

Plants & Pathways:
More-than-Human Worlds of Power, Knowledge, and Healing

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation investigates the pathways and consequences of the commodification of ayahuasca, an Indigenous psychoactive and medicinal Amazonian plant brew, and the Shipibo healing rituals associated with its use. The “ayahuasca complex” is an assemblage of socionatural boundary beings, more-than-human relations, and interspecies and Indigenous practices that produce ayahuasca as a global commodity. I argue that the ayahuasca complex produces worlds in which both plant beings and humans participate, and which create ontological openings toward life. Providing healing services to outsiders is one way that Shipibo communities in the Ucayali region of the Peruvian Amazon have responded to the conditions of globalization and regional histories of colonial violence, racism, and resource extractivism; but these communities are still living in great poverty.

This dissertation unfolds in response to four guiding research questions: **(1)** how does the commodification of ayahuasca differ, if at all, from the socioeconomic and socioecological relations that have defined the extraction of other resources in Ucayali?; **(2)** how do Shipibo communities and healers benefit from ayahuasca tourism and what are the limitations on their ability to benefit?; **(3)** how does the adoption of Shipibo healing practices by outsiders affect relationships between humans and plant beings?; and **(4)** how can outsiders and researchers like myself work in Shipibo communities in ways that are not exploitative and extractive?

My findings are based on fourteen months of ethnographic research in Ucayali, Peru (over five years), in which I conducted interviews, ecological studies, focus groups, and participant-observation of practices associated with ayahuasca, including harvesting, cooking, and healing. I also lived and worked in Shipibo communities and became involved in NGO projects and a community-based forest management project. My work dwells at the intersection of political ecology, STS (Science, Technology, and Society), environmental history, and environmental anthropology while also emphasizing decolonial approaches and introducing feminist and multispecies lenses to this topic.

I use a political ecology framework to show that although the ayahuasca boom may appear similar to other extractive frontiers, the plants used to make ayahuasca also resist commodification in certain ways and create their own particular economic pathways that do not conform to usual commodity circuits. Nonetheless, as with other extractive economies, resources flow northward to

rich countries through the growing ayahuasca commodity web. Although the commodification of ayahuasca *does* open up channels for resources to flow back to Shipibo communities, benefits and power continue to be concentrated in the North, and Shipibo communities are constrained by ongoing structural racism from capitalizing on the commodification of ayahuasca.

I find that a legacy of colonial exploitation and extractivism still structures racialized hierarchies in Ucayali and globally, which constrain Shipibo healers' ability to benefit from capitalist/colonial systems of power. However, ayahuasca's particular relationships with humans, both material and cultural, causes it to behave unusually as a commodity. This dissertation reveals that plants themselves are important actors in commodity networks. I argue that as the ayahuasca complex moves through capitalist and reductionist frameworks, plant-human relations are altered in such a way that plant agency is constricted. My work draws from the literature on political ontology to understand relational practices as constitutive of worlds. Ayahuasca's relationship with humans, therefore, is constituted through specific practices that shift as they move through different ontological framings and take on new meanings, values, and configurations of power. I focus on power, knowledge, and healing, as three attributes that are associated with ayahuasca, and use this as an analytic to show that these attributes become unraveled and *humanized* as ayahuasca is recontextualized. However, new articulations and openings are also created as plants and humans, Shipibo healers and outsiders engage in new types of collaborative worldmaking practices.

Dedicated
to my teachers,
both plants and humans,
scholars and healers.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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|----------------|--|
| Alianza Arkana | A Pucallpa-based NGO that often hosted me during my fieldwork. They are a “grassroots” organization that works with Shipibo communities on issues related to education, women’s empowerment, health, sanitation, justice, and the environment. |
| Agua Florida | (Spanish) Flower water. Refers to a commercially-produced cologne used for shamanic purposes throughout South America. |
| Amigos | (Spanish) Friends. Shipibo people use this word to refer to outsiders. |
| Arkana | (Quechua) A song of protection used by Shipibo healers to open and close diets among other purposes. |
| Artesania | (Spanish) Crafts. Shipibo women make many types of crafts and are particularly known for their intricate embroidery work. |
| Asamblea | (Spanish) A community assembly forum used for most community decision making in Shipibo communities. |
| Ayahuasca | (Quechua) Vine of death. I use it to refer to the brew (oni in Shipibo) made with caapi vine (<i>Banisteriopsis caapi</i>) and chakruna (<i>Psychotria viridis</i>). Is frequently used to refer to the vine on its own also. |
| Bena Jema | An urban Shipibo community on the outskirts of Pucallpa. |
| Bijao | <i>Calathea lutea</i> , a plant whose leaves are used to wrap <i>juanes</i> , a rice ball made with chicken that is a regional food. |
| Bobinsana | <i>Calliandra angustifolia</i> , a shrub and teacher plant. |
| Caapi | The ayahuasca liana, <i>Banisteriopsis caapi</i> (Nishi in Shipibo), one of the principle ingredients in the ayahuasca brew. |
| Caapi Drops | A pseudonym for a company trying to commercialize a pure extract of caapi for sale in the U.S. and in partnership with the community of Junin Pablo. |
| Camu camu | A fruit grown in Ucayali and commonly consumed as a tart juice. |
| Caseríos | Non-Indigenous or mixed rural or riverine communities. |
| The Center | Pseudonym for a foreigner-run ayahuasca retreat center near Iquitos. |
| Chacra | Agricultural plots, generally cultivated by each family. |
| Chakruna | <i>Psychotria viridis</i> (kawa in Shipibo), a shrub and one of the principle ingredients in the ayahuasca brew. |
| Cat’s Claw | <i>Uncaria tomentosa</i> . (Uña de Gato in Spanish or Micho Mentsis in Shipibo). A woody vine that grows in the forests of Ucayali. Its inner bark is used as a treatment for inflammation and arthritis, and it is sold commonly in the U.S. as a nutritional supplement. |

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| Chiric Sanango | <i>Brunfelsia grandiflora</i> (Moka Pari in Shipibo), a shrub in the nightshade family, and a teacher plant. |
| Choque | (Spanish) Clash. Used to describe a clash of energies, such as when ayahuasca does not mix well with something, and can instead cause difficulties. Or when a strong energy clashes with a plant diet. |
| Cinchona | <i>Cinchona spp.</i> The bark is extracted to make quinine, and was one of the first plant commodities extracted from Ucayali. Also called Jesuit's bark. |
| Civilismo | (Spanish) The ideology of the dominant political party (Partido Civil) of the late 19 th and early 20 th century in Peru. It was designed to establish a civilian rule as opposed to military rule. It was defined by an elite land-owning class and the hacienda system. |
| Colonos | (Spanish) Colonists. Used to refer to settlers in the Amazon from elsewhere in Peru usually. |
| Comuneros | (Spanish) Community members. |
| Correrías | (Spanish) Runs. Used to refer to slave raiding missions. |
| Curanderismo | (Spanish) the style of healing practiced by Indigenous and mestizo healers or shamans. |
| Daño | (Spanish) Harm. Refers to (spiritual) harm caused maliciously by another shaman. |
| Diet | Also <i>dieta</i> (Spanish) or <i>Samá</i> (Shipibo). Refers to the practice of mastering a teacher plant through observing certain restrictions and prohibitions on food and behavior. |
| DMT | N,N-dimethyltryptamine, famously called “the spirit molecule” due to its strong visionary effects. DMT is found in chakruna, one of the principle plants in ayahuasca. |
| Dueño | (Spanish) Owner. Refers to the spirit masters, or (ibo). What I often call <i>plant spirits</i> . |
| Habilitación | (Spanish) The hierarchical and exploitative debt-peonage system established during the rubber boom. |
| Ibo | (Shipibo) The spirit master, owner, or mother of a plant (or animal). |
| Ikaró | (from Quechua) Songs sung during ayahuasca ceremonies in collaboration with spirits (ibo). |
| Iquitos | A city 500 km north of Pucallpa where the Ucayali feeds into the Amazon River. An old rubber boom town, which is now the “epicenter” of ayahuasca tourism. |
| Indigenismo | (Spanish) A political movement in Peru that gained popularity in the 1920s focused on ending the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and including them in Peruvian society and politics. |
| Jefe | (Spanish) Chief. An elected position in Shipibo communities. |

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| Junin Pablo | A community about seven hours south (upriver) from Pucallpa, where I helped conduct a caapi population study with Michael Coe. |
| Farmacia Viva | (Spanish) Living Pharmacy. The name of the collaborative medicinal forest garden project in Paoyhan. Its current full name is <i>Farmacia Viva Shipibo Sanken Yaka</i> (The Sanken Yaka Living Shipibo Pharmacy). |
| Kano | (Shipibo) Channel. Refers to the connection with the spirit world when singing an ikaro. |
| Machinga | A large teacher tree whose resin is dieted by the Shipibo. |
| Maestro/Maestra | (Spanish) Teacher or master. Often used as a title for healers. |
| Mapacho | <i>Nicotiana rustica</i> , a potent species of tobacco native to the forests of South America. It is an important component of ayahuasca ceremonies, used for purification and protection. |
| Mal Aire | (Spanish) Bad air or evil wind. A type of spiritual illness caused by a type of bad energy carried on the wind. |
| Maloka | (Quechua) A building where ceremonies are held, usually round. |
| Mareación | (Spanish) Seasickness or dizziness. Commonly used to refer to the effects of drinking ayahuasca. |
| Médico | (Spanish) Medic or doctor. Used among the Shipibo to sometimes refer to healers or onanya. |
| Meraya | (Shipibo) Generally used to refer to the highest class of healer for the Shipibo. It is widely agreed that there are no longer any merayas left among the Shipibo. They were said to be capable of flying and traveling to other planets. |
| Mestizo | (Spanish) Refers to the dominant social class in Peru, derived from the word <i>mixed</i> , referring to a mixed Indigenous and European heritage. |
| Motokar | (Spanish) An auto-rickshaw, the most common type of transportation in Ucayali. |
| Noya Rao | (Shipibo) A large and rare teacher tree that is important in stories. Called Palo Volador in Spanish. |
| Onanya | (Shipibo) “Having knowledge” or “one who knows”—translated as healer, shaman, curandero, or médico. |
| Paoyhan | One of the Shipibo communities in which I conducted my fieldwork. Technically in the Loreto District, it is just over the border of Ucayali, and is situated on the Ucayali River a few hours north of Pucallpa. Also technically, there are two communities: Paoyhan and Paococha, though they are located just adjacent to each other. For ease of reference, I refer to these together as Paoyhan, and in this dissertation I lump Paoyhan into what I am referring to as “Ucayali” and the “Ucayali region” because it lies in the Ucayali watershed just over the border and is highly connected with Pucallpa, as the closest city. |

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| Pasajero | (Spanish) Passenger. Used at some Western-run centers in Peru to refer to the participants in ayahuasca retreats. |
| Patr6 | (Spanish) Boss. Refers to the rural elite that were landholders and slaveholders during the rubber boom era and beyond. |
| Pucallpa | The capital city of Ucayali. |
| Ramet | A clonal shoot of a plant. |
| Rao | (Shipibo) translated as <i>medicine</i> , but refers to plants with specific effects on the body or spirit. |
| Raomis | (Shipibo) A class of healer, similar to an herbalist, who heals with medicinal plants, but not necessarily performing ceremonies or dealing with spirits or spiritual illness. |
| Samá | (Shipibo) The word for <i>diet</i> . The verb form is <i>samati</i> . Healers use <i>dieting</i> practices, consisting of periods of fasting and deprivation, to learn from teacher plants (or other material or spiritual entities). |
| Santo Daime | A Brazilian ayahuasca religion based in Christianity with ayahuasca as the sacrament. It has now spread internationally. |
| Sendero Luminoso | The Shining Path, a violent maoist insurgent group that terrorized Peru during the 1990s. |
| Shipibo-Konibo | Usually referred to as <i>Shipibo</i> . The most populous Indigenous group in Ucayali today is the Shipibo-Konibo. They are a conglomerate of two Panoan groups, the Shipibo and the Konibo, who share the same language and have intermarried for generations. Now, the Shipibo-Konibo live in small settlements along the Ucayali and its tributaries, as well as in the urban areas around Pucallpa (Ucayali's capital), in Lima, and abroad. Often I refer to them as simply <i>Shipibo</i> as is done colloquially by the Shipibo themselves in Ucayali. |
| Sopla | (Spanish). Blow. It refers to several elements of the ayahuasca ceremony in which the healer uses their breath to blow (sometimes using either perfume, smoke) onto an object or person. |
| Susto | (Spanish) Fright. Refers to a type of spiritual illness caused by shock, fright, or trauma—often in children. |
| Sylvestre | (Spanish) From the forest. |
| Ucayali | The Ucayali district is a political demarcation, with Pucallpa as its capital. Although Ucayali was only designated as its own district in 1980 (separated from Loreto), I use “Ucayali” and “Ucayali region” throughout this dissertation to refer to the watershed around the Ucayali River where I conducted my field research, with overlaps with the present-day designation of the Ucayali district. |
| Vegetalismo | (Spanish) The type of healing practiced by mestizo healers in Peru, focused on plant medicines. |

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| Shitana | (Shipibo) The dark side of plant spirits. The <i>shitana</i> can dominate and control a person to cause them to become a <i>yobe</i> (sorcerer), or it can turn against a person. |
| Yarina/Yarinacocha | A suburb of Pucallpa, where I lived part time and where Alianza Arkana is based. |
| Yobe | (Shipibo) Sorcerer or <i>brujo</i> in Spanish. |
| Yoshin | (Shipibo) Demon, genie, or evil spirit. There may be good <i>yoshin</i> too (I am unclear). |
| Zarzaparilla | Also called Sarsaparilla. One of the first plant commodities extracted from Ucayali (from several <i>Smilax</i> species), the dried herb was used to treat rheumatism and syphilis as early as the sixteenth century. |

LIST OF NAMES

Note on anonymization: For interlocutors who requested anonymity, including and in addition to those who were involved in activities related to ayahuasca export, import, or hosting ayahuasca ceremonies in countries where it is not legal, I use pseudonyms. I did not anonymize the names of collaborators, field assistants, or people with official positions in communities, on committees, or in local government, though for many I use first names only. I do anonymize the names of ayahuasca centers and one of the organizations I write about so as to be able to critique them without impacting their reputations. I refer to the Shipibo healers I write about by part of their Shipibo name, whereas they usually go by their Spanish names. This gives an element of privacy without erasing their names.

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| Alianza Arkana | A grassroots nonprofit organization based in Pucallpa who hosted me during my field work. |
| Arana, Julio | A rubber baron whose operations “Casa Arana” were based in the Putumayo region. Casa Arana was responsible for some of the most violent and egregious atrocities during the rubber boom. |
| Arnal | A young man from Pucallpa who cooks ayahuasca for both local consumption and export (pseudonym). |
| Bari (Papa Bari) | An elder Shipibo healer who lives in Paoyhan. |
| Beka (Maestra Beka) | An elder and renowned Shipibo healer from Ucayali. She was murdered in 2018. |
| Bene (Maestro Bene) | An elder Shipibo healer from Ucayali who used to work at The Center and now has his own healing center in his community. |
| Beso (Papa Beso) | An elder Shipibo healer who lives near Pucallpa (Rawa’s grandfather). |
| Biri | Maestra Beka’s daughter, and a healer in her own right. |
| Brian Best | One of the co-founders of Alianza Arkana and a linguist. |
| Caapi Drops | A small U.S.-based company that wanted to commercialize and import a pure caapi extract for sale to U.S. consumers (pseudonym). |
| The Center | A prominent foreign-run ayahuasca center near Iquitos that employs many Shipibo healers (pseudonym). |
| Dan | A man from California who imports ayahuasca and hosts Shipibo healers for ceremonies in the United States (pseudonym). |
| Edith | One of my god-sisters who helped do interpretations during some of my interviews. |
| Eli Sánchez (Profesor) | My Shipibo language instructor and one of the foremost experts on the Shipibo language. Profesor Eli is also an activist for Indigenous rights and has been involved with several NGOs. |

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| Elías Medina | The treasurer of the Farmacia Viva committee in Paoyhan. |
| Emma | A European woman who is one of Papa Meni's longtime students who has lived in Paoyhan for several years (pseudonym). |
| Farmacia Viva | A collaborative forest management project in the community of Paoyhan aiming to conserve and educate about medicinal plants. Its full name is <i>Farmacia Viva Indígena Sanken Yaka</i> . |
| Feliciano | One of our forest guides from the community of Junin Pablo. |
| Gregory | One of the founders of the Caapi Drops company, who was acting as the community liaison for the company (pseudonym). |
| Hawkins Lewis | A researcher from the U.S. who I collaborate with. At the time he was a masters student at Pacifica Graduate Institute. He has since graduated. |
| Horacio | A staff member at OVIMA trained in sustainable tourism studies who helped facilitate the Farmacia Viva project (pseudonym). |
| Humberto Rojas | The new president of the Farmacia Viva committee as of 2019, and the former <i>teniente</i> (lieutenant) of Paoyhan. |
| Jovita | One of my god-sisters and a skilled Shipibo artisan. |
| Manuel | A Shipibo agroforester and technician who works at OVIMA and helped facilitate the Farmacia Viva project (pseudonym). |
| Melaina Dyck | A researcher who helped facilitate the Farmacia Viva project. She has a Masters in Forestry from Yale University. |
| Meni (Papa Meni) | An elder Shipibo healer from Paoyhan, one of my primary teachers. He has his own dieting center in Paoyhan. |
| Metsa (Maestro Metsa) | A Shipibo healer from Ucayali who lives in Lima. |
| Michael Coe | An ethnobotanist from the U.S. who was working on his doctoral research at the time at the University of Hawaii and has since graduated. We conducted some ethnobotanical interviews and ecological field work together. |
| Nick | An American man who imports ayahuasca from Pucallpa (pseudonym). |
| Nora Reategui | The current vice-president of the Farmacia Viva committee in Paoyhan. |
| Orestes | A Shipibo man who helped coordinate with the community of Junin Pablo for the caapi demography study, and accompanied us during the fieldwork. |
| OVIMA | <i>Organización para la Vida Indígena y el Medioambiente Amazónico</i> (Organization for Indigenous Life and the Amazonian Environment). A small Peruvian NGO I worked with who helped facilitate the Farmacia Viva project (pseudonym). |
| Paul Roberts (Dr. Paul) | One of the co-founders of Alianza Arkana, he was one of my collaborators and mentors. Paul committed suicide in 2018. |

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| Pete (Papa Pete) | A Canadian man who is has studied for many years with Papa Beso and is now a reputable healer in his own right, hosting ceremonies and diets internationally (pseudonym). |
| Rawa | A young Shipibo healer who lives near Pucallpa (Papa Beso’s grandson). |
| Rebecca Buell | A masters researcher from Oregon State University who worked on the Farmacia Viva Project. |
| Roberto | The first president of the Farmacia Viva committee in Paoyhan (pseudonym). |
| Rona | The daughter of Maestra Wano and a healer in her own right. |
| Sani (Maestro Sani) | A Shipibo healer from Ucayali who used to work with Dan. |
| Stahl, Fernando | A Seventh Day Adventist preacher, established the Perene Mission on former Ashaninka land, and incited a wave of mass conversions among the Indigenous peoples of Ucayali in the early 1900s. |
| Tasorentsi | An important Asháninka leader, who led the 1915 uprising that drove Europeans out of Ucayali. |
| Thomas | The British founder of the Center, a popular ayahuasca retreat center near Iquitos (pseudonym). |
| Vargas, Pancho | One of the most powerful patrónes in Ucayali during the rubber boom era. |
| Wano (Maestra Wano) | An elder Shipibo healer based in Pucallpa |
| Yoshan | An elder Shipibo healer, one of my teachers, called <i>Yoxan</i> , or grandmother, in Shipibo. I spell it “Yoshan” for ease of pronunciation. |

LIST OF ACRONYMS

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|----------|--|
| AIDSESP | <i>Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana</i> (Inter-Ethnic Association for Development of the Peruvian Rainforest) |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| OIRA | Regional Indigenous Organization of Atalaya |
| ORAU | <i>Organización Regional AIDSESP Ucayali</i> (Regional Organization of AIDSESP in Ucayali) |
| OVIMA | <i>Organización para la Vida Indígena y el Medioambiente Amazónico</i> (Organization for Indigenous Life and the Amazonian Environment) |
| UPOV | The Union of New Varieties of Plants |
| INDECOPI | <i>El Instituto Nacional de Defensa de la Competencia y de la Protección de la Propiedad Intelectual</i> (National Institute for the Defense of Competition and Protection of Intellectual Property) |
| COICA | <i>Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica</i> (Coordination of the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin) |
| COSHIKOX | <i>Confederación Shipibo-Konibo y Xetebo</i> (Shipibo-Konibo and Xetebo Confederation) |
| APRA | <i>Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana</i> (American Revolutionary Popular Alliance) |
| FECONAU | <i>Federación de Comunidades Nativas del Bajo Ucayali</i> (Federation of Native Communities of the lower Ucayali) |
| ACR | <i>Area de Conservación Regional</i> (Regional Conservation Area) |
| SERNANP | <i>El Servicio Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas</i> (National Protected Natural Areas Service of Peru) |
| DMT | N,N-dimethyltryptamine |
| MAOi | Mono-amine oxidase inhibitor |
| STS | Science, Technology, and Society Studies |

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Ichabires irake.

PREFACE

When I began this research working in Shipibo communities in the Amazon regions of Peru, I feared that I could not do my work without reproducing ongoing coloniality and racial hierarchy as a white outsider and researcher. This fear at times was paralyzing. However, I was compelled by an underlying personal need to figure out how to live as best I could in a world in which my face represented a form of privilege denied to many of those with whom I relate. I have not always done my work in a way that I now recognize as “right” or “best practice.” These hypocrisies, challenges, and tensions, I expect, are evident in this text and in my own positionality. I aim to be transparent about these shortcomings, and persistent in striving for more ethical, equitable, and just relating through both my writing and ongoing work in these communities. I offer my mistakes and subsequent realizations as I continue to find my own ethical and accountable relations and research practices (Donald 2012; Wilson 2008) as an outsider in particular places and communities in the rural Peruvian Amazon. This struggle in itself is also a form of healing.

