting family after the jungle, some routine blood work showed antibodies to the Hepatitis C virus. I had to come home immediately and get follow-up testing. It turns out I do not have the virus. The doctor said the only medical explanation is that I am one of the lucky few who came into contact with the virus at some point, and whose body overcame it on its own. It was the same doctor as above, actually. He was amazed, and I was blown away in gratitude.

I would say that the major difference I am noticing in my life is that I am no longer identified with pain. I am no longer walking around as a victim to circumstance. People around me have even commented at how "solid" I seem. I feel that. I recently said I feel like a tree. I do. I feel so deeply rooted to this earth, with my feet so firmly on the ground, and a beautiful, deep, and wise stillness, that only moves growing toward the light. If I could give this to every person I love, I would.

Speaking of love, I actually love myself, which is a first. I don't love myself from an ego place because I have some grandiose idea of myself. I love myself because I know my essence. I don't just imagine it, or believe it, I know it. I understand what I am, how that fits into the grand scheme of existence, and what it means to love and be loved. I cannot explain any of this, of course, but it is a remarkable way to live.

I was on a spiritual path before this work. It seems as though in a matter of three months, all the work I had done prior culminated. Intentions I wanted to manifest for years became true. I forgave transgressors, released demons, paid penance, reconciled ghosts, became accountable, responsible, and began to reclaim my personal power. Possibility itself revealed to be the stuff existence is made of,

and I became an authentic optimist, with a realistic edge due to dropping so many illusions. I'm not finished, of course, but this is a terrific leap forward.

Conclusions

The effects that ayahuasca had on participants above are similar to the effects described by Schmid et al (2010). The case of Joy is quite amazing and pertains to the case study in Schmid et al (2010) of the informant who overcame Hepatitis C as well. She received medically verified physical healing from ayahuasca. Others experienced more non-specific effects, such as a new outlook on life or a sense of general well being. This is in line with the findings of Winkelman (2005) who found that people experienced an increased and enhanced self awareness as well as personal insights. Based on the qualitative results, it seems that the aspirant who will find the most success is the one searching for emotional healing and personal insight.

These results can be explained by Antonovsky's concept of salutogenesis, whereby individuals have a greater understating of their every day experiences, which leads to a greater ability to deal with psychological stressors. Under the influence of ayahuasca participants enter a liminal period, a catalyst for the therapeutic process, allowing them to locate the source of their illness. Mike described an experience where his body vaporized before him allowing him to "to experience the vastness of my infinite self and to explore the expansion and wonder of all that is of which I am a part of." It is like the man's head on a lion's body that Turner (1967) describes. It breaks "the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation" (Turner 1967: 106). I had a similar experience myself, where I saw my "self" represented as a spherical burning object within my chest. In that instance

I was able to observe who I was more clearly than I have ever been able to. Speaking of the liminal period, Turner (1967) explains “there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence” (106). That is precisely what occurs. One is able to see themselves from the outside and see all that they are apart of. It is like something I have always said. “In order to see the house for what it is, you have to step outside of it first, otherwise you are just looking at the inside of a room.”

The study by Winkelman (2005) did not give conclusive results as to whether ayahuasca has the power to cure one’s sense of alienation. I asked Kike’s coworker whether she thought it was possible for those who are lost to find direction taking ayahuasca. She responded, “If you follow what the spirits say, they will push you,” she explained. “Spirits can provide direction and push those changes. Ayahuasca works so well because it purges out the spirits that cause the problems. You cannot see the difference without the energies until they are gone.” Sara and Meredith seemed to have insights concerning their life situations which drove them to makes decisions. Mike’s whole outlook on life changed. Whereas before he felt bored and emotionally detached from life, (symptoms of alienation) he seemed to be reconnected with himself afterwards, no longer alienated.

Ayahuasca, being a plant, is a part of nature, and according to the informants of Luna (1992), ayahuasca teaches its users. By ingesting ayahuasca perhaps ayahuasca users are connecting with nature literally. However, in the way that Marx envisioned it, people must change their material conditions in order to bring themselves out of alienation. Simply taking ayahuasca and returning to their previous state does not

accomplish this. A change in the person's material relationship with the product of their labor is necessary. In the case of emotional trauma, the liminal period produced by ayahuasca has the potential to affect change on the emotional level of the participant by providing them with a deeper understanding of their situation. In terms of alienation, the participant must change their material conditions, thereby entering a new state of profession or social obligation. Neo-shamanic ritual does not aggregate one into a new position of society. One leaves the place of ritual and the comrades with which one has shared their experiences and returns to their previous place in society. They have been provided with a new intellectual framework and a new outlook on their lives, but any changes they wish to make relating to their material condition must be carried out on their own.

CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

Amazonian shamanism has never been a stagnant ritual. It has undergone massive changes throughout the years that anthropologists have observed it. Before the arrival of Europeans the shaman's role differed greatly from that which he occupied after the Spanish took power. Much has been written on tribal Amazonian shamanism since the 1970's. This provided a framework to compare all other changes that shamanism has undergone. It is important to remember that what was written in this era is not how it always was. The political structure of many indigenous communities was rearranged, while others were decimated during the Spanish conquest. What was left was dramatically different. Despite pressure from the Spanish, the use of hallucinogens remained a practice of the indigenous groups of the Amazon. In fact, during and after the Spanish invasion, the shaman took on a far more influential role in the governance of the tribes.

Whereas the power of the shaman and his medicines gained support during the colonial period, the transition to statehood and incorporation into the global commodity market caused a decline in shamanic practices at the tribal level. At the same time, shamanic practices, namely the use of ayahuasca, began to emerge outside of the indigenous milieu. Urban dwellers of indigenous ancestry brought the shamanic tradition

into the cities. Many of the same practices were retained but they were melded with folk Catholic belief systems and western disease pathology.

The increase in travel to these parts of the world and the many books written by anthropologists led to a phenomenon called “ayahuasca tourism,” where westerners travel to the Amazon to partake in mestizo shamanic ritual. This practice has created much controversy due to the commodification of ayahuasca and a lack of cultural safeguards surrounding its use. Abuses have been reported and charlatans found. But a few bad apples do not spoil the bunch. Many westerners have benefited greatly from its use. It is not traditional shamanism but, in truth, nothing really is.

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Curriculum Vitae

Danylo grew up in Northern Virginia. He Graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of Mary Washington in 2005. An avid lover of plants and a desire to spend his days out of an office led him to work in the landscape industry after graduation. Not inspired by a career in landscape and without direction he spent a year traveling around Latin America. His time abroad became the inspiration for his studies in Anthropology at George Mason University. While studying at GMU, he continued to work for the same landscape company, eventually becoming the foreman. The literature he was exposed to in the program in addition to his time abroad inspired him to look critically at the landscape industry as a whole. Based on his observations he decided to open a landscape company of his own that would use edible plants instead of the typical ornamental plants used by most landscapers.