Ethical relating, according to Dwayne Donald, is supportive of life and living (Donald 2016). This resonates with the Shipibo term *jakon* (good or “toward life”) (Best 2019). I would also like to introduce the Shipibo concept of *ponté shinan* (Best 2019). *Ponté* is sometimes translated as straight, as in the course of an arrow, with true aim. *Shinan* refers to the mind, emotions, and spirit together, and perhaps more. I think of *ponté shinan* as a focus of one’s intentions in alignment within oneself and in relation to other selves. It is important to maintain *ponté shinan*, when relating with plants or others, in order to achieve a healing outcome. With this in mind, I try to allow a focus on these relational principles to guide my research praxis as much as possible.

Moving away from imperialist and objectifying research requires a move toward embodied, affective, experiential, and relational learning. This type of knowing is in contrast with a mythical “objective” stance (Haraway 1991). In order to formulate my arguments, I find it necessary to write significantly about myself in order to situate my political and social position with respect to the events, people, and plants about whom I write. Thus, within this dissertation, I have made the decision as part of a feminist praxis, to offer my body as a site of inquiry, understanding, and healing as I attempt to negotiate this challenging terrain. I feel the vulnerability of this decision, perhaps particularly so as a woman, and at the same time recognize the nature of my privilege that makes this decision easier as a white North American researcher affiliated with an elite academic institution.

There is much that I do not understand about the Shipibo practices I have learned and about the plants themselves. This mystery—the inability for me to fully access these worlds I write about (whether it be the Shipibo or the plant world)—is important. And yet, I feel the pull of academic authority-making and cultural imperialism that lead me to write, speak, and act sometimes as if I know something. The plants, experienced through my body and the various socio-cultural and academic lenses through which I make sense of the world, have taught me to be wary of any assertions of certainty. I try to root my claims in empirics—that is, in the words of my interlocutors and the experiences of my own body—and I try to avoid totalizing or universalizing statements. Therefore, although I make an argument in this dissertation and hope that my ideas come across clearly, I see my work primarily as revelation and relation. I am simply drawing back a curtain, polishing the lens, and making connections between worlds of which I only have partial access

and ideas with which I have formed relationships. What I see is that things are impossibly complex, tangled, and nuanced, but perhaps there are ways of interacting with and digesting the mess through lived experience with one's own relations that can lead toward healing and opening, or at least a loosening or unwinding of things that lead to dis-ease.

My plant teachers have been important “way showers” for ease, light, and understanding in the uncomfortable, in-between places of unknowing and unseeing. They have also shown me terror, gore, and violence. I have participated in plant diets and ayahuasca ceremonies as my way of interviewing plants, but also as part of my own healing and education. Though they communicate in ways I am unaccustomed to, it cannot be denied that, by being with plants in this way, I have understood, felt, dreamed, and thought *differently* than I would otherwise. The questions I ask have also changed as a result. Instead of asking for answers, I ask for guidance—*How can I be of service? How can I nurture life? How can I be medicine?* I try to hold these questions close as I write.

I have also experienced powerfully transformative effects on my own identity that plummet the mind into an interstitial state of unknowing that then allows it to open to alternate worlds of possibility. Under the influence of ayahuasca there have been times in which I became strange to myself, not knowing who was thinking the thoughts that presented themselves so forcefully. *Who is “I”?* I have wondered. Was I a plant experiencing a human body or a human experiencing a plant consciousness? Do these perceptions arise from within or without me? *Who is “I”?* At times, there is no name or even history that I can grasp to understand the meaning of self. “I” has lost any sort of meaning, and it is just a persistent buzzing sound that fills my existence as my thoughts dissolve and “I” becomes pure perception. Yet, I can somehow remember the very beginning of time. “I” emerges into a moment, as if sung forth from nothing, and this body is shredded inside-out to create the entire universe. Something has occurred here, I sense, and it seems important. *Sense makes “I.”* Being and relating with plants has helped me to make peace with the others that are also part of the composite “I.” I have marveled at the utter beauty and perfection of earth and the earthly experience. I have cried for earth's pain as she aches and grieves, and I have felt that pain as my own. I have accepted my own death and the death of the planet. I have forgiven my own ancestors. I have confronted and befriended the parasites and spirochete bacteria that have made my body their host, even as I wallowed in self-pity. These hybrid identities that shift and morph as they move between worlds, geographies, bodies, cultures, are also the subject of this dissertation.

I attempt to do justice to the wonder and mystery of these experiences of direct relating, enchanted unknowing, and interspecies identity, which I have touched and felt during the time I have spent learning to learn from plants. I worry that I am overcritical of other outsiders in search of these types of connections, many of whom I consider to be close friends. However, I must read my own experiences through the colonial geopolitics in which I find myself enmired as I learn from Indigenous practices and plants. I want to hold in a protected and precious place the plants, who have generously taught me and lent me their vitality. I fear that my academic writing may be too analytical for the subtle worlds through which plants work, though I trust that they will continue to persist, resist, and form their own articulations regardless.

I have learned immensely from my time living in Shipibo communities, and I strive to honor the people who have opened their homes and hearts to me. Perhaps I have learned the most when I have had the luxury of moving slowly, spending the days simply sitting with my adopted mother and sisters in the kitchen while they work on their embroidery and tend the pots for the day's meal; or going on the river to bring the fishing nets in with my friend Elías and his children.

Being included in these day-to-day activities in the village has been important for my own wellbeing and for the ways that I understand the phenomena and impacts of what I write about. Perhaps more so, I am indebted to the Shipibo healers who have served as my teachers—primarily, Papa Meni and Yoshan, who have both been generous with their knowledge, songs, and love, and patient with my questions, persistent presence, and repeated interviews. I am aware that my position as a foreigner and outsider has given me access to information, secrets, and resources to which I otherwise may not have been privy, and also excluded me from other types of knowledge and information.

I know that there are ways that I will represent Indigenous peoples and the communities I work in that betray the naivety with which I entered this research, especially with regard to appropriate decolonial research practices. By being welcomed into Indigenous families and experiences, through either healing ceremonies or research, there is the risk of fueling what Tuck and Yang (2012) call “adoption fantasies,” which are ploys toward a “move to innocence” that may erase the weight of guilt and discomfort experienced by settlers or outsiders without having to change their behaviors or give up their land or privilege. Accusations of this move toward innocence are often leveled at white academics who gesture at terms like decolonization in order to absolve themselves of colonial guilt, while actually benefitting professionally and academically from these absolving gestures. I cannot say that I have not experienced adoption fantasies, that I have not worked from a desire to erase my guilt, and that I will not benefit from these decolonial gestures. Nonetheless, through the relations I have formed in Shipibo communities with both people and plants, I am striving to be in better reciprocity with all of my relations; this, to me, is part of an ethic of healing.

I recognize that this dissertation itself is limited in terms of its benefits to the communities and people I have worked with. As Papa Meni liked to remind me every time he agreed to an interview, the interview is contributing to me getting a degree, and not much else, but he was willing to help me because we had a relationship. The cautionary tales he shared about other researchers who recorded interviews and songs and never came back to the community influenced my research praxis, pushing me toward more engaged, reciprocal, and participatory methods as my time in the village went on. What I have taken to heart from working with my Indigenous collaborators on community projects is that when faced with a challenging and difficult scenario, when my intentions or practices are being called into question, and when I have the greatest desire to run away from the conflict, the most important and generative practice I have learned is to listen, stay in the discomfort, admit my faults, try to do better, and most importantly continue the dialogue toward repairing the relationship. As Donna Haraway (2016) says, we must “stay with the trouble.”

INTRODUCTION | PLANTS & PATHWAYS

MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLDS OF POWER, KNOWLEDGE, AND HEALING

0 | 0 INTRODUCTION

OPENING

Rawa is singing, and has been doing so for close to an hour. The room is dark — it is nighttime — and the young healer’s grandparents lie across the room from us. I sit on a sheet on the concrete floor next to him as I compose this (the opening of my dissertation) in my mind. Every once in a while I can hear the gentle voice of his grandfather joining in with Rawa’s *ikaros*, the songs used for healing. The language is Shipibo. Rawa’s house, which is also his parents’ house, is next to his grandfather’s house in the outskirts of Pucallpa, Peru. The house is humble; we are sitting in the living room, which is also the kitchen, though it has been cleared out and some blankets put down for the ceremony tonight. This house has been built recently, in the front yard of another house, where other family members live, and next to another house much the same. The whole neighborhood of Bena Jema — an urban Shipibo settlement — is built in this way, with houses constructed nearly on top of one another for different family members or neighbors. Near the door of the room, Rawa’s three year old daughter sways casually in the hammock and eventually falls asleep. This, I imagine, must be a regular part of her life since Rawa and his grandparents hold ceremony in this room several times a week.

When I exit to use the outhouse, a dog sleeping on the front steps barks at me as I pass by in the dark, skirting the side of the house to the backyard in the moonlight. I feel slightly unsteady, though mentally clear, and when I close my eyes subtle geometric shapes dance through my vision. The effects of ayahuasca are called *mareación* in Spanish, which translates to seasickness¹. Several of us at the ceremony — Rawa, his grandparents, his two cousins, and I are under the effects of ayahuasca, an Amazonian plant brew. Several others have come only to receive *ikaros*, without themselves drinking ayahuasca: two mestizo women in their forties from Pucallpa—one says she’s faced a string of bad luck recently that she is trying to cure; a young mestizo man with relationship troubles; a young Shipibo man with his elderly grandfather, who is barely able to walk or stand with a cane — the young man must support the elder with his entire body any time he wishes to rise. These patients of Rawa’s have not consumed ayahuasca tonight, but rather are there to receive his *ikaros* to help them with their spiritual and physical ailments. Previously, patients sought the services of Rawa’s grandfather, Papa Beso, but Beso now seems to play a supporting role for

¹ In Shipibo, *mareación* is called *pae* — intoxication

Rawa, who has taken on the role of *onanya* (healer — meaning “one who knows” in Shipibo) in his family.

I include my embodied experience so as to be clear about my own positionality and partial knowledges with regard to what I write about. I start here, because that is where I find myself. I first met Rawa two years prior, when I came to sit in ceremony with his grandfather. I had come to Papa Beso’s house with two companions: the late Dr. Paul, an Englishman who was my close friend and colleague from the NGO Alianza Arkana, and his Canadian friend, Pete, a long-time student of Papa Beso. Papa Pete was now a practicing healer himself with an international following. Both of my companions were in their sixties, had grey hair drawn back in ponytails, and had been living in Pucallpa at least part-time for several years — Paul, running the NGO and doing plant diets with Papa Meni (Papa Beso’s younger brother), and Papa Pete doing plant diets with Papa Beso and hosting his own diets for foreigners as well. We had come with Papa Pete because he knew Papa Beso well, and could determine whether the elder healer, now in his 80s, was well enough to conduct ceremony or not.

The other foreigner present at that ceremony was an American in his early thirties. He was a military veteran and had made promising strides in healing his PTSD and debilitating back pain with Papa Beso, through ayahuasca ceremonies and plant diets. Papa Beso was at one time considered to be one of the best healers among the Shipibo. He was known as being a “trunk of Noya Rao” — a special tree, that this family specializes in dieting, which is one of his plant teachers. However, many foreigners no longer liked working with Papa Beso in his home for various reasons, including his alcohol consumption and, I imagined, the condition of his house.

During that ceremony, Rawa had lain in the middle of the doorway to the kitchen on the concrete floor, with the light from his cell phone shining through the thin blanket he had cloaked himself in. Toward the end, he joined with us in singing, and his *ikaros* were lovely and inviting. I thought him to be only about fifteen years of age at the time — he was relatively small in stature, like most Shipibo, but was also slender and youthful in appearance, with his hair cut longer in the front so that it swooped over one of his eyes. He told me during that first encounter that he was 22, though later he confessed that he was actually only twenty. “People say I look like I’m fifteen, but sound like I’m seventy when I sing.” Tonight, two years later, Rawa is proud to have me by his side on two counts. First, my presence as a foreigner lends credibility to his craft in front of the others in the room — he still does not have a strong international clientele among his patients. Furthermore, he is proud to show *me* how far he has come in the time since I have known him, and to show me the strength of his *ikaros*. We have become friends, and I have tried to be a good mentor for him when he comes to me for guidance on various business and romantic ventures. He has been inviting me to ceremony for several months, and I finally decided to join — in part because he owed me money that I lent him to buy a laptop, and I decided that this was an agreeable way for him to cancel his debt.

After he finishes his opening *ikaro*, Rawa gives everyone a *sopla*: he had been singing into a bottle of *agua florida*², and now he pours the perfumed liquid into his mouth and blows it on each of us in turn —first onto the tops our heads, and then in our folded hands, palms together. More than other healers, the amount of perfume that Rawa blows on me is substantial, and I realize why each of his clients have brought him a full bottle as part of their participation in the ceremony. Rawa takes a swig of water, complaining that the *agua florida* burns his throat, then he inquires how I am feeling in a whispered voice so as not to disturb the quiet of the room.

² A commercially-produced cologne that is used throughout the Amazon for shamanic purposes.

Though I have consumed a moderate amount of ayahuasca, the effects are not very strong. I can feel the medicine working in my body and my mind is quite active composing this passage, but I am not having any visions. Rawa's ayahuasca brew is thick like molasses, sweet, and also warm because he cooked it today and hadn't had time to refine it down — realistically it probably requires another half day of cooking. He seems concerned that I am not having visions and urges me to drink a second dose. He pours another serving to me in a small plastic cup, but I cannot bring myself to down the liquid. I am already feeling slightly nauseous from the first cup, and if I drink any more I will probably vomit. Rawa drinks more himself before crawling across the room to sing to his patients individually. Soon after, I *do* vomit the contents of my late lunch into the bucket provided. Rawa returns to this side of the room to sing to me. I sit motionless while he sings and am surprised at the strength that I feel in his rhythmic *ikaros*. As he proceeds, I feel the tension in my back ease and release. Upon finishing, he again gives me a *sopla* that douses me in the *agua florida*, and then lays on his side to chat with me casually in Spanish. He tells me he is very *mareado* (feeling strong effects of the ayahuasca). While he sang to me, he says animatedly, he saw my body filled with spines, but now they have dissipated — he has cured them with his *ikaros*, and my body is now filled with light.

After chatting a while, he asks if I know a certain song; I begin to sing, and Rawa follows along with the sweet Spanish lyrics. Afterwards, I sing the only Shipibo *ikaro* I know — it is based on one that Rawa taught me last year, and whose specific phrasing I improvise each time. Rawa sings his own *ikaro* softly to lend mine strength. The lyrics I sing contain affirmations of my singing, the strength of the healing power of the plants, and implore the plant worlds to open for me. As I sing, the effects of the ayahuasca gently amplify with my voice. If I concentrate just so, and connect with my plant teachers, it feels as though the sound of singing reverberates in my body in a certain way, and sometimes new phrases come to me that I have not sung before. I am beginning to understand how to direct this energy, and I weave in and out of an ephemeral feeling of connection with and control of the plant energies carried with my voice.

Listening to plants does not come naturally to me, though I have been learning over the past several years as part of my plant education. It is a subtle practice. I have *dieted* four master plants in order to learn from them, and learn *how to learn* from plants. I listen in dreams and visions and intuitions. I listen and I sing. The plants have helped me heal my body and they give me energy. I experience their teachings as clues along my path. These clues and insights have led me to this moment, and they have influenced how I do my research. I do my best to follow the intuitions I have under their influence — for instance, attending Rawa's ceremony, and befriending him in the first place, and now composing this passage. Anything I write of my plant education, however, is something that has been translated several times—into and through my body, into words, into a language that is appropriate for academia. A more direct transmission is the *ikaro* itself, within which the trained listener under the effects of ayahuasca could hear what ways and how well the voices of the plants work my body. But sitting here on the concrete floor, composing this scene in my mind, I ask the plants for grace, for forgiveness, for them to help me with the work of translation I will undertake in shaping this into written words. I put these prayers into my tobacco, into the pipe that Rawa helped me carve from the wood of the *noya rao* tree, and lighting it, I hold that prayer in my mouth for a moment before sending it forth as smoke.

I felt compelled to etch this scene into my mind because it encapsulates so many of the dynamic tensions that arise in my thinking about the recontextualization of ayahuasca. The grittiness of my experience in Bena Jema is not what people usually imagine when they think of

ayahuasca ceremonies — either they think of an expensive retreat center, or a romanticized jungle village far from civilization. The mixture of elements in the ceremony itself — the plants used, the religious undertones, the people present, the juxtaposition of a crowded urban settlement with a traditional healing practice form the basis of some of the equivocations and contradictions that will help me to show how ayahuasca traverses the many worlds through which it has entwined itself.

AYAHUASCA IN DIASPORA: SITUATING THIS RESEARCH

Ayahuasca, a strongly psychoactive and “psychedelic” Amazonian plant mixture, has long been a powerful fascination for outsiders who encounter it. For instance, several Brazilian religions formed around the use of ayahuasca as a sacrament in the early 20th century, including Santo Daime and the União do Vegetal (UDV) (see Labate and Pacheco 2011). In the last decade the healing powers of these plants have become famous globally, and ayahuasca has become a buzzword in certain circles. There have now been three iterations of the *World Ayahuasca Conference*, which brings together scholars, practitioners, Indigenous communities, and healers (see Chapter 5). Part of this attention is due to a “psychedelic renaissance” that has been occurring as psychedelics become increasingly popular and accepted in the United States and the Global North more broadly (e.g. Pollan 2018). Stories about ayahuasca have been circulating with growing frequency in mainstream media outlets, often portrayed as a fetishized sensation that is mysterious, powerful, and exotic. It is seen as a means of healing, but also as a psychedelic adventure. This has been in concert with a growing number of outsiders traveling to the Amazon regions and other parts of South America to drink ayahuasca ceremonially as a form of “spiritual tourism” or “ayahuasca tourism.” Subsequently these ceremonial forms and the use of ayahuasca have spread throughout the world and have been adapted and hybridized along the way. This phenomenon is what Labate, Cavnar, and Gearin (2017) have termed the “world ayahuasca diaspora.”

Meanwhile, the Indigenous ³ groups that are credited with originally developing relationships and practices with ayahuasca are often living in poverty, fighting for their territories, and facing systemic racism after centuries of exploitation and oppression. Shipibo healers like Rawa and Papa Beso use ayahuasca for cleansing, connecting with the spirit world, and performing healing. The plants used to make it are master plants, which facilitate communication with a suite of other plants that are considered to be important teachers and healers. Ayahuasca is made from two plants: a vine, caapi (*Banisteriopsis caapi*), and a shrub, chakruna (*Psychotria viridis*), and sometimes contains admixtures of other plants. The term *ayahuasca*, a Quechua word, actually refers to the caapi vine.⁴ It means vine of death or vine of the dead, which is reportedly because of its ability to open to other worlds beyond the living—what Michael Taussig has called the “space of death” (Taussig 1987). Ayahuasca is generally taken ceremonially at night, and administered by a healer, whose *ikaros*, a type of ritual song, guide the ceremony and conduct the plant spirits. For Shipibo healers, plants and plant spirits are lively and animated beings that are enrolled by the healer in the performance of ritual healing practices. However, the meanings and interpretations surrounding ayahuasca have been transformed as healing practices are adapted for non-Indigenous

³ Throughout this dissertation I capitalize the word *Indigenous* following Indigenous scholars such as Alfred and Corntassel (2005), who see *Indigenous* as an identity category rather than just an adjective. I do not attempt to define indigeneity here, but recognize that *Indigenous* is a complex and contested identity.

⁴ In this dissertation, for clarity, I use the word *caapi* to refer to the vine itself, and *ayafhuasca* to refer to the mixture of the two plants, though in common parlance *ayahuasca* can refer to either, and is used more commonly than *caapi*.

audiences. Thus, the meanings and practices associated with ayahuasca are co-constituted by the relations among Shipibo healers, outsiders, and plants that have emerged.

The global popularity of ayahuasca has affected social, economic, and ecological landscapes in the rural Peruvian Amazon. Ayahuasca tourism in the Amazon has increased notably during the last decade, including along the Ucayali River of Peru and the greater Pucallpa area in general, where I conducted my field research from 2015-2019. This has created a large demand for the plants themselves, indicated by decreasing access to caapi and chakruna in the region. Ayahuasca tourism has also generated new economic opportunities that do not rely on extractive logging, the region's primary industry and a contributor to high rates of deforestation.⁵ It is still a common sight on the Ucayali River to see barges carrying stacks of large fallen trees toward the city. Ucayali displays many characteristics of a forest "frontier" region, and Pucallpa, the capital of the Ucayali region, of a frontier city—in which resources are actively being sought as a means of vying for regional control and authority among both state and non-state actors.⁶ Therefore, ayahuasca tourism may provide rare opportunities for novel land-uses and alternative forms of development that are less extractive.

In this dissertation, I attend to a fragment of the global assemblage surrounding ayahuasca, beginning in small Shipibo communities in Ucayali, Peru,⁷ and following these relations to California. At this particular moment, Ucayali is an ideal place for studying some of the key impacts of ayahuasca tourism development in the Amazon, since ayahuasca tourism is growing rapidly there. Ayahuasca tourism in Ucayali draws Europeans, North Americans, and Australians, with Shipibo healing practices as the primary interest. Pucallpa is roughly in the geographic center of the historical territory of the Shipibo-Konibo, who I refer to primarily as *Shipibo*, one of the largest Indigenous groups in the Amazon with an estimated 45,000 members.⁸ Though most Shipibo live in or have ties to small *comunidades nativas* (native communities) along the Ucayali River, there is a large Shipibo population that lives in urban communities on the edges of Pucallpa and there is even a Shipibo area of Lima.

Rural Shipibo communities are primarily subsistence-based, though some communities engage in industry selling timber, growing bananas, raising cattle, or harvesting non-timber forest products. Medicinal plants are important for local health care, as most Shipibo communities lack basic sanitation and have poor access to health services and Western medicines (Follér 1995; Goy and Waltner-Toews 2005; Tudela-Talavera, La Torre-Cuadros, and Native Community of Vencedor 2016). Providing healing services to outsiders is one way that certain Shipibo families have responded to conditions of capitalism, development, and globalization. Shipibo healers have become renowned for their use of ayahuasca and other medicinal plants. This has created greater livelihood opportunities and economic stability, while increasing the interest in traditional healing

⁵ There is little primary forest left around Pucallpa, and timber extraction is moving increasingly further into the forest (see Chapter 2 for more on forest extraction).

⁶ More recently, there has been large-scale conversion of forests to oil palm and coca plantations in Ucayali, along with increasing narco-trafficking along the river. "Land trafficking" is also a problem, in which oil palm companies and coca cartels (often entangled) appropriate Indigenous land using fabricated land titles, and then use that land for cultivation, sometimes dispossessing local residents through violence (more in Chapter 2).

⁷ The Ucayali Region is a political demarcation, with Pucallpa as its capital. Although Ucayali was only designated as its own region in 1980 (separated from Loreto), I use *Ucayali* and *Ucayali region* throughout this dissertation to refer to the watershed around the Ucayali River where I conducted my field research, with overlaps with the present-day designation of the Ucayali region.

⁸ The Shipibo-Konibo are a conglomerate of two Panoan ethnic groups, the Shipibo and Konibo, who have converged culturally (Eakin, Lauriault, and Boonstra 1986a).

practices and medicinal plant use among Shipibo youth. Ayahuasca has been taken up by many Indigenous groups like the Shipibo as a symbolic representation of Amazonian culture, which also affords the possibility of economic development and global recognition. However, it remains unclear the extent to which Shipibo communities are able to benefit from ayahuasca tourism.

California is one of the hotspots in the Global North for the consumption of ayahuasca and the shaping of discourses around globalized ayahuasca. There are dozens of well-established and sometimes large “ayahuasca circles” based in California that hold weekly or monthly ayahuasca ceremonies. Some of these follow Shipibo practices. Other groups host more intermittent ceremonies when certain healers from South America go “on tour” and pass through various locations in California holding ceremonies. There are several prominent institutions in California that host regular or ongoing conferences and symposia pertaining to ayahuasca, psychedelics, and plant medicine more broadly, helping to shape global conversations, particularly in the Global North, around these plants and practices. These include Chacruna Institute, MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association of Psychedelic Science), CIIS (California Institute for Integral Studies), and more. Furthermore, there is also a strong connection between ayahuasca communities in California and specific Shipibo communities in Peru. Many people from California have apprenticed with Shipibo healers, some of whom now hold their own ceremonies. In turn, several Shipibo healers have traveled to California themselves to hold ceremonies, hosted by their apprentices.

Since I am situated within these connected communities, my analysis is grounded in the specificities of these places and encounters. Therefore, this dissertation is not meant to be a universal or exhaustive analysis of ayahuasca’s entanglements, but rather a small part of a story among many other stories playing out around the world and these specific regions. Nonetheless, the particular connections I describe are significant for understanding the broader phenomenon of ayahuasca globalization more broadly. Theoretically, Ayahuasca can be thought of as a rhizome that continually makes new connections; it may have no singular origin in time and space but seeks new places to inhabit and thrive (e.g. Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Stengers 2011; Ogden 2011). As such, there are certain structures that congeal and crystallize around the way that economies, ecologies, practices, and symbolism are organized around ayahuasca. In the analyses that follow, I attempt to make some of these moments of crystallization visible. In order to do so, I follow certain threads, but along the way, pathways that seem simple later fray. I follow plants, but plants become liquid and solid and liquid again, plants become representatives of cultures, and carry their own rituals that glom on new symbolism and sweep up different types of humans in the process. Plants become human bodies, healing human life.

SHIPIBO HEALING PRACTICES

At the commencement of my field work in Ucayali, my then-collaborator, Dr. Paul Roberts, stressed that if I was going to be studying and writing about medicinal plants, it was important that I establish a relationship with these plants by practicing the Shipibo method of *dieting*. Paul had been dieting plants for several years with his teacher Papa Meni, a Shipibo healer in Paoyhan, and he took me to the village to do the same. I had intended to study how botanical knowledge was passed down generationally among Shipibo healers. I was under the impression that healers would learn their practices during an apprenticeship period, usually with older family members. However, when I began conducting interviews I was surprised that, though some healers had apprenticed with an elder, when asked who their teachers were and how they learned, almost all of them began

by describing their plant teachers. Maestra Wano, an older woman we interviewed near Pucallpa emphasized to me, along with the others I interviewed, that “plant spirits teach you, they teach and we have to learn. The plant itself teaches you things for healing.” Specifically, the plant spirits teach the *ikaros*, or songs used for healing. This knowledge is not just the words and melody of the *ikaro*, but a specific way of singing that has been described to me as “channeling” the songs and voices of the plant spirits in order to access their healing powers.

Shipibo healers like Papa Meni and Maestra Wano explain medicinal plants as having powerful spirit masters, which require a delicate relational practice in order to enroll their powers in healing. Throughout this dissertation I use the term *plant spirit* to refer to the Shipibo word *ibo*, which in Spanish is sometimes called the *dueño* or *madre* of the plant, translating as its *owner/master*, or *mother*. Each type of teacher plant has a distinct spirit or *ibo*, though not all plants have the power to heal or teach (Jauregui et al. 2011).

The teacher plants are directed by spiritual owners, who in Shipibo are called Ibo. These Ibo have the appearance of human beings, although as they are spiritual, they are capable of transforming according to their will. Usually, they present themselves as old *médicos*, but they can also acquire the appearance of clinical doctors or any other way they wish (Favaron and Gonzales 2019, 22, my translation).

Shipibo healers, called *onanya* in Shipibo (meaning *one who has knowledge*), and often referred to in Spanish as *médicos* (doctors) are the people who have cultivated a relationship with plant spirits to the extent to which the plant spirits have opened their worlds, power, and knowledge to them. The *onanya* can then draw on that relation to perform healing. Healing takes place in a ceremonial context involving singing *ikaros* and drinking ayahuasca, as shown with Rawa in the opening vignette.

The importance of ayahuasca for contemporary Shipibo healing is several-fold: a healer takes ayahuasca primarily in order to be able to connect with the spirits (these include plant spirits, animal spirits, ancestors, and the spirits of the patient or whatever spirit or energy may be afflicting the patient). The connection with certain plant spirits enables the healer to sing *ikaros*, which are used for actuating the power of the plants—*ikaros* can open the spirit worlds, guide visions, heal, or even cause harm to an enemy. Meanwhile, the purgative properties of the ayahuasca brew cleanse the body of both physical and spiritual illness, which, according to the healers I interviewed, are generally seen as being related.⁹ This aids in the healing process, while also making the body more receptive and sensitive to the teachings of the plants. In addition, when a *dieter* drinks ayahuasca, it allows them to connect with and learn from a teacher plant (the plant they are dieting) more easily.

Dieting (*samá*) is the primary method of fostering a connection with powerful plants, and enlisting their help in both healing and learning. Other Amazonian societies, including both Indigenous and mestizo healers or *shamans*, also practice various forms of plant dieting, and this practice is now being adopted by outsiders and foreigners in concert with the larger phenomenon of ayahuasca tourism and the globalization of ayahuasca. The process of dieting entails ingesting, smoking, bathing in, or otherwise contacting the plant of choice, accompanied by a sensitizing period of deprivation and relative solitude, avoiding certain foods, substances, and behaviors for a period of weeks to months. Dieting is often, but not always, aided by consuming ayahuasca. Communication between the dieter and the plant spirit is further described by Astrith Gonzales, a

⁹ That is, physical ailments are often spiritual in origin, the result of contact with certain types of spirits or negative energy, or the result of harm inflicted by another *onanya* or *yobe* (sorcerer).

Shipibo woman who has written about Shipibo healing practices and cosmovision with her husband, Pedro Favaron, an academic from Lima:

The dieter sees [the Ibo] and converses with them in their dreams; and thus receives the fundamental teachings for their future practice as a *médico*. When dreaming, the soul of the dieter is freed from the temporal constrictions of the physical body and moves to the spiritual worlds in which the owners of the medicinal world live. Our grandparents said that, in the beginning, the Ibo of the plants test the dieters, to see what their true intentions are. In these tests, the dieter will be offered all kinds of skills and powers so that he can satisfy his egoistic desires, such as the potential to seduce women or weapons to defeat those who make fun of him. It is said that the dieter must be strong, determined, with a clear purpose, to reject these attributes. Whoever, on the contrary, allows himself to be seduced by these illusory powers and accepts his offers, will not be able to access the superior worlds of medicinal knowledge. The *médico* is a person with the necessary vocation to serve others with generosity and detachment (Favaron and Gonzales 2019, 22, my translation).

By some, this process of enlisting plant spirits as allies or teachers has been described as a process of domesticating the plant spirit and appropriating its powers (Jauregui et al. 2011). I like to think of it as a type of courtship process. Rawa described it to me like this:

The plants gave me energy, thoughts, knowledge, opening the mind. They would come. I complied with their guidance...with love and affection, treating the plants with love, with a lot of respect. We always have to respect plants. And then they give you more knowledge, wisdom, energy.

It is evident that for Shipibo healers, plant spirits are lively and animated beings that contribute to the performance of rituals and participate in healing practices. Relations between plant beings and humans that are formed through these practices trouble many naturalized boundaries—including those around the conceptions of self, human, and body—that have become hegemonic, but do not necessarily reflect “natural” divisions cross-culturally. The adoption of Shipibo practices by outsiders has consequences for the practices themselves, as well as for the configurations of power through which ayahuasca’s economies and ecologies emerge.

0 | 1 THEORETICAL FRAMING: AYAHUASCA IN MORE-THAN HUMAN AND MORE-THAN-CAPITALIST WORLDS

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW: THE COMMODIFICATION OF AYAHUASCA AND THE RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF SHIPIBO HEALING PRACTICES

My dissertation research has been motivated by four broad and interrelated questions pertaining to the social, economic, and ecological relations around ayahuasca tourism and the global spread of Shipibo healing practices. First, I sought to understand how, if at all, the socioeconomic and socioecological relations around the commodification of ayahuasca differ from those defined by the extraction of other forest resources of the Amazon. Second, I wanted to know how Shipibo communities and healers benefit from ayahuasca tourism, as well as understand the limitations on their ability to benefit. Third, I wanted to understand the consequences of Shipibo healing practices being adopted by outsiders, for the relationships between humans and plant beings. Lastly, through my own embodied praxis I wanted to reflexively explore how I could work

in Shipibo communities and learn from plants as an outsider and researcher in a way that was *jakon*—a Shipibo word translating to *good*, but which literally means *toward life*.

In order to address these questions, this dissertation follows two related tendrils, each with their own complex networks of relations, as ayahuasca is commodified and consumed globally. These two trajectories are neither separate nor linear; indeed, I have found them to be irreconcilably entwined. First, I examine how relationships between plants and humans shift and show that these shifts affect the ability of plants to act in the world. Secondly, I describe how Shipibo healers and communities interact with outsiders. At different times, these outsiders have been conquistadors, missionaries, colonists, timber corporations, and tourists. Both of these sets of relations shape material wealth, social power, and concepts of indigeneity in Ucayali. I frame these relations among people, plants, worlds, and ideas, as constituted through practices and mediated by forms of exchange. I explore each of these tendrils at times separately and at others simultaneously through attending to practices performed by both plant beings and humans (plant-human practices) as they transform through time, space, and cultural milieu.

Following other scholars of the ontological turn in the social sciences (de la Cadena 2015; Kohn 2013; Blaser 2014), I aim to take Indigenous ontologies seriously. As such, I view the participation of other-than-human entities in Shipibo healing practices as not just symbolic; plant-human relations have real effects on the world. In my dissertation I provide examples of how these healing practices enact worlds in which nonhuman beings, together with humans, participate (Apffel-Marglin 2011). Thus, I show that healing practices—specifically ayahuasca ceremonies, singing *ikaros*, and dieting plants (*samá*)—are interspecies worldmaking practices. I also approach my own writing as a worldmaking practice, which can either open or close ontological possibilities from the realm of analysis (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018). While not trying to delineate the bounds or existence of worlds to which I may not have access, I attend to the worldmaking practices performed by plant beings and humans (Blaser 2014). Specifically, I follow practices associated with the production of ayahuasca, from harvesting to trade (Chapter 3); practices associated with healing, like ceremony, singing, and dieting (Chapter 4); practices associated with research and Indigenous ways of knowing (Chapter 5); and community-based forest management (Chapter 6).

Scholars studying the globalization of ayahuasca tend to focus on the new cultural forms and practices of shamanism that have been adopted as ayahuasca spreads within and outside of the Amazon from an anthropological perspective (Taussig 1987; Labate 2014; Labate and Cavnar 2011; Tupper 2009; Fotiou 2016; Brabec de Mori 2014; Talin and Sanabria 2017). This global phenomenon has not been investigated with attention to the socionatural transformations, interspecies relations, and reconfigurations of power that occur as ayahuasca and Amazonian healing practices are adopted and adapted by global consumers. While I draw from anthropological texts and concepts, I use a political ecology and interspecies approach—examining the ways that nature, economy, and more-than-human identities are co-constituted through terrains of power. I show the ways in which ayahuasca has woven itself into various cultural contexts, and how its socionatural relations have shifted along the way. To structure my arguments I often use examples and counterexamples to illustrate difference or change and to anchor the poles of the tensions I describe. This sometimes involves deploying strong binaries between Indigenous and outsider, especially when I draw attention to how power operates and is reconfigured in these processes. I then attempt to complicate these dichotomies to show nuance, variation, and complexity. While recognizing that these binaries and dichotomies are often fictional and certainly mixed and entangled, they are useful analytic tools for amplifying and making visible certain forms and patterns of interest.

Ayahuasca offers a poignant and timely case for understanding how powerful and culturally important nonhuman beings participate in shaping more-than-human social worlds and economies. The ayahuasca economy in some ways is a departure from the previous extractive economies in the Amazon (Chapter 2). In other ways, it operates within the same system of power in which plants are objectified as resources. As ayahuasca is enrolled in capitalist systems as a commodity for exchange, however, its pathways of circulation do not conform to usual routes of trade. I trace the pathways through which ayahuasca's component plants circulate to demonstrate that plants themselves play important roles in shaping their own commodity networks (Chapter 3). I argue that the ecological, physiological, and social relations in which ayahuasca participates shape the particularities of the ayahuasca economy and its trajectory of commodification.

Ayahuasca as a commodity is relatively unique in the way that Indigenous healing practices have accompanied ayahuasca's global circulation. Healing practices in turn shift as they are adapted and translated into the Western milieu (Chapter 4). I use the concept of recontextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990b) to understand the consequences of outsiders adopting and adapting Shipibo healing practices. Recontextualization allows us to see how practices transform as the frame of reference (context) changes, and certain elements are left behind while others take on new meanings. Recontextualization first requires decontextualization, allowing for a more universally consumable product (Bauman and Briggs 2003). I show that the ayahuasca complex and Shipibo healing practices in more-than-Shipibo contexts are co-constituted by the emergent social relations between plants, healers, and outsiders.

As outsiders increasingly determine the frame of operation for Shipibo healing practices (Freedman 2014), power, knowledge, and healing tend to be more "humanized" as opposed to emerging primarily through relations with plant spirits. Plant agency, in turn is often construed as a byproduct or side effect of the plant's material or chemical properties; a reductionist understanding of plants precludes plants (and their spirits) from certain types of socionatural interactions and relations. I argue that the exclusion of plant spirits from social relations constricts the social agency of the plant spirits, and thereby limits the co-constitution of relational worlds in and through which plant spirits are animated. I argue that this aspect of the recontextualization of healing practices has resulted in a de-animation of plant spirits, while the power attributed to humans increases. This has helped allow ayahuasca to become a commodity and object of analysis, with a diminished role as a being with its own ability to act, teach, and heal. The specific role of the healers as critical interlocutors at multiple points in the enactment of these relations is also diminished as the spiritual power of the healers is routed through economic mechanisms. At the same time, new types of relations between plants and outsiders emerge through recontextualized healing practices, creating ontological openings toward worlds in which plants and plant spirits *do* act, teach, and heal.

Ayahuasca tourism *does* represent a shift from previous relations between Shipibo and outsiders, which, since the colonial period, were founded on resource extraction, exploitative labor relations, and religious oppression (see Chapter 1). However, these relations are still embedded in the ongoing coloniality that has dominated Ucayali since Spanish colonization (Quijano 2000). Histories of Indigenous enslavement and exploitation that powered extractive industries in the Amazon have constructed racialized hierarchies that still govern Indigenous lives and livelihoods (Chapter 2). As such, ongoing structural racism linked with the extraction of natural resources continues to limit Shipibo healers in benefitting from the commodification of ayahuasca and ayahuasca ceremonies. I show that within present-day commodity networks formed around ayahuasca, Indigenous healers are increasingly construed as replaceable and redundant, and are

sometimes valued more for their labor and representation of indigeneity than they are for their ability to command spirits or their knowledge of plants (Chapter 4). Furthermore, demands of foreign consumers for translation and comfort have made it so that healing centers catering to tourists are expected to offer a more “luxury experience” than many Shipibo healers are able to provide, as was the case with Papa Beso and Rawa in the opening vignette.

I look critically at discourses on healing and indigeneity and how certain narratives influence the relations among outsider participants, plant beings, and Shipibo healers. I show that individualized views of healing and the body, along with materialist and reductionist ways of understanding plants, limit plant-human relations and their ability to co-create worlds in which both participate (Chapter 4). This also shifts the social power of Shipibo healers whose expertise lies in navigating relations with plant spirits. Scientific practices are also responsible for the ways that knowledge about plants, healing, and bodies, are constructed and legitimated, historically devaluing Indigenous ways of knowing. I explore the breadth of research practices used to know ayahuasca and argue that Indigenous methods offer important ways of knowing and relating that are not available through science or social science methodologies (Chapter 5). I further examine how researchers, including myself, also contribute to the objectification of plants and Indigenous peoples. I explore how some of these hierarchies may be problematized by following Indigenous methods and participatory community engagement, through one of the projects I helped facilitate in a Shipibo community (Chapter 6).

Relating with ayahuasca through Indigenous practices offers important and powerful methods of disrupting hierarchy and understanding one’s own humanity—this is one reason Shipibo healing practices have become so popular. However, when healing only flows in one direction, when plants become capitalist commodities, and when Indigenous healers become wage laborers, we need to consider who is benefitting the most from ayahuasca’s global popularity. I draw distinctions around the tensions between capital, development, and ayahuasca, illuminating which elements of this process reinscribe colonial relations, as well as ways that some of these dynamics are disrupted. Though ayahuasca can offer powerfully transformative experiences for outsiders who seek it, I argue that ethical interspecies and intercultural healing must extend beyond the individual’s process, and into the socionatural networks and systems in which one participates.

ANIMACY, EXTRACTION, AND HEALING: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE

The literature that I engage with is framed at the intersection of three broad theoretical conversations. First, my work engages with multispecies/interspecies literature in political ecology and anthropology that focuses on how nonhumans or other-than-humans contribute to social and political affairs, and how they engage in practices that enact their own worlds. Many of these conversations have emerged within feminist and STS (Science, Technology, and Society) discourses. The concept of the pluriverse acknowledges the existence of multiple worlds, co-constituted through relational practices, as a way of validating difference on its own terms. These worlds are considered to be partially overlapping, and engaged in political struggles for their own existence that play out in the material field across more-than-human assemblages. I view materialisms diffracted through multiple cosmovisions, cosmopolitics, and versions of history. Thus, drawing from Shipibo worldviews, I bring to the interspecies literature an examination of how plant spirits, and not just the material aspects of plants, participate in social worlds.

Secondly, I engage with theories from political ecology on extraction and the commodification of nature. I use theories of value, exchange, and extraction from feminist

geography, postcolonial and Latin American studies, and Amazonian anthropology. I see extraction as a process of primitive accumulation and capitalist expansion that fuels global environmental inequalities and coloniality while also expanding the regional control of powerful governing bodies including the state, transnational corporations, and illicit networks. Drawing from feminist and postcolonial theories, I trouble these powerful actors and processes to attend to spaces of resistance, and the ways that capitalisms cannot fully enclose or explain the outcomes we see. I see power structures in Latin America, and particularly the Amazon, as built on racialized hierarchies fueled by extraction. I bring to this conversation a multispecies approach that views natural beings (in this case, plants) not just as resources, but as animate subjects. Plant beings have their own networks of relations, which affect the resulting trajectory of commodification. Indeed, I argue that by attending to commodity networks around these plants the influence of the plants themselves (both materially and relationally) are made visible.

Finally, I draw on conversations from feminist and Indigenous studies literature to specifically address topics relevant to the negotiation between worlds across power asymmetries. I draw on conversations from feminist STS on boundary objects (Star and Griesemer 1989; Bowker and Star 2000) to conceptualize ayahuasca as a *boundary being*—a being with significance in multiple worlds, though its meanings and role shifts. I also draw from literature on liminality and hybridity in conversation with feminist and Indigenous scholarship for understanding how ideas, beings, and practices transform as they transit between worlds. Feminist approaches emphasize the importance of praxis, embodiment, and situated knowledges, which places the researcher as an important subject of inquiry in any academic work, and it brings to the forefront questions of identity, embodiment, and theories of relationality. To these conversations, I bring interspecies concepts to show how more-than-human relations as embodied praxis are also engaged in healing and learning. Embodied relational practices between plants and humans serve to co-constitute human subjectivities and plant spirits, and enact a world in which both participate.

THE ANIMACY OF PLANTS & PLANT SPIRITS

The ability of plant beings to act in and influence the social worlds of humans is common in Indigenous Amazonian ontologies (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1998; Descola 1994; Kohn 2013), where ayahuasca is both a healer and a teacher and has its own subjectivity. Surprisingly, however, ayahuasca is widely regarded across cultural boundaries (even among some Western scientists) as possessing a spirit capable of communicating and acting (Harris and Gurel 2012; Gagliano 2018). Indeed, during ethnographic work at the World Ayahuasca Conference in 2016, I observed that most scholars on the subject across disciplines spoke of ayahuasca as animate and/or inspirited. I have argued elsewhere that excluding plant spirits from academic discourse and analysis is actually damaging, as it perpetuates a division between Indigenous “belief” and academic knowledge production (Dev 2018). Therefore, this analysis views ayahuasca as an interspecies and intercultural matter, and engages with Shipibo ontologies that consider ayahuasca to be an inspirited plant being with animacy and agency. Plant agency has been discussed and shown by a variety of scholars (Marder 2013; Gagliano et al. 2014; Hartigan 2019). I build on these discussions to make visible the ways that plant agency appears and manifests itself relationally with humans, in not only material ways.

When I say that ayahuasca is a *plant being*, I mean that although it is made from plant materials and cooked into a tea, it is also a *being* with its own spirit and social relations. Therefore, sometimes I use the word *ayahuasca* to refer to all of these aspects of ayahuasca, which should

not necessarily be separated. Similarly, I sometimes refer to *plants* in a way that collapses material and spiritual distinctions. This is in the same respect that many of my interlocutors use these terms. For instance, in the quote by Rawa below, you can see that his conception of “plants” moves fluidly between speaking of them as material and spiritual beings, and that the two are not always distinguishable:

My first diet was with Noya Rao¹⁰ when I was 15, for three months. And with more strength and more strength I felt the energy of the plants in my body, and I liked the energies, as if there was a spirit in my body. I finished my 3 months of diet and then I dieted other plants as well, for energy. All plants have their energy. I like it. It is good to have strength. In ceremonies, to heal people that are ill. And so, I practiced things, learning to sing the icaros, I continued practicing with the plants. I was taught. About plants, about Noya Rao. The plants taught me. They were teaching me knowledge.

For clarity, I attempt when possible to draw distinctions between plants (as material specimens) and plant spirits (their mothers, owners, or *ibo*). However, there are times when these distinctions may be collapsed, and I try to then refer to it as a *plant being*, or in some cases, as in the above quote, simply *plant*.

I use the word “animacy” after Mel Chen (2012), who theorizes animacy as a hierarchical and shifting property beyond an animate/inanimate categorization. Chen refers to animacy as an organization of matter according to a relative ranking of liveliness. This is related to but distinct from the way that I use “agency” as the ability to act or effect outcomes. Animacy is a linguistic concept. According to Chen, the attribution of animacy happens discursively, and is a deeply political matter. Animacy is also entangled with conceptions of race, ability, and sexuality, and helps determine how different subjects, human and nonhuman, are recognized and “mattered” (Chen 2012, 10). I define “animating” as the imbuing of life or liveliness in something, allowing for agency, selfhood, and the recognition of the worldmaking capacities of other-than-humans. I suggest that relation-forming (and worldmaking) practices have animating capacity, as well as the capacity to de-animate through social and discursive relations. For instance, Shipibo healing practices are able to animate plant spirits through the human body, while simultaneously, plants are able to animate the human body. This is manifest in the singing of *ikaros*, songs that are collaborations between plant and human agency. Animation happens both discursively and through relational practices (Stengers 2018). Therefore, my own writing praxis also has the ability to animate plants, and I attempt to do so throughout this dissertation.

The beings, forms of life, and types of humans that are granted animacy and agency in political and scientific discourse is in part determined through what Michel Foucault (1978) called biopower, the techniques of exercising control over the population and labor force through discursive categorization, science, statistics, and disciplinary institutions that render humans biological. Elizabeth Povinelli (2016) offers the term “geontopower” as a form of discursive power beyond biopower, which determines what does or does not constitute “life” in the first place. This is in recognition of the fact that many Indigenous peoples relate with rocks, glaciers, mountains, and weather patterns as living and inspirited kin, and that mechanistic science and state institutions have exercised power over Indigenous worlds by strategically denying life to those beings—de-animating them. This allows them to be exploited and turned into commodities (Povinelli 2016). Naming and troubling these categories of living/non-living that have been naturalized and taken for granted is in the vein of longstanding critiques of science like those of Carolyn Merchant (1980)

¹⁰ Noya Rao is a teacher tree.

with *The Death of Nature*, with regard to the way that mechanistic science was involved with the de-animation of the natural world, and the division of nature into hierarchical categories separate from human culture.

As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, agency and animation, or “desire,” do not belong to the individual, but only arise as heterogeneous components come together in an assemblage; thus, the agency belongs to the assemblage itself. Following their conception, I view agency as an emergent relational property that is characterized by the ability to act. Though sometimes intentionality is used as a determinant of agency, I use a definition of agency that is independent of intentionality. Alfred Gell (1998) and other anthropologists have explored *social* agency through heuristically employing the worship of “idols,” when a nonliving object is treated as person-like or continuous with sociality. These idols possess a social agency insofar as they are able to affect the actions or behaviors of those that relate socially with them. Thus, the agency of the idol manifests relationally through the practices of the worshipper. Idols then lose power when they no longer have authority over peoples’ behaviors. The traditional view is to see idol worshipping as originating in human agency, with the idol being a “passive agent,” enmeshed with human agency through these social relations. When agency is understood as an emergent relational property, it is instead seen as co-constituted between the idol, the worshipper, and myriad other relational components. In this conceptualization, it is impossible to disentangle the agency of the idol from the agency of the human and the other elements in the assemblage. The ability to act then depends on one’s position within a network of social relations (Gell 1998). In the case of plants and plant spirits, it is tempting to view their agency as only routed through human beliefs and actions. This is only one way that the animacy of plant beings can be made visible. However, plants and plant spirits, as living ecological beings and “selves,” are also entangled in their own networks of more-than-human relations through which agency emerges. Furthermore, social agency is not the only type of agency. The materialities of “things” also have their own types of relations and corresponding effects on the world.

The recognition of matter as animate and agentive is part of greater conversations in the ontological turn, and specifically “new materialisms,” coming from scholars in the humanities and social sciences. New materialisms are characterized by an effort to think with the liveliness of matter, both living and nonliving, and recognize the power of material things *beyond* discursive representation (Bennett 2010). These theories seek to overcome the nature/culture divide that has plagued Western thought. For example, Bruno Latour and others in STS have developed actor-network theory, recognizing “actants” of all sorts as symmetrical agents (Latour 2005). These include things like laboratory equipment and materials of study, in addition to humans. Jane Bennett (2010) has taken the idea of “thing power” to understand the ways in which matter and “things” have the capacity to act in the world, interact with each other, and affect human affairs.

New materialisms have been part of a posthumanist effort to decenter the human in analyses, and trouble the category of *human* in relation to its *others* (Braidotti 2013; Margulies and Bersaglio 2018). Donna Haraway’s cyborg, for instance, offers us a way of understanding relationships in which humans and other-than-humans are so muddled and mutually infused that human nature itself is brought into question (Haraway 1991). As such, human bodies are not essentially different from other things, but also exercise thing power as part of the substance of the world. Posthuman studies and new materialisms generally have been criticized for not dealing with race (Tompkins 2016). Black feminist scholarship of the posthuman, however, has been particularly fruitful with regard to troubling racialized assemblages. For example, Alexander Weheliye and Sylvia Wynter have each shown how the discursive categorization of human and

nonhuman, or “not-quite-human” is part of the coloniality of power that has contributed to racial hierarchies that continue to shape global geopolitics (Weheliye 2014; Wynter 2003). Chen’s (2012) work also serves to disrupt some of the categorizations and hierarchical forms that have become entrenched in dominant discourse.

Also working to decenter the human in social analyses has been a large body of work emerging in the last decade on multispecies and interspecies worlds. Such work explores more-than-human social relations, economies, and cultural forms, and the ways that nonhumans are actively engaged in their own world-making activities (Kohn 2013; Tsing 2015; Haraway 2008; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010). However, multispecies ethnographies have struggled to truly decenter the human in such analyses, and to move beyond human representations of or speculations about the nonhuman on the one hand, and scientific study that relies on experimentation in response to stimuli on the other. Eduardo Kohn shows compellingly in *How Forests Think* how other-than-human beings, including “spirit masters,” can also be considered *selves* with agency and animacy. He defines *selves* as “waypoints in the lives of signs,” or “loci of enchantment” (Kohn 2013, 90). In response to the new materialisms, Kohn argues that is dangerous to treat *nonhumans* as a generic category because other selves are relationally constituted, and therefore have specificity; how they understand and represent *us*, in this case matters. For Kohn, *things* that are also selves exhibit a different kind of agency beyond “thing power” on the one hand or Latour’s “actants” on the other. That is, other selves do not just affect the world, but they have their own ways of *representing* the world that are not dependent on human spokespersons (Kohn 2013). Kohn demonstrates these representations with a semiotic analysis of interspecies interactions—that is, based on signs interpretable beyond the human, rather than on linguistic constructs.

Scholars have increasingly focused on the agency of nonhuman beings in charting their own courses and influencing material outcomes within economic networks, through their more-than-human relations (Mitchell 2002; Kohn 2013; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010). My framework is similar to, but also divergent from that of multispecies ethnographies like Anna Tsing’s (2015) exposition on the social worlds of matsutake mushrooms. Tsing follows global commodity circuits of matsutake to understand how their material, ecological, and social relations create certain economic and cultural institutions around them (Tsing 2015). I follow her approach to a storied and multifaceted social existence of nonhumans through their economic networks and relations. On the other hand, I also take into account the spiritual and intersubjective dimensions of ayahuasca, particularly through healing practices that animate plant spirits. In my analyses, I illuminate ayahuasca’s agency through its more-than-human relation-forming practices, which, I argue, are evident in its ecologies and patterns of economic circulation.

Though much of the multispecies/interspecies turn has focused on animals, vegetal agency has recently received a flurry of interest from scholars in the philosophy of science (e.g. Marder 2013; Hartigan 2019; Segundo-Ortin and Calvo 2018) and cultural and environmental anthropology (e.g. Natasha Myers 2015; Boke 2019; Schulthies 2019). This has occurred in dialogue with plant scientists who study plant cognition and behavior. These works analyze the ways in which plants sense, communicate, and interact with their worlds to show that plants are capable of learning (Gagliano et al. 2014), sensing (Segundo-Ortin and Calvo 2018), decision-making (Hodge 2009) and communicating (even with other species) through chemical expressions (Dicke and Bruin 2001). These scholars have shown that the animacy and agency of plants is quite obvious when one attends to their ecological behaviors and interactions. Ayahuasca presents a fairly unique case thus far in multispecies literature, as chemically these plants communicate directly with human and mammalian brains in ways that are unmistakably alien to ordinary thought

(Callicott 2013), and the resulting visions are often described by Shipibo healers and outsiders alike as opening up the worlds of the plants.

Nonhuman subjectivity and affective relations remains an area of epistemic murk, because of the near impossibility at understanding the subjectivity of an *other*. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's (1998) perspectivism offers a view on Amazonian ontologies in which personhood is a property of most living beings. That is, from each being's own subjective experience, what Phillippe Descola (2013) calls "interiority," they consider themselves to be human. In the Shipibo language, for example, *human* and *animal* are relational words in the same way as *uncle* or *you* or *I* or *food* are relational words in English (Kohn 2013). One of the features of Amazonian perspectivism is that the world one occupies differs based on the type of body one inhabits (Viveiros de Castro 1998), their "physicality" (Descola 2013). Indeed, Descola (2013) argues that "naturalism" is a Eurocentric assumption that we all occupy the same world and yet have different subjective experiences, in contrast to "animism," in which the subjective experience is similar, and the world differs.

For my Shipibo interlocutors, the selfhood or subjectivity of a plant belongs to the plant's spirit or spirit master (the *ibo*). The world of the plant spirit is a different one than the world humans live in; though the two worlds may overlap, their reference points are different. What I see as a forest, the plant spirit sees as a garden, for example. The individual plant specimens in the forest are considered to be material extensions of that plant spirit, or domesticated plants of the plant spirit's garden. Through shamanic techniques, the agency of the plant may be "abducted," in which the human is able to occupy the perspective of the plant spirit (Viveiros de Castro 2004a; Brabec de Mori 2012a). In essence, this is a practice by which the plant spirit's subjectivity is constituted. Kohn considers the spirit masters of the forest (analogous to the Shipibo *ibo*) as an "emergent real" that is not just culturally or socially constructed: "one must be willing to say something general about what makes spirits real—something that includes but also goes beyond the fact that other people take them to be real, that we should take that fact seriously, and that we should even be open to how these kinds of reals might affect us" (Kohn 2013, 217). Thus, though spirits emerge through (more-than-) human practices, they are not constrained to those practices, and acquire their own life with their own relations and ability to interact with other selves.

The pluriverse, or the concept that there are many different (though partially connected) worlds, is a conceptual framework proposed by scholars involved in emerging conversations on political ontology (e.g. de la Cadena and Blaser 2018; Escobar 2018; Law 2015; Stengers 2010) as an analytic tool. This conceptual framing has the ability to work across both species and cultural lines and acknowledges how practices constitute and articulate across worlds. According to Stengers (2018), practices are characteristic of the way worlds are *mattered*, and indicate the values the practitioners commit to. Political ontology stretches beyond the realm of political ecology, to view some political and ecological conflicts as at their root caused by ontological tensions or antagonisms (Blaser 2013b), which result from fundamental differences or contradictions across worlds. Rather than attending to cultural differences as a way to explain why Indigenous peoples think the way they do about "the world," political ontology seeks to use cultural difference to trouble hegemonic conceptions of the world. Attending to ways of being, doing, and relating that create different ontological openings, thus offers possibilities for alternative futures. Still, Chandler and Reid (2018) caution that arguments in favor of taking Indigenous ontologies seriously may unwittingly colonize those worlds when the primary purpose is understanding what Indigenous ontologies can teach the "moderns" (Latour 2013) about *better* ways of being during

times of ecological crisis. Instead, they argue, a more decolonial engagement with Indigenous peoples and worlds would take up a true concern with Indigenous struggles and rights.

My approach aligns with that of Marisol de la Cadena's in *Earth Beings* (2015), in which she elaborates the political life of earth beings, the mountains or rather, *tirakuna*, that are relationally constituted through her Andean interlocutors. Following Strathern (2005), for de la Cadena, earth beings and her interlocutors live in worlds that are partially connected to her own world and the world of the Peruvian state; her work focuses on processes of translation between those worlds. I draw from de la Cadena's approach to controlled equivocations, after Viveiros de Castro (2004b), to refer to a practice of probing translations to reveal the ways that worlds diverge or diffract from one another (Blaser 2018). This approach is opposed to seeking coherence and unity, but finds consonance in accepting radical alterity between worlds, and recognizing that the meanings of concepts translated between worlds often mutually exceed one another. Thus, according to de la Cadena's ethnographic concept of ontological openings, *tirakuna* are mountains, but *not only* that.

On the other hand, de la Cadena writes little about her own relationship with the earth beings whose relations she studies. Rather, her relationship with earth beings is mediated by her relations with her human interlocutors and her writing practice (de la Cadena 2015). In contrast, direct relationships with plant beings through learning Shipibo practices has been important for my work. While I do not claim to know in the same way, or to know the same things as my Shipibo interlocutors, my own interspecies practices inform and enrich my project, and also serve to disrupt the divide between "Indigenous beliefs" and "Western knowledge." While not explaining away alterity or differences between worlds, I am also engaging with worldmaking practices that create their own ontological openings toward worlds otherwise. I suggest, along with others, that Indigenous practices, methodologies, and ways of knowing are better suited to address plant subjectivity and the animacy of plant spirits than the tools of academia and science. Indigenous scholars have increasingly critiqued Euro-American progenitors of the ontological and multispecies turn, many of whom use ideas regarding the animacy of nonhuman beings without crediting the long history of Indigenous thought and scholarship to which the animacy of the natural world has been essential (Todd 2016; TallBear 2011; Watts 2013). Indigenous methods and theories have long precedent for engaging and relating with the more-than-human world. Many Indigenous peoples relate with diverse natural beings as kin or ancestors who are enlivened with spirit, and thus not simply *actants* (Watts 2013; Todd 2015). Relations beyond the human have been described as important by Indigenous scholars from many different peoples in North America (Todd 2016; Kimmerer 2015; Hoover 2017; TallBear 2011; Watts 2013; Manning 2011; Whyte 2013), South America (Favaron and Gonzales 2019), and Australia (Martin and Mirraboopa 2003). An ethos of more-than-human connection is central to Indigenous relationality, which according to Kim Tallbear, co-constitutes more-than-human identities (TallBear 2017). Indigenous conceptions of life and animacy, she argues, are better able to "enfold" the concepts of spirits into the realm of more-than-human beings and actors (TallBear 2017).

EXTRACTION, SPACES OF DEATH, AND MORE-THAN-HUMAN ECONOMIES

We live in a time on earth in which very few things could be said to be beyond the reach of the "extractive gaze" (Gómez-Barris 2017). That is, the way that the living and animate world has been reduced to labor, resources, commodities, and the production of capital (Castree 2003). Extraction of plant and Indigenous vitality was perpetuated by colonial agents, turning everything

they could into power for the empire. In Latin America, this continues to play out in an ever present racialized coloniality that fuels extractive capitalism (Quijano 2000). The Amazon, as one of the most biodiverse bioregions on the planet, has been construed as a particularly abundant source of resources and commodities, and its economy has thus been centered on extraction. Europeans first came to the Amazon in search of gold and cinnamon, and ended up also finding cinchona, rubber, and timber; these plant commodities were all important in fueling the expansion of empire (Schiebinger 2009).

Meanwhile, Indigenous peoples of the Amazon have been exploited, enslaved and indebted for their labor. They have alternately been portrayed as savages in need of civilizing, or as possessing magical healing capabilities because of their connections with the forest and the plants therein. Michael Taussig (1987) argues that these two tropes of Amazonian peoples are fundamentally related, and that both serve to place Indigenous peoples in contrast to Western conceptions of superiority. Even within the ineffable terror and healing of the ayahuasca experience, Taussig argues that its commodification plays into the familiar exploitation of Indigenous peoples, which fetishizes and exoticizes indigeneity as something that is subject to both scrutiny and possession by foreigners (Taussig 1987).

Taussig's (1987) famous work on traditional healing in the Sibundoy Valley of Colombia argues that the ayahuasca experience (called *yage* in Colombia), operates within a "space of death" that relies on drawing power from colonial and extractive history. In particular, Sibundoy shamans draw magical power from the figure of the "lowland shaman." The magic and wildness of the lowland shamans were constructed by both colonial agents, and the "civilized Indians" of the highlands that were Taussig's interlocutors, in part through drawing on the memory of what befell the lowland Indians during the violence of the rubber boom. Thus, in complex intellectual maneuvers, Taussig demonstrates that the power of healing, though drawn from Indigenous forms of power, is dependent on colonial histories or memories appropriated for present-day uses. Oftentimes, Taussig explained, these Sibundoy shamans were healing colonists and white people who were plagued by modernity. Thus, Taussig shows that the magic power of the "wild Indians," constituted by colonialism, is then used toward the healing of outsiders whose illnesses are generated from those same colonial processes.

I draw on Taussig's work heavily in this dissertation, and I do not disagree with his assessment of how magic and healing can be extracted and appropriated to serve dominant cultures. However, the Shipibo are different from the Sibundoy Valley shamans, particularly in that the Shipibo are "lowland Indians" themselves. Thus, their shamanic power is not drawn from the images of wildness projected on others whose magic they appropriate.¹¹ The "other world" for Taussig's interlocutors, was the world of the dead (Taussig 1987, 374). For the Shipibo, there are four worlds. Only one of these is occupied by spirits of the dead, and is interestingly, sometimes translated as *the world of sin*. Shamanic power is not drawn from that world, the world of illness, but from the other worlds populated by other types of spirits. Shipibo healing power is particularly

¹¹ This is not to say that the Shipibo do not construct their identities in opposition to other types of more remote or "wild" tribes. I and others have observed this (Gow 1993). However, these "others" are not perceived by the Shipibo to be sources of spiritual, magical, or shamanic power. That is reserved for forest entities, as well as the Chaikuni—forest beings who used to be humans like the Shipibo, but who retreated from the material world to live in the spirit realm. If anything, the Chaikuni could replace the "huitotos" or wild Indians of Taussig's account. However, the Chaikuni did not share the colonial fate of the huitotos that Taussig draws on to substantiate his claims that these powers were derived from colonial history. Therefore, that is not my argument.

drawn from the spirits of the plants that grow in the lowland Amazon regions, and reside in the *good world* (*jakon nete*), the world that is *toward life*. Shipibo conceptions of power are especially (compared with other Indigenous groups) linked with the plant beings over other types of spirits or entities. Taussig does not discuss plants extensively, as plant spiritual power was not as important for his interlocutors, the shamans of the highlands who reportedly acquired their plants, practices, and power, from lowland shamans.

For Taussig, the space of death was inextricably linked to life—it is a space of uncertainty, disorder, and terror, with the power to revive and empower new life (Taussig 1987, 374). It was also a colonially-constructed place, which further served to colonize and maintain hegemony. This image, similar to that of the *extractive gaze*, creates a powerful way of understanding how even transformative spaces can be simultaneously put to use to maintain the colonial order or the stability of dominant culture. This same sort of paradox is central to many of the themes I explore in this dissertation. However, my approach is different. Plant beings are central to the Shipibo healing process in a way that is interconnected with, but not necessarily dependent on, colonial forms of power. As such, I draw on Shipibo concepts to investigate the ways in which these plant beings *do* work toward life and constitute new forms of power, even while acknowledging that death and coloniality are also key mediators of these processes.

Marxist theories on the commodification of nature are useful for understanding the relations between capitalism, nature, and labor, and the inequalities that arise therein (Marx 1976; Castree 2003). However, *commodification* and *nature* are often unquestioned terms that do not always function homogeneously (Castree 2003). I see ayahuasca as a socionatural commodity with spiritual, cultural, and material aspects, which itself is engaged with and constitutive of the economies in which it circulates. *Socionatural* is a term coined by Erik Swyngedouw (1999) to represent the way that natural resources and society are co-constituted through both biophysical and socio-economic processes. This framework is critical of perspectives that separate social and natural processes, and is in contrast to social constructionist approaches to the “production of nature” that tend to ignore the importance of materiality and the contribution of nonhuman entities as historical, political, and geographical agents (Bakker and Bridge 2006; Castree 1995). Socionatural approaches emphasize that what are often taken as “natural” entities are simultaneously material and ontological, and are also produced and reproduced epistemologically and politically.

Many works in political ecology have discussed at length how the commodification of diverse socionatural entities is often incomplete, and characterized by a certain resistance to commodification (e.g. Bakker 2000; Peluso 2012; Tsing 2015; de la Cadena 2010). Tsing (2005) called these resistances “friction,” and described how commodifying processes form grooves through which commodities, capital, and power travel. Ayahuasca’s commodification process has been less smooth or linear than, say, rubber or cinchona, previous forest products extracted from the Amazon. It displays “unruly” behavior as a commodity (George 1999), which I argue is due to its particular *relations* with humans. I describe the ayahuasca economy as not only more-than-human, but also as a more-than-capitalist economy (Henderson 2013), which is shaped by the tensions and resistances brought into relief as ayahuasca and its plants and practices are pulled into commodity relations. Arjun Appadurai (1986b) argues that in order to understand the essence of a commodity, one must follow not just the relations of production, but also the relational practices governing exchange, valuation, and consumption. By looking at these relations, and the particular journey of commodification, I suggest ayahuasca’s own influence within its relational network may be revealed.

Karl Polanyi described fictitious commodities as commodities that are not originally produced for exchange (Polanyi 1944). This refers specifically to the proclivity of extractive capitalisms to enclose land, labor, and money into the form of commodities that can then be bought, sold, traded, and used to gain more capital. Without certain resistances or countermovements, these commodities will eventually be destroyed. Polanyi in turn theorized “double movements” as the ways that societies will continually devise new regulatory structures in response to the commodification of culturally important fictitious commodities, like labor and land, within an unregulated market system (Polanyi 1944). Ayahuasca and its ceremonies, like many socionatural commodities, can be thought of as fictitious commodities that are enfolded into commodity relations. Nancy Peluso makes the point that new culturally important things being converted into commodities should not be surprising, as this has been happening since the beginning of capitalism, despite the resistances that inevitably ensue (Peluso 2012). Peluso argues that it is more a matter of *when* and *how* rather than *whether* or *why* something will become commodified. Nonetheless, the specificities of the commodification process and the tensions that arise are not predetermined and may encode important information about the commodity and its relations within a particular conjunctural moment (Peluso 2012).

Extractivism is one way by which contemporary colonial processes continue to exert their influence on Indigenous territories and ontologies, specifically by advancing what some scholars are calling a *one-world world* (Law 2015). Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser define this as, “a world that has granted itself the right to assimilate all other worlds and, by presenting itself as exclusive, cancels possibilities for what lies beyond its limits” (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018, 3). Indigenous spiritual practices and entities have long been subjects of contestation, resistance, and contradiction with regard to commodification and extraction. In particular, de la Cadena draws attention to the ways that the one-world world forecloses the possibility of the existence of earth beings, the natural beings that populate Indigenous worlds, and thereby excludes them as political actors (de la Cadena 2010; 2015). She is attentive to colonial histories and the ongoing coloniality facing the worlds of Indigenous Peruvians and earth beings in the face of extractive capitalism. On the other hand, she sees the inclusion of earth beings in allied human-nature resistance to extraction as indicative of an Indigenous resurgence, with the capacity of disrupting hegemonic practices and worldviews. Ayahuasca is a different type of earth being than de la Cadena’s *tirakuna*/mountain, but similar arguments can be applied when thinking about how it has come to be involved with Indigenous political movements.

Macarena Gómez-Barris (2017) has suggested that there are *submerged perspectives* that exist below the reach of the extractive gaze, and that provide places of hope and resistance alongside and within zones of extractive capitalism. For example, Gómez-Barris describes her experience of altered perception at a retreat center in Peru’s sacred valley as an opening, even if it occurred within the extractive relations and overdetermined experiences that have made Andean spirituality a tourist commodity. This concept of submerged perspectives aptly describes one of ayahuasca’s paradoxes. Even when the ayahuasca experience, or what I call the *ayahuasca complex* (meaning ayahuasca and the rituals and practices around it), becomes a tourist commodity, and may be problematic, it also provides access to these types of submerged perspectives that may foster resistance and hope to hegemonic conceptions of the world that see plants as inanimate resources.

Because ayahuasca is a socionatural being with particular ecological and social relationships, its commodification is different than the commodification of a ritual alone. Thus, I consider ayahuasca’s material, social, and spiritual relations to be constitutive of ayahuasca’s

economy. I describe specific tensions between economic and social processes that produce ayahuasca as a commodity, and resistance to commodification that arise from ayahuasca's relations. These relations are in part shaped by the materialities of ayahuasca itself as they interact with social and economic processes (Bakker and Bridge 2006). Here, I draw from work in geography, like Mann and Dickinson's (1978) hypothesis, in which they describe certain biophysical "obstacles" to capital development, which shape the form of agricultural economies and the social relations therein. However, these obstacles also pose opportunities for capitalist processes, investments, and appropriations (Henderson 1998). Thus, these tensions shape the resulting commodity networks and the trajectories of commodification. I use the term *resistance* as opposed to *obstacle* to indicate that these tensions are relational, and that ayahuasca is not an inert object that is acted upon by external forces. However, I do not mean it in the same way as many authors describe *resistance movements*. I use *resistance* in the way that Bakker and Bridge use it, to describe how "the materialities of resources may be sources of unpredictability, unruliness, and, in some cases, resistance to human intentions" (Bakker and Bridge 2006, 18). Bakker (2004) has also demonstrated the way that a resource, in her case water, can be "uncooperative" in the process of commodification.

I describe the ways in which ayahuasca's economy has its own particularities that arise from its emergent cultural associations, and how these in turn constitute geographies and histories. In order to make ayahuasca's commodity story explicitly more-than-human, I draw on the concept of *vitality*, conceptualized by Fernando Santos-Granero (2019; 2015) as the fundamental substance of life, which is the basic unit of exchange in Amazonian more-than-human societies. Vitality functions across species divisions, and is evident in relations like predation, which Descola, for one, has argued is central to Amazonian modes of relation (2013). In predation, one being's vitality is appropriated and metabolized, and becomes part of the vital substance of another being. Vitality is also involved in shamanic forms of exchange, which appropriate vitality from human and nonhuman (spirit) beings in order to ensure both social and natural reproduction (Santos-Granero 2019). Thus, according to Santos-Granero, vitality, "as the power to 'give life' constitutes the central component of native Amazonian political authority" (Santos-Granero 2019, 463). Thus, thinking about economies as not only defined by circulations of capital, and resources, but also as circulations of vitality, is one way that I link plant ecologies with human economies, toward a more-than-human view of economic relations.

This is part of a trend in geography of telling "commodity stories" about the production, circulation, and consumption of various "exotic" commodities in order to reveal their socio-ecological relations (Bakker and Bridge 2006). With the idea of a more-than-human economy, I explore economic difference and diversity by thinking through how ayahuasca participates in global circulations, how it is valued, the extent to which it is commodified, and the resistance it poses to these processes. This is in the tradition of J.K. Gibson-Graham, who offers the term *diverse economies* as a way of attending to economic practices that are marginalized by singular portrayals of capitalist logics. Acknowledging economic heterogeneity does not ignore larger power structures (e.g. Capitalism with a capital C), but views these power structures as relational and contingent, rather than deterministic. This leaves the door partway open for new economic possibilities and world-making (St. Martin, Roelvink, and Gibson-Graham 2015). The practice of describing diverse economies is "allowing for empirical encounters and creative expressions of the new, the unthought, the unexpected" (Gibson-Graham 2006). It also allows us to understand the submerged perspectives and *spaces of life* that offer possibilities for resistance and disruption of the extractive gaze.

NEGOTIATING WORLDS: LIMINALITY, HYBRIDITY, AND HEALING

In the United States, and elsewhere in the Global North, ayahuasca has been adopted as another tool in the belt of new age practitioners for transformation, healing, and personal growth; by psychiatrists and therapists as a powerful drug for healing trauma and addiction; by psychedelic thrill seekers as one of the extreme possibilities for otherworldly experience; by anthropologists as a fascinating Indigenous ritual. We rarely see one substance taking on such significance across diverse groups of people and cultural contexts. However, among these different communities that have relationships with ayahuasca—including scientists, Westerners or outsiders who use ayahuasca, anthropologists, and Indigenous peoples—the meanings ascribed to ayahuasca are different. Furthermore, as Labate, Cavnar, and Gearin (2017) point out, ayahuasca itself can be very difficult to define; it is at once a mixture of plants, a ritual, and a cultural construct, what I call the ayahuasca complex. This ontological slipperiness of ayahuasca is characteristic of beings that inhabit the liminal spaces between worlds, operating as mediators and negotiators during crossings.

I adapt the term *boundary object* developed by Star and Griesemer (1989) to refer to something that has significance in different worlds and communities of practice, though the interpretation and use of the object may be different. In this case, to oversimplify the matter, ayahuasca could be seen by an anthropologist as a cultural tool, by a Santo Daime practitioner as a sacrament, or by a neuroscientist as a drug. Boundary objects can be managed to create coherence across these intersecting communities of practice even without consensus (Bowker and Star 2000), through the creation of shared practices and languages (Star 2010). Though it would fit Star's framework to call ayahuasca a boundary object, part of the work of this dissertation is to amplify the ways that ayahuasca and its associated plants do not act like objects.

I posit the term *boundary being* to refer to the way that ayahuasca establishes meaning across different worlds in a political ontology or pluriverse framing. Based on Star's clarification of the boundary object concept, one often ignored feature of boundary objects is that different cooperating groups will "tack back-and-forth" between multiple forms or interpretations of the object (Star 2010, 605). This can be observed in the way that ayahuasca tourists, scientists, and healers will often alternate between speaking of ayahuasca's beingness as animate and as inanimate: as a teacher sometimes; at others as a drug, for example. Thus, *boundary being* to me represents this negotiation of animacy and agency as ayahuasca traverses between worlds. Healing practices and ceremonies can be seen as a form of infrastructure that has been created to manage ayahuasca as a boundary being between different worlds. The concept of *boundary being*, is useful because it allows us to acknowledge ayahuasca's animacy, while also acknowledging that this animacy is challenged as it forms different relational arrangements across worlds. These relational arrangements or configurations are determined through interspecies practices among plants and humans.

The concept of *subordinating objects* has been proposed by Leandro Rodriguez Medina (2013) to modify the concept of boundary objects to include how inequalities in power between worlds is also negotiated through the boundary object. Where there are power differentials between social worlds, he says, there is no boundary object, but a subordinating object. This framing is useful in describing asymmetrical negotiations as plant vitality and Indigenous labor are used toward the healing of outsiders. Thus, tensions that occur as meanings and values move between worlds are not always mutually antagonistic, but may occupy subordinating relationships. As such,

these negotiations across terrains of power mirror the delicate balance within the liminal spaces of the ayahuasca experience between spaces of life and spaces of death.

Feminist and Indigenous scholarship in particular addresses the inequalities and tensions inherent in contradictions to coherence that occur in transits between worlds. Astrith Gonzales has described these places of tension as also potentially generative:

From the spiritual world of my ancestors I receive teachings that allow me to answer to the challenges or tests that arise every day in this globalized and unequal daily life. Even though Indigenous peoples have been and continue to be discriminated against, marginalized, cornered and abused, we continue thinking and creating, feeling and loving. And if we do not lose our connection with the wisdom of our ancestors, we can teach other peoples and teach Western civilization itself that there are more beautiful and balanced ways to live on this earth, without destroying it, and respecting all living beings. Like so many other men and women of my people, we want to participate in the modern world, learn the good things it can give us, but without losing our identity. We want to contribute with our wisdom to generate a more open and less greedy and destructive society (Favaron and Gonzales 2019 my translation).

We can see from this quote how Gonzales' Indigenous identity puts her in a marginalized position with respect to the colonizing culture, but she also refers to the spiritual world of her ancestors as a source of strength and wisdom, defined in part by connections with the natural world. Negotiating between the Indigenous worlds and the colonizing/settler society, according to many Indigenous scholars, is one of the shared experiences of Indigeneity (Waters 2004; Todd 2015; Moreton-Robinson 2003; Donald 2012). Although this plays out in very context-dependent ways that should not necessarily be generalized, colonized peoples have often had to become adept at holding the ontological tensions that result from contradiction. Homi Bhabha has termed the process of integrating these ontological tensions *hybridization*, which is characterized by syncretisms, acculturation, translation, and reinterpretation during the negotiations that happen in transits between worlds (Bhabha 1994).¹²

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, an Aymara decolonial and feminist scholar from Bolivia is skeptical of hybridity with regard to the lived experience of *mestizaje*, which in Latin America refers to the mixing of Indigenous and European ancestry or culture. "The metaphor of hybridity suggests that we can 'enter and leave modernity,' as if it were a stadium or a theater, instead of a constructive process—simultaneously objective and subjective—of habits, gestures, modes of interaction, and ideas about the world" (Cusicanqui 2012, 106). Hybridity, she argues, is often stripped of its politics, and implies a harmony that obscures the difference and antagonisms that are part of *mestizaje* or, as she prefers, the Aymara word *ch'ixi*, which can also refer to a color grey formed by a mixture of both black and white dots, never with any actual grey pigment. *Ch'ixi* "expresses the parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not extinguish but instead antagonize and complement each other. Each one reproduces itself from the depths of the past and relates to others in a contentious way" (Cusicanqui 2012, 105). Dwayne Donald also cautions against an uncritical embrace of hybridity and liminality as a postcolonial logic, while also advocating for a more relational stance (Donald 2012). Hybridity, he argues, is placeless, and detracts from engagement with the actual places and lands that form the basis of spiritual connection for many aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, it serves to erase the cultural heterogeneity and historical specificity of the experience of Indigenous peoples (Donald 2012).

¹² Note, that this is different from the uses of hybridization that have been employed in STS (e.g. Latour (1993), and geography (e.g. Swyngedouw 2004).

I try to hold these poles—between liminality and specificity, symmetry and inequality—in my writing and analyses. Thus, it is from within the murky and liminal places between worlds, but also grounded in the specificities of certain places and the entangled and unequal relations therein, that this dissertation unfolds. Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) speaks of the borderlands, a space where multiple worlds or communities of practice exist in a single individual, as a space that rejects purity and singularity. Illuminating the monsters and inhabitants of the borderlands without needing to make them singular or pure or *other* requires stewing in the discomfort of the ambiguities and contradictions that arise in those spaces without following the urge to explain away or reconcile those tensions. According to Anzaldúa, accepting and understanding the monsters of the borderlands, bringing them into relation within one's identity, can provide an entry into healing (Anzaldúa 2012).

Embodiment is a key to navigating liminal spaces. In this case, the body serves as a bridge between material relations with plants, and spiritual and intersubjective relations with plant spirits to address how plant beings also constitute human subjects and sociality. Embodiment as a concept highlights the physical and material nature of life and beingness, while also centering the experiential and sensual perceptions of the situated body (Bakker and Bridge 2006; Csordas 1990). Bakker and Bridge conceptualize embodiment as an extension of Haraway's (1991) concept of situated knowledges, which asserts that all knowledge is situated within a given social and political position. It is also situated within specific bodies that are subjectively formed within social and political relations.

In understanding embodiment, healing, and the sacred, I turn to the work of M. Jacqui Alexander (2005), a feminist scholar who draws “the Sacred” into her writing through embodied and daily practice of relating with the ancestors and Orisha as a practitioner of African diaspora spiritual systems. Alexander defines spiritual work as the “lived capacity to initiate and sustain communication between spiritual forces and human consciousness, to align the inner self, the behavioral self and the invisible ...” (Alexander 2005, 328). Through her writing and praxis, she seeks to dissolve and contest the dualisms between the material and metaphysical; according to Alexander, the metaphysical is always part of the material (Alexander 2005). The body, she further reminds us, is central to healing and the knowledge of how to heal. The body serves as a central conduit through which healing occurs and travels to what she calls the *inner self*.

Healing in a spiritual sense can be seen as a set of practices that results in a transformation to one's relational subjectivity and subjective experience. The body, and in this case, the human body, becomes the site for healing and healing practices. According to Thomas Csordas (1990), embodiment as a methodological principle serves to collapse the duality between mind and matter through both practices and phenomenological experience. I view healing as a relational and transformational phenomenon that, at its best, provides ethical guidance for navigating through times or processes of disconnect, in which nature is being commodified, and human labor exploited. These are the conditions for disease within the ecology of relations. Healing, on the other hand, provides a way of understanding the body in relation to a network of more-than-human relations, toward repair and care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010)—toward life. I call this an *ethic of healing*.

Attending to relations with other species can give us new ways of understanding how to *be* in the world, or as Gerda Roelvink says, it can give us different modes of humanity (Roelvink 2013). This is in contrast to the alienation from one's *species-being*, which Karl Marx used to describe how workers under capitalism become estranged from their own “life activity.” According to Roelvink, Marx's species-being is based on social relationships with others that are

both sensuous and transformative of human subjects and bodies. Although species-being was only applied by Marx to humans, Roelvink, through Ollman (1971) extends Marx's analysis of species-being to relations beyond the human-nature binary that colored Marx's analysis. Ollman suggested, thus, that sensuous and corporeal engagement with other beings or "external nature" is the way by which species powers are appropriated or utilized constructively, through their incorporation into the human. The example Ollman gives is that through eating, the power of the piece of external nature that is eaten is intertwined in the human body. Thus, Roelvink's reading of appropriation in this context is the interdependence of the human species with other earthly beings as they "become part of, transform (and are transformed by), and thereby constitute humanity" (Roelvink 2013, 59).

Amazonian concepts of knowledge see knowledge as embodied, and the body as constructed by both human and non-human others in a social process, *through* the transfer of knowledge. Cecilia McCallum describes the body, according to the Cashinua she studied with, as a web of connections between exterior matter, speech, and knowledge in the body, as well as the manifestation of that knowledge expressed externally as action (McCallum 1996). Thus, the body extends beyond the material body, and into the web of more-than-human relations, actions, and knowledge in which the body participates. Alexander also sees the body as a vehicle for connection with spiritual entities: "The purpose of the body is to act not simply, though importantly, as an encasement of the Soul, but also as a medium of Spirit, the repository of a consciousness that derives from a source residing elsewhere ... To this end, embodiment functions as a pathway to knowledge..." (Alexander 2005, 298).

I see healing with and learning from medicinal plants as an embodied alternative to "thinking with." A direct corporeal connection between the plant's chemical expressions and the human body is made through healing practices in which the plant's vitality is appropriated by human corporeality—but this is *not only* a material relation. By ingesting, bathing in, smoking, or perfuming oneself with plant materials, the human body engages with and appropriates the plant's vitality to give rise to the self in the moment. The result of these material practices serves to animate and constitute plant spirits along with the human's subjectivity. The healing relation is centered on the way one's selfhood or *beingness* is transformed by *being with* the plant being, and this is both subjective and corporeal. Thus, the human body is a site of healing, and healing is a transformative process that occurs in this case, in relation between human beings, plants, and plant spirits. I ask, as Jacqui Alexander does, "How does one come to know oneself through and as ... Spirits? How does one not know oneself without them? What kind of labor makes this intelligibility possible?" (Alexander 2005, 293).

A FERAL AND RELATIONAL APPROACH TO RESEARCH

Disciplinarily, this text does not fit into neat categorization, as the subject matter—namely, how humans and medicinal plants together participate in and constitute nature, economies and cultural forms—does not fit into the purview of a single field. Though my approach could certainly be described as interdisciplinary, both methodologically and analytically, that term seems almost too tidy for the entanglements of method, species, knowledges, and worlds that have come together to produce this dissertation. I prefer Mel Chen's (2012) use of the word *feral* to describe an approach that challenges discipline and domestication. I feel that this reflects more accurately the pathways that I have followed, been led down, and been pursued through that have traversed naturalized boundaries—of animacy, selfhood, culture, and world—in order to understand the

significance and transformative potential of those crossings. These practices that push back against the conventions of discipline also serve to challenge the ways researchers approach problems, and expand the types of problems we are able to confront (Rowley 2007).

This research took place from 2015 to 2019 with a total of fourteen months in Peru. I have drawn on research approaches from several fields, using ethnographic methods, ecological fieldwork, ethnobotanical interviews, and participatory approaches with Shipibo communities. I also engage with Shipibo ways of knowing, whose methods for knowing plants, I argue, are better-suited to learning certain types of knowledge. These ways of knowing are often in tension with one another—something I discuss in great detail in Chapter 5. I draw on Sonya Atalay’s (2012) concept of braiding knowledges together to form a more robust and cohesive whole. In this framework, no one way of knowing takes precedence, but rather, one takes the lead for a while, and then it is tucked away to serve in a supporting role as another way of knowing comes forward. The tensions and differences that arise between these ways of knowing actually provide structure and anchoring points for analysis. The goal in this type of analysis is not to determine which way is “correct,” nor to provide a unified truth of the matter, but rather to hold and maintain the tensions, bringing light to equivocations (Viveiros de Castro 2004b) and seeing them as strands that provide insight into other worlds.

This research is also part of a colonial legacy, whose hierarchies I have been enmeshed in—academic, geopolitical, and racial. In my research approach, I draw on the work of Indigenous scholars from North and South America, as well as Australia, who write about decolonizing research and best practices for working in Indigenous communities (e.g. Wilson 2008; Donald 2012; Smith 2012; Tuck and Yang 2012; Cusicanqui 2012; Martin and Mirraoopa 2003; Atalay 2006). My methodological approach privileges Indigenous methodologies and worldviews in order to understand more-than-human worlds and knowledges (TallBear 2011). I lean on the advice of the Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012) now classic book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, to understand how best to work in non-extractive ways that respect Indigenous communities and worldviews, and attempts to dismantle the researcher-researched hierarchy that has been so problematic for the way Indigenous communities are represented in academia. Meanwhile, Martin and Mirraoopa (2003) provide an example of how collaborative research can be done that adheres to Indigenous protocols and practices, and respectfully engages with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and relating.

Dwayne Donald’s theory of Indigenous Métissage, though specific to the Canadian First Nations context, provides a methodology for engagement with Indigenous colonized histories (Donald 2012). Donald offers the term “ethical relationality” to refer to the possibilities of forming connections and relationships mediated through Indigenous place stories and sociocultural artifacts with contested interpretations. Ethical relationality, then, depends on reflecting and engaging with these multiple interpretations, contradictions, and ambiguities in a way that makes apparent and resists the logics of colonialism. As such, ayahuasca as a boundary being serves as an artifact with which to understand contested interpretations, layered histories, and from which to gain a particular view of colonial logics. Ethical relationality requires a critical examination of the histories and places that give rise to such ambiguities, situating my own place within colonial history. This is also reminiscent of Shawn Wilson’s (2008) call to “relational accountability.” Wilson lays out an Indigenous epistemology, which involves forming relationships with people, ideas, and places. Maintaining accountability to these relationships is what he calls the research ceremony. I attempt to hold and accept multiplicities and contradictions, while also working

toward the ethical relationality and relational accountability that Donald and Wilson urge researchers to pursue.

Though I feel I cannot lay claim to being “decolonial” in my approach (and this is not my judgement to make) I wish to make my commitments clear to work toward a more decolonial way of conducting research, or as de la Cadena says, a not only colonial approach (de la Cadena 2017). Though my efforts may be clumsy, I have commitments to stand with the Indigenous communities I work with. Community-based participatory approaches (e.g. Fortmann 2008) were an important way for soliciting feedback from the Shipibo communities I work in, and allying with their own struggles and goals. However, I only adopted these practices later on in my field work. The participatory framework provided a natural avenue for self-reflexivity. As someone who wields power as a researcher and foreigner, I was able to reflect on how I could put my resources and position toward the advancement of the communities I work in. This process led to more collaborative projects and research efforts. This process also led me to question who knowledge creation ultimately serves, and pay attention to how my own work circulates power. Participatory approaches tend to create knowledge that can directly be put into action by communities, as opposed to knowledge that is made for consumption by academics. Thus, while I write about it less in my dissertation, the participatory research I conducted with my Shipibo collaborators still formed an important part of my methodology. For more detailed information on my research methods, field site, and partner organizations, please see Appendix 1.

0 | 2 PATHWAYS OF THE DISSERTATION: SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

This dissertation begins with a historical chapter, “Encounters,” which focuses on the history of encounters that have defined the relations between the Shipibo and outsiders, beginning with colonization. I describe the colonial history along the Ucayali River, told with attention to Indigenous agency and perspectives. This was accompanied by efforts to dominate Indigenous ideologies through missionization. I show how the impacts of this demographic and ideological domination continues to affect relations between the Shipibo and outsiders. I argue that these colonial histories and roles continue to be reenacted through certain aspects of the ayahuasca tourism economy. However, this relation between Shipibo healers and outsiders will be revisited many times throughout the remainder of the dissertation.

Colonization of the Amazon has always been tied up in efforts to extract plant vitality and Indigenous labor to serve the imperial power and wealth of the Global North. Extractive industries are largely responsible for linking the Amazon regions with global political and economic processes, and are also responsible for both ongoing and colonial violence toward Amazonian Indigenous peoples (Taussig 1987). In addition, extractive industries have fundamentally changed the relations between humans and nature in Ucayali. Chapter 2, “Extractions,” takes a detour from the discussion of ayahuasca to outline Ucayali’s extractive history and the co-constitution of Indigeneity. The chapter argues that the present-day racialized hierarchies and socio-natural relations were constructed through the extractive processes that have taken shape in Ucayali since the rubber boom. This chapter poses the question of whether the ayahuasca boom should be viewed as just another wave of extraction, or whether it is fundamentally different. This is one of the guiding questions that will be explored through the following chapters of the dissertation.

One unique aspect of ayahuasca's global expansion is that even as it has moved into new cultural contexts, it has retained a close association with rituals and ceremonies that accompany its use. Thus, despite its global spread and commodification, ayahuasca remains embedded in Indigenous traditions and practices that regulate its use and consumption. Indeed, ayahuasca as a commodity is cultural and ceremonial as much as it is material. Chapter 3, "Pathways," examines the particularities of ayahuasca's economy to show how ayahuasca is engaged in shaping its trajectory of commodification through its relations. The tensions between the commodification of ayahuasca and its resistance to commodification structure a more-than-capitalist economy around its use and its effects (Gibson-Graham 2014). In order to understand the dimensions of value associated with ayahuasca, I examine the production, circulation, and consumption of the ayahuasca complex, including multiple sites at which ayahuasca ceremonies are enacted. Through ayahuasca's relations with human bodies, ceremonies, and ecologies, I have noted moments of what I call resistance to commodification. I argue that the emergent properties in these relationships serve to shape ayahuasca's trajectory as a commodity and reveal some of the ways that plant agency displays itself in various types and sites of commodity formation.

Chapter 4, "Translations," explores the ways that concepts, relationships, and practices surrounding Shipibo healing and ayahuasca-use have been translated discursively as they are constituted within more-than-Shipibo worlds. I focus on ceremony, shamanic singing, and dieting teacher plants as three practices that comprise shamanic power, and have been taken up by outsiders. I show how power is reconfigured as these practices are recontextualized and commodified within the more individualistic, materialist, and instrumental relations exemplified by late capitalism. I examine the role of ayahuasca tourism in shaping discourses around indigeneity, healing, and the use of ayahuasca. I argue that the subtle and not-so subtle differences in the relationships among plants, healers, and patients/participants as these practices are recontextualized constrict the power of both healers and plants as they are routed through capitalist mechanisms that themselves take different forms in different cultural and geographic contexts.

Knowledge making practices are worldmaking practices. Knowledge has been used by academics to distinguish "those who know" from "those who believe." Dieting plants, a Shipibo way of knowing, is also an interspecies worldmaking practice, that is based on learning with plant beings/spirits, whose very existences do not adhere to the usual criteria of "modern" knowledge. Accepting the existence of other worlds, and entities that are often deemed unreal, has the power to unsettle what Isabelle Stengers (2018) calls the command to discern reality from belief, and constitutes those who know. Chapter 5, "Knowledges," focuses on the various practices that are used by both Indigenous peoples and academics of knowing plants. As such, I critically examine my own methods for knowing ayahuasca, those used by presenters at the World Ayahuasca Conference, and those of Indigenous healers that I have interviewed. *Dieting*—a particular Indigenous method for learning from plants—accesses knowledges that differ from those that are accessed through "scientific" or "academic" knowledge-making practices. I also show how my own practice of dieting influenced my research, and the knowledge products I ultimately create. Multispecies perspectives and Indigenous standpoints create more complete and collaborative understandings.

Chapter 6, "Participation," is an exposition of my foray into participatory research approaches in the creation of *Farmacia Viva*, a community medicinal forest garden. On the one hand, developing a community-run medicinal forest garden connects with values and visions that offer openings to celebrate and revitalize Indigenous knowledges and more-than-human relationships. On the other hand, the project has potential to become a conduit for reproducing

colonial relations by casting this small area of native forest as a site for ecotourism, marking the community's cultural and botanical resources for consumption by outsiders. By describing the participatory planning process of the forest garden—involving community members, NGOs, and researchers—I expose equivocations and differing values regarding land-management and the organization of space held by members of the more-than human collective involved in the making of the garden. Divergent understandings of *garden*, *trees*, and *project* have become generative areas of inquiry. I view these tensions as reflective of the multiple worlds we constitute relationally.

In the conclusion of this dissertation, I conceptualize healing as an ethical and relational stance that serves as an orienting tool for coming into being *within* an ecology of selves (Kohn 2013; Donald 2012; Wilson 2008). Ayahuasca has been theorized as a cure to modernity's ailments, with the unequal labor of healing falling to Indigenous peoples (Taussig 1987). However, in the age of the late capitalism, as human and other-than-human futures become increasingly entangled, interspecies relations are a salient concern. I explore the potential for relating with plants to disrupt animacy hierarchies (Chen 2012) through de-objectification, opening the possibility of more interesting, less hierarchical, and less oppressive multi-species assemblages. I argue that learning from plants subverts hierarchies of animacy, and allows us to exist in a world that is more alive. Although the politics of the globalization of ayahuasca are not unproblematic, it does differ from other extractive economies, particularly in its ability to maintain a world in which openings to other worlds are still possible (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018).

CHAPTER 1 | ENCOUNTERS

A HISTORY OF RELATIONS BETWEEN SHIPIBO AND OUTSIDERS

1 | 0 INTRODUCTION

OPENING

Before, people never used to drink ayahuasca, says Papa Meni, sitting next to me on his porch while the sun descends across the soccer field from where we sit. Shouts from children scuffling for the ball ring out through the recording of him telling me ayahuasca’s origin story. Most of the foreigners, Papa Meni’s clients, have retreated to their mosquito nets, and I endure the persistence of the oncoming mosquitoes as Papa swats indolently every so often at his arms. *There was once a wise Shipibo healer, Augustín Aya, who, when sick people came to him, cured them with plants and nothing else—just tobacco and songs.* When he grew old and started to get ill, he told his son, “Look, I’m going to die. When I die, you have to take these two sticks, and near the edge of my *chacra*¹³ there is a *lupuna* tree. When I die, please put me here next to this tree and put these two sticks in my body.” In accordance with his father’s wishes, when the old healer died, his son brought his father’s body to the *lupuna* tree, and placed the two sticks as he had been instructed. A few weeks later, he went back to check on the old man’s body, and out of the sticks sprouted two leaves that grew into a snake-like vine and curled around the *lupuna* tree. *That is how ayahuasca began.* His wife, María, was also old and wise and knew how to cure with plants, harvesting them from the forest. When she became sick not long after, she also went to her son and said: “When I die, don’t bury me. There’s a big clay pot; you must put my body inside and fill it only half-way with dirt.” So the son did this; when she died, he followed her instructions, and after a few days María grew into a beautiful plant. This was *chakruna*. *This is why, when you cook ayahuasca, you can’t just add whatever leaves you want. You have to add chakruna*, says Papa Meni. The man and woman have to be united to create the power of ayahuasca, and when these two are cooked together they give the wisdom and learning of how to heal.

In Shipibo the word for ayahuasca is *oni*, having to do with knowledge or knowing, and the word for healer is *onanya*—one who has knowledge or one who knows. This reflects the importance that ayahuasca, the cooked mixture of these two plants, has for the Shipibo as a source of knowledge.¹⁴ Healers serve as the mediators between the worlds of the plant spirits (*ibo*) and the world of humans. The Shipibo word for the vine, *caapi*, is *nixi*—a common word meaning simply *vine*. This is one piece of evidence that Bernd Brabec de Mori (2011b) cites in arguing that ayahuasca has not been known by the Shipibo for very long—most other plants that are commonly used have more descriptive names. Another piece of evidence is that in this common ayahuasca origin story told by the Shipibo, the healer’s names are Spanish, often told with different surnames, none of which are typically Shipibo. Some Shipibo say that Augustín and María are not Shipibo,

¹³ Chacra is a piece of land used as a family garden for swidden agriculture.

¹⁴ Healers are taught this knowledge from the plants through ‘dieting’ practices (*samá* in Shipibo), consisting of periods of fasting and deprivation.

but from another Indigenous group. On the occasion above, when I asked Papa Meni if these wise healers were Shipibo, his reply was uncertain—he said “well, yes, I think so—yes, they were Shipibo.”

Each time I heard the story from various healers it was slightly different, but the idea was the same. Maestro Sani, when recounting the tale, concluded it as follows:

So then, time passed, the curious cut the vine, and they drank it. Then, since that date, they started to see many visions. In that time they called it forest TV. It was not known as ayahuasca or vine of the dead. They called it that—not ayahuasca. Forest TV. Before being ayahuasca, forest TV.
(Maestro Sani)

Sani’s quote demonstrates the curious way that stories surrounding ayahuasca (and stories in general) get remixed and reimagined by Shipibo healers in Ucayali, and also by the many people that consume ayahuasca globally. Present-day manifestations of Indigenous mythology and power, like all histories, are results of continuous hybridization as they have adopted new meanings and reference points within the challenging landscapes of globalization and late capitalism. Michael Taussig argues that these pieces of Indigenous religion that persist in the ruins of conquest are not testament of the traditions that came before, but rather that these mythic images and figures appropriate the histories and experiences of conquest to bear on matters of the present (Taussig 1984). Such retellings of history are a form of ontological resistance that call into question the histories that have gone uncontested because of their appeals to common sense.

OVERVIEW: INDIGENOUS HISTORIES

Historical accounts have often treated Indigenous culture as already dead. The conquest of the Americas was a foregone conclusion, and time was bound to persist in a manner that would eventually see the remnants of “primitive societies” wiped out. *Salvage anthropology* has become the term for documenting the ruins of Indigenous cultures before they are completely gone. This was carried out not just by anthropologists, but by conquistadors, missionaries, ethnobotanists, and Indigenous peoples themselves (Cuelenaere and Rabasa 2018). These efforts often construe Indigenous cultures and practices as static, and diversions from those fixed practices as “less Indigenous.” Thus, there is a double violence of colonialism in the link between historical accounts that enshrine Indigeneity in the pre-Columbian past, and the ongoing coloniality that excludes Indigenous subjects from full participation in modernity (Quijano 2000; Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui 2008). Indigenous scholars Alfred and Corntassel argue that contemporary colonialism is carried out through the “erasure of the histories and geographies that provide the foundation for Indigenous cultural identities and sense of self” (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 598). Thus, histories that would attempt to avoid such forms of colonialism must move beyond official stories and state-imposed identities forced on Indigenous peoples. Alfred and Corntassel assert the need for the telling of histories rooted in Indigenous cultures, which demonstrates the attacks on their existence and dispossession within their own lands, while simultaneously recognizing Indigenous power and resistance.

In this chapter and the one that follows, I draw on efforts of colonial era salvage anthropology, and use these historical sources to trouble the waters of time in constructing colonial pasts and Indigenous subjects. By recounting the historical events that transpired in Ucayali with a focus on Indigenous peoples I show how Indigenous societies of Ucayali have resisted ontological domination and persisted through the ability to hybridize, syncretize, and collapse linear understandings of time and causality (e.g. Taussig 1984). As such, it is useful to recognize

that nothing is static. Even those things that seem indelible, like the river channels, are constantly shifting, forming new associations, opening up new routes through which materials, concepts, and stories are circulated. Those circulations and associations are the forces of history that determine how *things* are constituted and understood in different worlds. This telling of history is not meant to provide an authoritative account, but rather to bring into relief the moments of ontological tension, spiritual conflict, and historical contestation that reveal how ideas, landscapes, and identity come into being. However, time itself is not unified; according to Mark Rifkin (2017), histories involving Indigenous peoples must reckon with how dominant colonial understandings of temporality may not be appropriate for understanding Indigenous experiences, and their ways of resisting, persisting, and adapting.

My aim is to infuse the histories I tell here with *jakon joi*, what Brian Best, a linguist who has studied Shipibo language and practices for over a decade, translates as the “life-giving-good voice, word, language, and message” (Best 2019, 1). That is, for these words to infuse such histories with life. Writing an Indigenous-focused¹⁵ history of Ucayali recognizes Indigenous Amazonians as subjects of their own making and can affirm Indigenous cultures as alive, agentive, and sovereign—able to define their own terms of existence and tell their own stories. However, it also reveals the systems and structural hierarchies that overdetermine Indigenous roles.

Ayahwasca’s current global engagements cannot be understood apart from the history of encounters between Indigenous Amazonians and outsiders over the last 500 years. I use the term *outsider* as a general term that at times refers to missionaries and conquistadors, at others to non-Indigenous colonists from elsewhere in Peru or the mestizo ruling class, and at others to refer to foreigners or tourists. The colonial history of the region has constructed a certain type of relation between Indigenous peoples and outsiders that extends back to early explorer and missionary efforts. These encounters introduced Christian ontologies and European ideologies. The persistence of plant and animal spirits along with Indigenous practices and ways of knowing attest to ongoing Indigenous resistance and the strength of Amazonian sources of power, even as colonial power relations and ideologies interpellate Indigenous subjects. Entwined colonial-Indigenous histories contribute to the current relations of power that have influenced present-day ayahuasca tourism economies and ecologies.

Anibal Quijano theorizes coloniality as a dimension of global power that has fundamentally shaped the relations between Europe and Indigenous peoples of the Americas in particular, based on divisions of race, and enforcing Eurocentric logics (Quijano 2000). This colonial order of power impressed itself upon Indigenous relational ontologies, dominating the production of meaning, knowledge, relations, identities, and worlds. Christianity was a tool used to force the colonized groups to learn and conform to European cultural ideals. Quijano says that all of these converging processes “involved a long period of the colonization of cognitive perspectives, modes of producing and giving meaning, the results of material existence, the imaginary, the universe of intersubjective relations with the world: in short, the culture” (Quijano 2000, 9). At the same time, Europeans fashioned themselves as naturally superior protagonists of modernity, and relegated Indigenous peoples and cultures to the past. While coloniality (e.g. Quijano 2000) certainly shapes Indigenous peoples’ relations with global markets, labor, and access to resources (see Chapter 2), Indigenous Amazonia is well known among anthropologists for its own conceptions of power,

¹⁵ I say “Indigenous-focused” instead of “Shipibo-focused” because, as I will explain, the category of *Shipibo* is also a historical construct, and this history covers a span of time in which several Indigenous groups of Ucayali were important.

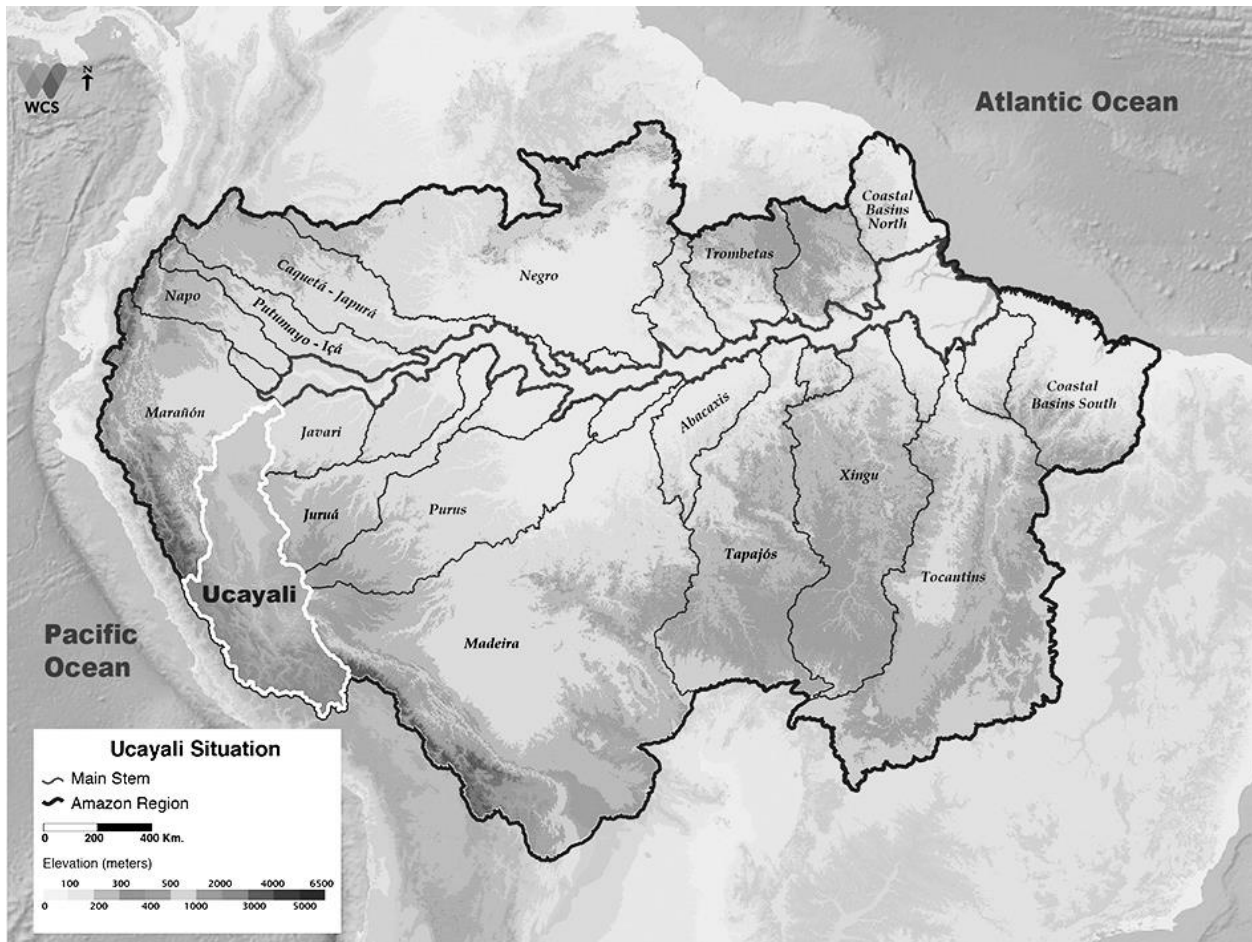
which are not based in Eurocentric ideals. Amazonian forms of power inhere in the spirit worlds. Exchanges between worlds are based in concepts of vitality, reciprocity, and predation (Santos-Granero 2019).

I argue that encounters between Shipibo healers and outsiders have been and continue to be characterized by an ideological antagonism that has manifested in different ways throughout history. That is, along with attempts at dominance by colonial agents, there has also always been Indigenous resistance. In the colonial period, missionaries were concerned with saving Indigenous souls and ridding them of their “idolatrous beliefs.” The new ideologies and modes of power they brought did not succeed in erasing Indigenous modes of power that inhere in the spirit world. Even as Indigenous peoples were oppressed, these spiritual entities were also feared. Thus, healers, as mediators between “our world” (*non nete*) and the spirit worlds (*jakon nete*, *panxin nete*, *jene nete*), have been in a unique position in relation to outsiders as well. While the material knowledge that Indigenous healers possessed about plants was considered potentially valuable, their spiritual knowledge was viewed with derision and fear, and seen to be in need of reform. Meanwhile, healers were able to draw on Christian figures, like Christ and the Bible, and incorporate them into their ritual practices as sources of power. Contemporary relations between Shipibo healers and outsiders mirror some of these same types of relations while also forming new associations and relations.

Dussel argues that *encounters* is not the correct word to use when speaking of the colonial interactions between Indigenous peoples and outsiders, as it implies a simple meeting between two worlds. “The idea of meeting covers over reality by occluding how the European ego subjugated the world of the Other” (Dussel 1995, 55). In this chapter, I use *encounters* intentionally to represent the heterogeneous nature of the interactions between Indigenous peoples and outsiders. These encounters were often violent confrontations or conquests, but sometimes there were relations of care. The lack of agency implied by Dussel’s reading of Indigenous peoples as “innocent victims” (Dussel 1995, 55) is contrary to parts of the history I tell here, in which the colonial period was characterized by Indigenous resistance and uprisings. The word *encounters* reflects that even though the confrontations between Indigenous peoples and outsiders were unequal and resulted in domination, in their encounters, sometimes Europeans killed Indians and sometimes Indians killed Europeans.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections. In section one I outline the history of conquest and early colonialism on the Ucayali River and the Amazon regions more broadly, including the presence of missionaries. I show that the conquest of Amazonian peoples was never a smooth process, and involved continual Indigenous uprisings. Nonetheless, the persistence of settlers and missionaries over several centuries would irreversibly change the power dynamics, societal structure, and ideology of the Indigenous peoples of Ucayali. In section two I discuss how missionization and religious oppression have influenced Indigenous ideologies and practices. I show that hybridization, or the ability for Indigenous peoples to adapt Christian forms of power, is one way that Indigenous peoples have resisted ideological domination. In section three I discuss how the role of the healer and Indigenous expertise has changed in relation to outsiders. The role of Shipibo healers has been mediated through their knowledge of medicinal plants. I first discuss the European preoccupation with medicinal plants and Indigenous knowledge has constructed certain narratives around Indigenous knowledge and healers that extend to present day ayahuasca tourism. Next, I outline the recent history of the commodification of ayahuasca in relation to foreigners in Ucayali. I include ethnographic stories of how relations with outsiders have manifested for two Shipibo healers, culminating in the untimely death of Maestra Beka at the

hands of a foreigner. These two cases are not meant to be representative of all Shipibo relations with outsiders, but serve to demonstrate certain extremes of how power dynamics have persisted and changed throughout the centuries since colonization.



Map 1.1. A map indicating how Ucayali is situated in the Amazon region. The Ucayali River watershed is outlined with a white border and shown in relation to the other major watersheds of the Amazon region. The Ucayali is one of the main western tributaries of the Amazon River. The Amazon’s main stem is outlined with a darker black line, and runs West to East through the center of this map. Copyright by Wildlife Conservation Society, 2020.

1 | 1 CONTACT & DEMOGRAPHIC UPHEAVAL

The Ucayali River flows northwards from the Andes near Cusco through Eastern Peru to become the Amazon River near Iquitos (Map 1.1). Because of its relative inaccessibility and the harshness of the physical environment, colonization of the Amazon region has been more tenuous and less totalizing than it was in coastal or Andean Peru. The Amazon region continue to be home to nearly 400 Indigenous groups, including dozens of “uncontacted” tribes. However, major epidemics, forced missionization, and a brutal extractive industry all severely altered the lives of Indigenous peoples and the geopolitical trajectory of the region after European contact. This

section will outline the early contact and conquest of the Ucayali watershed¹⁶ and the demographic effects on Shipibo-Konibo communities.

POPULATION AND INTRODUCED DISEASE

Spanish explorers came to the Amazon regions in search of gold and cinnamon (*canela*) as early as the 1500s, but they never found the mythical gold-rich city of El Dorado, legends of which motivated many expeditions. The earliest trip down the Amazon by a European was documented in 1542 by Gaspar de Carvajal, a missionary accompanying the voyage of the mutinous group led by Francisco Orellana, who had abandoned Gonzalo Pizarro to continue down length of the river (Carvajal and Society 1934). According to Carvajal's journal, the voyage was punctuated by frequent encounters with the Indigenous peoples they encountered, some of whom, he wrote, were peaceful and amicable, and some who were more warlike.

Most notable about Carvajal's account for later anthropologists was that he documented a densely populated and complex society throughout much of the Amazon region. The following is an excerpt from many descriptions of similar societies that they passed by on the river:

In the morning, we passed in sight of, and close to, a village very large and very flourishing, and it had many sections, and in each section [there was] a landing place down on the river, and on each landing place there was a very great horde of Indians, and this village extended for more than two and a half leagues, to the very end of which it was still of the type just stated; and, because the Indians of this village were so numerous, the Captain commanded us to pass by without doing them any harm and without attacking them; but they, having observed that we were passing by without doing them any harm, got into their canoes and attacked us, but to their detriment, because the crossbows and arquebuses made them go back to their houses, and they let us go on down our river (Carvajal and Society 1934, 203).

The European's survival, according to Carvajal, was only a result of them possessing superior weapons made of steel. By the time the next Europeans would come to the interior of the Amazon, the Indigenous populations Carvajal had documented no longer existed. While scholars initially took later accounts to be more reliable evidence of precolonial populations, most now agree that the earliest accounts of Amazonian societies actually provide evidence of the devastating effects of introduced disease and slave raids on the tribes and civilizations of the Amazon more broadly (C. C. Mann 2006; T. P. Myers 1974; Pinedo-Vasquez, Hecht, and Padoch 2012). Initial contact from Orellana's expedition introduced disease into the region, which, with no acquired resistance, was fatal for large portions of the Indigenous populations all over the Americas (C. C. Mann 2006). These dramatic and rapid reductions in population severely reduced the complexity of their social organization.

The disagreement about pre-contact populations reflects a broader debate by anthropologists and archaeologists about whether large and complex civilizations existed or could exist in the Amazon. Betty Meggers (1971) notably maintained the stance that the soils of the Amazon were too poor to sustain intensive agriculture that would be necessary to support such large populations. However, this view has been strongly refuted on several grounds (Pinedo-Vasquez, Hecht, and Padoch 2012; C. C. Mann 2006; Raffles 2002b). First, as mentioned above,

¹⁶ The Ucayali Region is a political demarcation, with Pucallpa as its capital. Although Ucayali was only designated as its own region in 1980 (separated from Loreto), I use "Ucayali" and "Ucayali region" throughout this dissertation to refer to the watershed around the Ucayali River where I conducted my field research, with overlaps with the present-day designation of the Ucayali region.

the earliest explorers described large and complex civilizations in the region. Secondly, the relatively recent discovery of large-scale landscape modification in the form of agricultural mounds, roads, and extensive pottery remains corroborate the existence of such complex civilizations throughout the Amazon (e.g. Erickson 2008). Lastly, there is evidence that the *terra preta* (meaning *black earth* in Portuguese) that comprises by some estimates up to 10% of the soil in the Amazon basin (S. Hecht 2003; S. B. Hecht and Posey 1989), was made by human civilizations who enriched the earth with charcoal and animals bones to create a rich, fertile soil.

The earliest recorded trip to the Ucayali River by foreigners was the expedition of Juan Salinas de Loyola in 1557 (T. P. Myers 1974). His were the only observations of Ucayali prior to the establishment of missions nearly a century later. On that first trip, Loyola had contact with several tribal groups, and similar to Carvajal, documented two large and complexly structured civilizations that dominated the Ucayali River (T. P. Myers 1974). The Pariache that he wrote about are thought to have been the predecessors of the Konibo, located in the southern part of the Ucayali River; the Cocama were the larger civilization in the northern part (T. P. Myers 1974). However, Loyola's is the only account that indicates that there were such highly developed civilizations in this part of the Amazon. The next wave of Europeans to document entering the region in the mid-1600s would find a much reduced population — in both numbers and complexity — with smaller groups of scattered tribes along the rivers. Jesuit visitors estimated the Cocama society to be around 10,000-12,000 people, with large villages (T. P. Myers 1974). Even *after* the next contact in the 1650s, when Jesuits later came to the region, the populations of the Indigenous groups had declined by over half again. This suggests that before the 1700s there were at least two major epidemics. Myers argues that any observations made after Loyola's 1557 visit necessarily reflect this drastic decrease in population, rather than an indication of pre-contact societal conditions.

River channels have long been important sources and indicators of power for the Indigenous peoples of the Amazonian regions. According to Myers (1974), only major rivers like the Ucayali could support the Indigenous groups that were larger in number and complexity. These groups also had competitive advantage, able to maintain their position against the smaller Indigenous groups, which settled in the lower tributaries. When a group was able to establish its dominance on the Ucayali, there were signs in the historical record of newly achieved power and cultural convergence (T. P. Myers 1974). Historical accounts suggest that Shipibo and Xetebo lived in such smaller communities on tributaries on the northern part of the Ucayali, compared with the Konibo, who occupied the Ucayali itself further to the south (T. P. Myers 1974). South of the Konibo on the Tambo River were the Campa and Arawak speaking peoples, who now constitute several groups including the Asháninka. Because the earliest explorers came via large river ways, they encountered and made contact with the larger civilizations first. Because of their higher population density, these larger societies were more susceptible to the rapid spread of smallpox, typhus, and influenza (e.g. Bodley 2014). Thus, when these areas were subsequently visited, the formerly large civilizations had been decimated, and the smaller tribes that lived in settlements on the tributaries remained.

MISSIONS & RESISTANCE IN UCAYALI

Europeans first attempted to settle the Amazon regions in the 1600s, with the establishment of Jesuit missionary camps along the tributaries of the Amazon, introducing an entirely new cosmology and material way of life into Indigenous Amazonia (Schmink and Wood 1992). The

Indigenous peoples, however, were not complacent in Europeans settling their lands, and the following centuries would be marked by constant conflict and continual expulsion of the persistent settlers and missionaries. This period involved major upheaval for Indigenous peoples of the Ucayali, whose larger civilizations had been decimated, and the remaining populations engaged in intertribal warfare vying for the occupation of the larger rivers.

The Konibo figured importantly in the geopolitics of Ucayali for several centuries, occupying the Southern part of the Ucayali River (the “Upper Ucayali”) (DeBoer 1986). The Konibo were reported from European accounts in the 17th century, and through the 1930s, to be some of the fiercest raiders in the Ucayali, capturing hostages from Amahuaca, Campa, Remo, Cashibo, and other Indigenous groups. They were called “Lords of the Ucayali” by Bernardino Izaguirre (1924, reported in Santos-Granero 2018). The Konibo were also strategically able to leverage their dominant position on the river to act as intermediaries between more remote Indigenous groups and Europeans. According to DeBoer (1986), the Konibo continued to raid other villages, selling their captives to the European missions and labor camps in exchange for iron tools, and later for firearms. The procurement of axes and other tools allowed them to increase and maintain their power in relation to smaller Indigenous groups. The Shipibo and Xetebo, who were often confused with the Konibo because of the similarities in their language and culture, were also fierce raiders and may have been included in these early descriptions of the Konibo (Marcoy 1873). These three groups dominated the lower Ucayali (Eakin, Lauriault, and Boonstra 1986b).

In the mid-1600s, both Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries entered the Ucayali region (T. P. Myers 1974). Though the Shipibo and Cocama, who had long been rivals, established a peace with both groups visiting the same mission. However, the missions were constantly under threat from these groups as well, and these efforts ended with Indigenous uprisings and subsequent abandonment of the missions (T. P. Myers 1974). In the 1660s several Indigenous groups allied together to successfully force the Franciscans out of Ucayali. It was another fifteen years until the Franciscans would return. This pattern was to continue into the 1700s, in which missions were established, unifying different Indigenous groups and villages, and were later driven out. Sometimes Spanish missionaries would live for a decade among the Indians making close ties, only to be later driven out or killed by Indians who opposed the European presence.

Some Indigenous factions looked kindly on missionary presence. In 1686, for example, Father Enrique Rither came to Ucayali with a group of Konibo who had come to ask for their own missionary (T. P. Myers 1974). Rither established nine new villages, but was eventually killed in 1698 by Konibo and Shipibo uprisings, driving all Europeans out of Ucayali yet again. After these events, it would be nearly fifty years until Ucayali would open to missionaries (T. P. Myers 1974). Further South, the Campa, (now called the Ashaninka) had similar uprisings, led by a Campa leader Atahuallpa in 1742 — aiming to return the region to the pre-Spanish condition (Bodley 1972). In the 1750s, missionaries again tried to enter Ucayali, searching for the great numbers of people that were said to inhabit the region, but only found temporary campsites and hunting grounds of the groups who lived in the tributaries. In the 1760s missionaries would again make contact; one thousand Shipibo were united into mission villages while many others remained dispersed, not wanting to gather into the larger settlements (T. P. Myers 1974).



Map 1.2. A map depicting the course of the Huallaga and Ucayali rivers and the pampa of Sacramento. The map references the territories of the Indigenous groups along the Ucayali and the locations of missions. Originally drawn by Franciscan missionary Manuel Sobreviela in 1799, it has been improved by other Ocopa missionaries and scientists over the years. Copyright of the Biblioteca Nacional de España.

In 1791 the Franciscans finally established themselves on the Ucayali for good (T. P. Myers 1974). Although the Shipibo had earlier defeated the Cocama, at this point the Shipibo were reportedly afraid of the Konibo and Xetebo and wanted their own priest, rather than moving into the mission with the other tribes (T. P. Myers 1974). Other nations moved to the new missions, and also sought their own missionaries, drawn by the iron tools and other gifts that the Franciscans provided. The Shipibo occupied the tributaries of the Ucayali near to Pucallpa—the Aguaytia, Pisqui, and Tamaya. The Xetebo and Konibo had allied and expanded to former Cocama lands, but many of the Konibo remained near the mouth of the Pachitea River, where it met Ucayali. The Xetebo occupied Manoa and Sarayacu. The Cashibo also occupied the Aguaytia and Pachitea. The Campa remained further to the south (Map 1.2).

The capture of the women and children from rival groups continued to be a way that tribes vied for their place on the larger rivers (T. P. Myers 1974). The Konibo had positioned themselves as intermediaries between Indigenous groups and European slave traders. Paul Marcoy, in 1867 navigated down the Ucayali River and the length of the Amazon, and reported extensively on the peoples he interacted with there. One of the members of Marcoy's expedition bought an Impétiniri boy as a slave from one of the Konibo villages they visited. He reports on the boy's terror at being sold to the white men:

...great was the consternation of the Impétiniri when his new master pushed him before him, had him conducted to the shore, and made him enter his canoe. Hardly had we got out into the stream, when the tears of the poor boy began to flow. Our colour, our beards, our clothes, our language, and our manners, were so different from anything he had previously seen, that he felt stupefied and afraid (Marcoy 1873).

In Ucayali, as discussed above, Indigenous peoples treated the missionaries' efforts as invasions into Indigenous territories. And yet despite the fact that for more than 200 years missionaries were repeatedly killed and driven out of the Ucayali region, their proselytizing was often successful. The persistence of the missionaries reflected their preoccupation with numbers converted—missionaries were given meaning and value through their efforts converting Indigenous peoples and “saving souls” (Arriaga 1968). At the same time, Indigenous peoples were being introduced to new types of trade and commodity relationships that were based in the European market economy, with increasing interest in European tools and weapons that proved useful. Early traders used the rivers as trade routes between the concentrated populations around the missionary camps (Schmink and Wood 1992), offering metal tools and blades to the native Amazonian people in exchange for forest products for export to international markets (Hemming 2009).

During the rubber boom of the late 1800s, extractive economies in Ucayali centered on exploited and enslaved Indigenous labor (see Chapter 2). It is during this time that some scholars believe that ayahuasca curing rituals spread throughout the region (more in later sections) (Gow 1996). Certainly many plants and remedies were exchanged between different Indigenous groups during the rubber era. The mixing among Indigenous groups as well as with outsiders in rubber camps and missions was unprecedented in Ucayali. Rubber camps often employed Shipibo, Konibo, Xetebo, Yine, Ashaninka, Cashibo, and more. Travelers in the region even attributed the lack of mestizo children borne to the rubber traders as a result of Indigenous women drinking medicinal plant contraceptives (Taussig 1987). Colonel Mendonça, in 1907 observed relations between the natives in the border region and the colonists who came to work in rubber, saying of the natives:

They were the guides and helpers of the pioneers; those that were the first to use caucho . . . they

taught the civilized medicinal and other virtues of many plants... they are multidimensional cultivators of both soils and fields having repeatedly given food to those who have come to usurp their lands, women and children. (Mendonça 1907, p. 141) (from Salisbury, López, and Alvarado 2011)

It was common for villages, depopulated of their men, and subjected to raids on women and children, to relocate during this period, often settling near missions (Veber 2014). Missions ended up being relatively safe havens from the “regime of terror” (Taussig 1987) that was brought on by the rubber industry. The violence and terror of the rubber economy (more in Chapter 2) kept Indigenous laborers beholden and subjugated to the violence of the *patrónes*—the colonist rubber barons that dominated the rubber camps of Ucayali (Bodley 1972). Many laborers would only escape from such conditions as missionaries passed through the camps; their villages were no longer safe or may have been abandoned. The Jesuits formed specific communities for resettling fugitives from rubber camps, putting them to work and indoctrinating them with Catholicism (DeBoer 1986). Despite this, attacks on missions persisted sporadically throughout the region. After the rubber economy collapsed in the early 20th century another Indigenous uprising swept the region in 1915, but this time it was aimed at expelling the rubber *patrónes*, along with all other Europeans from the region (more in Chapter 2). This resistance movement was largely successful—new colonists would not enter Ucayali again for more than five years.

In the 1920s Adventism arrived in Ucayali, garnering a stronger following among Indigenous peoples than the Franciscans and Jesuits that had come previously. Fernando Stahl, a Seventh Day Adventist preacher, established the Perene Mission on former Ashaninka land, and incited a wave of mass conversions among the Indigenous peoples of Ucayali. Stahl’s message was one of apocalypse and salvation — he reported that the world was soon to be destroyed, and those who kept the “Word of God” would be saved, while the others would “burn like the white-lipped peccaries” (Bodley 1972, 223–24). Apparently, the “Word of God” involved prohibitions on killing, drinking, drugs, unclean meats, and work on Saturdays, among others. Many of the natives believed that Stahl himself was the messiah (Bodley 1972, 223–24).

Several years after the establishment of his mission, in 1928, Stahl descended the Perene and Tambo rivers toward the Ucayali, in order to assess interest in the religion among the more rural Ashaninka and other tribes who lived downriver. At this time the rivers had been closed to outsiders since the uprisings in 1915. However, on this voyage hundreds would gather to welcome the Adventists, whose message of salvation had preceded their visit. Missions had already been built by the Asháninka, who were waiting for their own missionaries. Stahl’s companion, VE Peugh wrote:

There are actually thousands of Chunchu Indians [Campa - Asháninka] along these rivers who are longing for the gospel. The message has penetrated the forest way beyond our missions or our missionaries. We found whole villages among the savages where the message had trickled through, and all had given up the use of liquor and tobacco. At every place we stopped, hundreds gathered about us and attentively listened to the Word of God. This was a section where white men have feared to enter, a section where murderers rule supreme (McElhany 1928:24, Quoted in Bodley 1972, 224)

Bodley estimates that around 2,000 Indigenous people were converted to Adventism by the late 1930s in Perene and on the Ucayali. Around the same time, the Franciscans reestablished their own development and colonization projects that had been abandoned 200 years prior (Hvalkof 2006).

Tasorentsi, an important Asháninka leader, who had been at the helm of the 1915 uprising that drove Europeans out of Ucayali, by this time had become an avid convert himself (Santos-Granero 2018). He preached his own hybridized version of Stahl's Adventism. However, he reportedly refused to be baptized himself because that would mean that he would have to give up ayahuasca and tobacco, which allowed him to communicate with *Pabá*, the Asháninka animating spirit. If he were to be baptized, he feared the mother of ayahuasca would abandon or turn against him (Santos-Granero 2018). The Adventist teachings disavowed Indigenous shamanism and the associated practices like drinking ayahuasca, though according to Santos-Granero, Tasorentsi believed ayahuasca and other Asháninka ritual practices to be complementary to Adventist ritual practices.

Eventually, many Indigenous people deserted the new religion when the world failed to end, but the legacy of the Adventists is still strong in Ucayali Native Communities. Paoyhan, where I conducted major portion of my fieldwork, was influenced heavily by the Adventists. I describe the foundation of Paoyhan in the next section to show how these changes manifested for this community during the 20th century. This history is translated from a book one of my interlocutors showed me in Paoyhan, written by Hernando Inuma Macedo (2007).¹⁷

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PAOYHAN

In 1898 a family of eight Shipibo led by their Jefe, Apolinario Ramirez Silva, traveled down the Río Pisqui and along the Río Ucayali (Map 1) for several months (Macedo 2007)¹⁸. They journeyed in a rustic canoe that was 15 meters long with a roof made of palm leaves. Where they eventually arrived, they would establish friendships with several other families and decide to found a town, as they deemed the place suitable for agriculture. After many years of growing food and establishing their village, the riverbanks had eroded to the point which they decided they must relocate. After an intensive search they agreed on a suitable location about 5 km inland from the Ucayali River, on the shores of a lake rich with conches.

...they baptized it with the name of Ebenezer, a biblical term in the Hebrew language, that translated into Spanish as “*Hasta aca nos ayudo Dios*” [Unto here god helped us]—a name that was imposed by the Adventist missionaries, that in that time had penetrated the jungle, imparting their knowledge and evangelical doctrine (Macedo 2007, 7).

Ebenezer began to be populated by various peoples in addition to the Shipibo — Konibo, Piro (Yine), Ashaninka, and Cocamas. However, unable to get used to the Shipibo way of life, and subjected to discrimination by the Shipibo, these other groups did not stay long in Ebenezer (Macedo 2007).

In 1963 the first elected officials of the village were able to petition Lima for the official titlement of their land, and changed the name to Paococha. Shortly after, the Adventists succeeded in establishing a Private school in Paococha (Macedo 2007). It was not until 1971 that a state-run school would be established, later employing bilingual teachers. Within 10 years, however, the ever-eroding riverbank would catch up with them again and the town would elect to move their

¹⁷ Translated by Laura Dev.

¹⁸ The history of Paoyhan, *Historia de mi Pueblo*, was written by Hernando Inuma Macedo, a local, in 2007. I took photos of the small printed booklet written in Spanish that was shown to me by one of my interlocutors in Paoyhan. It appears to have been published as part of a UN program called “Second decade of the world's Indigenous peoples,” adopted in 2004 to promote and empower Indigenous peoples.

village site. They chose another location on a lagoon, 2 km upriver, and further away from the shore of the Ucayali River this time. This lagoon “had an infinite amount of fish in its water and was surrounded by beautiful palms that served the residents to construct their households” (Macedo 2007, 10). However, the decision to move was not unanimous and a small proportion of the townspeople elected to stay behind when the majority of the town moved in 1981. The new town was called Paoyhan, in order to distinguish it from those who had stayed behind. However, it was only 7 years before those who stayed behind in Paococha decided that they too must move, and in 1988 they rejoined their former community, reforming Paococha as an annex to Paoyhan, where it remains today.

After the collapse of the rubber boom, Indigenous groups on the Ucayali River lived in both permanent and semi-permanent settlements of various sizes along the riverbanks, connected to other tribal groups by trade, marriage, and warfare (Eakin, Lauriault, and Boonstra 1986b). As seen in the history of Paoyhan’s establishment, Indigenous communities in Ucayali often moved residences based on changes in the river channel, and seasonally shifted the location of their agricultural plots. Though they previously lived in extended family groups, they now tended to aggregate in larger communities centered around churches and schools, legacies of the missionary and rubber camps in the region. The gathering of so many Indigenous people into large settlements of hundreds or thousands of people was a marked difference from prior settlement patterns on the rivers (Bodley 1972). Today, Paoyhan (I include Paoyhan and the adjacent Paococha together) is the most populous of the rural Shipibo communities along the Ucayali River, with around 1,700 people.

As seen with the case of Paoyhan, the presence of missionaries had benefits for many Shipibo communities, not just in the material gifts they provided. Missionaries, for instance, played important roles in providing rural social services for some of the remote villages; this included setting up schools and Western health clinics in communities like Paoyhan. Missionaries also came to occupy specific economic and social roles in the communities, often sponsoring children and their families through becoming godparents (*madrina* or *padrino*). Missionaries originally were the ones to provide needles and teach the women embroidery work, whereas previously Shipibo textiles were primarily woven or painted with natural dyes. This embroidery work has become one of the main sources of income for many Shipibo families. Finally, missionary institutions have been instrumental in language preservation. As they were often the first outsiders to learn Indigenous languages, many Indigenous dictionaries were written by missionaries, and a Summer Institute of Linguistics (a Christian NGO for language preservation and development) was established in Yarinacocha for the preservation of Indigenous languages of Ucayali, initially helping to establish the written form of the Shipibo language.

1 | 2 INDOCTRINATION & HYBRIDIZATION

As intended, the effects of missionaries on the Indigenous societies of the Ucayali region were not simply demographic. The presence and missionizing dramatically shifted the ideologies of the Indigenous peoples of Ucayali. However, Indigenous spirits and relations with natural beings persisted. I show that hybridization was a tool by which Indigenous healers were able to reconcile the ontological antagonism they were confronted with from attempts at Christian indoctrination. Through hybridization, healers appropriated Christian symbols and rituals into Amazonian relational practices.



Figure 1.1. Pre-Columbian Chimu (Andean) sculptures from the Museo Larco. Prior to conquest, figures representing the spiritual and natural beings that populated Indigenous worlds, including the jaguar god, were depicted in positions of power over human figures. Photos by Laura Dev, 2018.

THE EXTIRPATION OF IDOLATRIES

Perusing the pre-Columbian sculpture galleries of Museo Larco in Lima, terra-cotta ceramic figures of jaguars, or creatures of strange shapes are seen positioned in powerful roles — feasting on human flesh, holding a severed human head, or vanquishing deer (Figure 1.1). Archaeologists suggest that power in pre-Columbian Peru was always depicted as belonging to spirits and natural beings. The sculptures themselves are thought to have been used for ritual purposes as offerings to those same spirits. However, in the imperial and conquest periods, these themes began to shift. There appeared first, in Chimu art (1300 – 1532), sculptures of Conquistador-looking men in positions of power — with deer slung over their shoulders, when prior to colonization deer had been the purview of the felines. The statement of these pieces were, the caption reads, “transmitting a message related to the humanization of power” (Museo Larco, 2018). After conquest by the Spanish, the humanization of power was further cemented, and sculptures from this period even featured strong men with dead *jaguars* slung over their backs (Figure 1.2). The caption reads: “For the first time in Andean art the feline god appears overpowered and defeated as if it were a deer, thereby reflecting the effect upon Indigenous religious beliefs of the process known as the Extirpation of Idolatries” (Museo Larco 2018). The Extirpation of Idolatries was a violent effort carried out by Jesuit Priests with the purpose of ridding colonial Peru of the spirits and natural beings that populated Indigenous worlds. Missionaries and extirpators taught that these spirits were “idols” and blasphemous according to Christian ideals, threatening Christian rule (Arriaga 1968).



Figure 1.2. Chimú ceramic art from the conquest period (after 1532 AD) from Museo Larco. Whereas the feline was a powerful figure in pre-Columbian art, after conquest this variation appeared for the first time, with the feline god appearing vanquished by a human as if it were a deer. Photo by Laura Dev 2018.

Just before missionary efforts began in earnest in Ucayali, Pablo José de Arriaga in 1621 released the document “La Extirpación de la Idolatría en el Perú” (The Extirpation of Idolatry in Peru) outlining a plan to eradicate Indigenous beliefs and relations with spirits other than those sanctioned by the Catholic church. The document by Arriaga was a manifesto for the missionizing efforts in Peru, with its tenets based in part on transforming the Indigenous leaders and healers into good Christians. The document also served as an instruction manual for Priests, with guidelines for how to conduct visits to Indian towns, how to interrogate sorcerers, and what regulations to leave in place to ensure that idolatrous practices were abandoned. Below is a representative passage:

Many of the sorcerers are...healers, but they precede their cures with superstitious and idolatrous practices. The priests should examine and instruct those who are to perform healing in order to get rid of what is superstitious and evil therein, and to profit by what is good, for example, their knowledge and use of certain herbs and other simples used in their treatments.

The only way to make the curacas and caciques¹⁹ behave (and the fact that they do not is, as I have said, an important cause of idolatry) is to begin at the beginning and instruct their children so that from childhood they may learn the Christian discipline and doctrine.... It is most important during missions and visits to gain the confidence of the caciques by treating them well and honoring them... because, when we have won over the curacas, there is no difficulty about discovering the... idolatrous practices. They must be used to this end, and those who are stubborn and rebellious, as some are, should have all the rigor of the law applied to them...If they are accomplices of idolatry, they shall be deprived of their position as cacique, reduced to forced labor, whipped, and shorn (Arriaga 1968, 99).

Arriaga recognized the Indigenous healers’ knowledge of medicinal plants as potentially useful for exploiting, whereas their spiritual practices and relations with “idols” were viewed to be

¹⁹ Curaca and cacique were Quechua words for leaders and chiefs, and were applied more broadly by Europeans to refer to all Indigenous leaders.

in need of reform. As is evident in the above quote, missionizing efforts were strategic and especially targeted the re-education of the children of Indigenous leaders by sending them to boarding schools to learn Spanish, Quechua,²⁰ and Christian doctrine. This involved saturating Indigenous peoples with Christian doctrine, forcing them to memorize it by rote, and punishing the practice of Indigenous rituals and relations (Dussel 1995). This quote demonstrates how healers and sorcerers were seen as important figures of resistance to Christian doctrine (Taussig 1984). The Extirpation of Idolatries explicitly prohibited rituals involving offerings to spirits or natural beings, which was the purview of healers. Arriaga referred to these as idol and pagan rites, borrowing the Quechua word *huaca* to mean sacred objects. Although Arriaga was most familiar with the Andean Indigenous peoples, this document was used as a handbook for missionary priests to follow when contacting Indigenous communities throughout Peru²¹ (Arriaga 1968).

Enrique Dussel (1995) describes the activities of colonial missionaries as a “spiritual conquest,” in which, because of the differences between European and Indigenous worldviews, the extirpaters aimed to entirely *substitute* Indigenous worldviews with Christian and European ideologies, rather than transforming them “from within,” as was done in Europe. Thus, religious changes did not result from a free conversion to a religious belief system, but rather a religious domination by the colonial oppressors. Thus, Dussel argues, these were not simply meetings between two worlds, but violence and genocidal domination of Indigenous worlds.

Indigenous ideologies irreversibly shifted with the persistence of the Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries that were intent on converting the Indigenous peoples to Catholicism and ridding them of their idolatry, often through violence and humiliation. These tactics resulted in a radical restructuring of Indigenous relational structures and ritual forms, including, notes Dussel (1995), alternative constructions of space and time. Such restructuring of time Meanwhile, “in the clarity/obscurity of everyday practices a syncretistic religion formed, which not even the purest Inquisition could have snuffed out” (Dussel 1995, 55).

Although practices for relating with spirits and natural entities have persisted throughout Indigenous Peru, the effects of missionaries on Indigenous practices and ontologies was dramatic and nearly impossible to account for. Cuelenare and Rabasa (2018) note that the activities of these priests were often part of an effort in salvage anthropology to document the colonized cultures and languages. In many cases, Indigenous converts were also part of these documentation efforts, not unlike contemporary practices of salvage anthropology. In contrast to present-day hegemonic narratives that relegate Indigenous ontologies into the realm of superstition and belief, priests and missionaries of the 1600s took Indigenous beliefs very seriously. Huacas, spirits, and idols, for example, were seen as demons with power that must be defeated through Christian conversion, and through a ceasing of relational practices with the huacas.

If one can say something about colonial extirpaters, it is that they took Indigenous cultures seriously. Magic and shamans are too real to be dismissed as the errors of intoxicated Indians. By the same token, extirpating efforts inevitably carry an element of salvaging, even if it is to make sure that the devil will not come back to haunt them in forms they would not recognize if the memory of Indigenous thought were destroyed. (Cuelenaere and Rabasa 2018, 69)

²⁰ At the time, Quechua was adopted as the official Indigenous language by which colonizers could communicate with the Indigenous peoples of Peru. Therefore, regardless of native language, many Indigenous groups learned Quechua in missionary schools.

²¹ At the time, Peru covered a much larger land mass than today, including most of the South American continent — Ecuador, Bolivia, and the Northern half of Chile in particular—though the precise boundaries were vague.

In the Amazon, missionary activity, and therefore documentation of Indigenous practices and beliefs, was much more intermittent than elsewhere in Peru. Thus, the salvage efforts of missionaries do only little to illuminate the changes that have occurred to Amazonian ideologies over the last 500 years.

As many scholars have noted, Amazonian ontologies were particularly able to create parsimony among differing belief systems (e.g. Vilaça 2016). Indigenous peoples throughout the Amazon reportedly imitated the missionaries' rituals of praying and performing services, though their conversions were often seen as superficial and the practices later abandoned (Vilaça 2016). Aparecida Vilaça (2016), who worked with the Wari in Brazil, argues that these mimetic practices may be understood through the lens of Amazonian forms of power. According to the perspectivism described by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998), through mimesis, one is able to occupy the perspective and appropriate the power of the other. Taussig (1987; 1993) and Kohn (2013) both make similar arguments, based on the idea that mimesis and personification are key methods for appropriating the power of an *other*.

This type of mimesis is also essential to shamanic forms of power for Shipibo healers. In perspectivist ontologies, personhood and subjectivity is extended to nonhuman entities, who all see themselves as human, but live in different relational worlds according to the perspective they occupy (Viveiros de Castro 1998). As such, identities and worlds are not fixed, but are constituted through their relations to others. Meanwhile, bodies and the material world are unstable and subject to transformation through relational practices (Vilaça 2016). By enlisting people and items into certain relational roles through ritual practices, those relations and identities are constituted and they are able to occupy positions of relative power (e.g. as predators or humans). According to Vilaça, bodily transformation through practices correlated for Indigenous peoples to the Christian idea of conversion, which also meant that it was reversible. By adopting the practices, and therefore the perspective of the missionaries, through conversion, they were in essence able to "fix" their status as humans, and as predators (Vilaça 2016).

Rather than completely substituting Indigenous practices, Christian rituals were able to be adopted into Amazonian forms of power through hybridization (Latour 1993; Vilaça 2016). My use of the word *hybridization* is not meant to imply that these hybrids are piecemeal or non-hierarchical. Here, I draw on Robbins's (2004) model of *adoption*, which recognizes how Indigenous forms of power and ritual remain active, even as Christian morality and modes of thought are adopted. Some missionaries even encouraged Indigenous forms of memory keeping, like performing rituals, in order to intertwine Christian imagery and values into Indigenous practices (Taussig 1987). Robbins argues that cultural hybrids should be understood as a dynamic "interplay between two cultures that are operative in the same place at the same time" (Robbins 2004, 6). However, Christianity has deeply infused Indigenous cultures in a non-continuous way (Robbins 2007). For the Shipibo, like the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea that Robbins wrote about, Christianity was not only adopted in a fragmented form, but was taken in earnest as a meaningful system to guide peoples' everyday lives.

In the next sub-section I will show, through an ethnographic example, how hybridizations have manifested for one Shipibo healer in Paoyhan. Many anthropologists have made more nuanced and thorough arguments than I will about the role of Christianity as transformative of morality and personhood for the Indigenous peoples they study (e.g. Robbins 2004; Vilaça 2016; Comaroff and Comaroff 2008). Such a discussion is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, as Christianity has indeed shaped Shipibo ideologies and practices profoundly, this section is meant to offer a sampling of how Christianity specifically manifests in healing practices.

I include this in order to trouble notions of Indigeneity that view present-day Shipibo healing rituals as continuous with millennia-old traditions. Rather than seeing hybridizations as compromising a fictitious Indigenous purity, however, I follow Indigenous scholar John Borrows (2016), who suggests that the ability to draw from outside sources to enable the survival of Indigenous relational ontologies should be seen as a form of power and resistance.

HYBRIDIZATION ACROSS FORMS OF POWER

Papa Bari, a smiling old man around the age of ninety, walked with a stoop and a cane. I often spotted him shuffling slowly along the streets of the village of Paoyhan to bathe in the river, visit his family members, or participate in community assembly meetings. In addition to hosting foreign clients at his home in Paoyhan, he also still makes frequent trips to Pucallpa, where he performs healing ceremonies for foreigners at a center run by a Russian man, one of Papa Bari's students. He told me a story while sitting in his two-story house at the edge of town about his history of dieting plants and how he came to know the Bible, even though he never learned to read. He was seated across from me in a sturdy wooden chair in the living room. Various family members—his son and his grandchildren, gathered around to listen to his stories, sitting on the floor and various other chairs. His wife, María, does not understand much Spanish, if any. This is common for Shipibo women above a certain age, who were not taught in the Peruvian school system. Nonetheless, I am aware that María is one of the few women in Paoyhan who still practices the traditional method of spinning thread and weaving cloth from the native cotton plants that she cultivates in the chacra behind her house. This method involves a backstrap loom with a complex system of sticks and palm leaves that are inserted to secure, guide, and tighten the weave pattern. This process is time and labor intensive. Now, most women buy machine-woven cloth from stores in the city to make their *artesanía* (crafts)—usually intricately embroidered cloth skirts worn by women, or tapestries sold to foreigners.

Papa Bari is the eldest surviving brother of Papa Beso and Papa Meni, who all learned healing practices from their older brother who is no longer alive. “My first diet was the Bible. My older brother cooked ayahuasca. Two sticks. And he took what was good from the Bible and he put it in there. And it sweated in there. That’s how we drank it. That is where I learned my prayer.” In Papa Bari’s story, the pages of the Bible were actually cooked into the ayahuasca brew and consumed while he followed Shipibo dieting practices. Dieting is a practice by which healers or apprentice healers follow specific restrictions while taking a substance (usually a plant) in order to learn from it. In his visions during the diet, he met God and an angel, saw the birth of Jesus, and was eventually told by an ominous voice to leave the path of ayahuasca behind to perform healing only with the power of Christ—which he did for several years.

In Ucayali, the demonization of benign and protector spirits is evident today in the language record. The Spanish translations of the words for plant spirits (*ibo*), especially in historical documents and dictionaries, were listed as *demonios* or *diablos* (demons and devils). The only existing Shipibo-Spanish dictionary (until quite recently), defines the word for *meraya*, the highest class of healer, as synonymous with the word *yobe*, translated as *brujo* (witch or sorcerer) (Best 2019). In many Shipibo communities traditional healing practices were suppressed, and sometimes lost altogether, due to these types of characterizations that set them in opposition to Christianity and therefore Eurocentric ideals of what constitutes a civilized human.

Papa Bari’s story makes these tensions and contradictions evident. In his story, he used the Bible in the same way that he would have used plant material in order to connect with a plant spirit.

In essence, the Bible replaced the plant spirit in his dieting practice. When he was younger, a pastor told him that ayahuasca and plant spirits were the devil. Although now, he sees the missionary's characterizations of plant spirits as wrong, he still persists in his Christian faith. This is how he reconciles those tensions:

Well, I am going to tell you. Dear God made all the things in this world that we see. Not just any old devil did this. God did this. That is why if you want to diet trees or plants, you have to ask God. ... This was not a devil. ...you can go ahead with the diet. ...God guides you through everything. He stays there. It's all good. ... Sometimes in visions I have seen the Bible. Once there was a pastor who prohibited that we believe in things from this world. ... "That boahuasca²²," as they say, "that is the Devil." That's what he would say to us.²³

Within Papa Bari's speech and shamanic practice, there is evidence of hybridization. The Bible, for Papa Bari, is an object of power that represents Christ and Christianity, even though the practices he used to know and make meaning of the Bible itself engaged in Shipibo relational practices, which Arriaga may have called "idolatry."

As I discuss later in the dissertation (Chapter 4), Shipibo healing practices center on ayahuasca ceremonies, the singing of *ikaros*, and dieting. Each of these practices has found ways to incorporate elements of Christian symbolism or practice. Though it cannot be certain exactly how much of contemporary Shipibo ceremonies were influenced by Christianity, there are certain aspects that echo Christian forms. When *soplas* are given during an ayahuasca ceremony, for instance, the patient folds their hands in a typical prayer position and the healer blows perfumed liquid into the patient's hands and onto the crown of their head—a practice reminiscent of Christian sacraments and baptisms. This is also done with tobacco smoke. Some Shipibo healers have more overt Christian overtones in their ceremonies than others, and *ikaros* will sometimes feature certain Spanish-derived words and phrases with Christian significance.²⁴

Bakhtin's (1981) conception of hybrids represents a "collision between different points of view on the world" (360), which he sees as embedded in socio-linguistic forms. Thus, even within a single utterance, or speech act, such as singing *ikaros*, two ideologies, (Bakhtin says "socio-linguistic consciousnesses") can mix and give rise to new meanings. The resulting hybridities may be either conscious or unconscious (Bakhtin 1981). According to Homi Bhabha (1994), these hybridities arise from a liminality, or a place of untranslatability, that is characteristic of colonial encounters. Both the colonizer and the colonized are transformed in the spaces of liminality that arise from the colonial encounter (Werbner 2001).

From a political ontology perspective, spaces of liminality arise as worlds struggle over their own terms of existence (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018). The power of these spaces can also be exploited; Shipibo (*and* Christian) forms power rely on harnessing the transformative potential of liminality (e.g. Turner 1970). Thus, hybridization can sometimes be used as a form of resistance to or subversion of colonial order (Werbner 2001). This can be done, for example, either by using colonial forms of power for shamanic purpose (e.g. by harnessing the power of Christian figures during Shipibo healing rituals); or by using Christian practices to conceal or transport Indigenous cultural elements (e.g. hiding Indigenous practices and ideologies within accepted Christian forms). Vilaça suggests that the former types of hybridizations can be seen as a predation of

²² Boahuasca is an older term used for ayahuasca.

²³ Interview conducted in January 2015 by Paul Roberts and Laura Dev.

²⁴ *Ikaros* are sung mostly in a specific form of Shipibo with jargon and semantic forms used only in these songs. *Santo biblia-ya* (in reference to the holy bible), *rios poderoni* (a shipibicization of *dios poderoso*—powerful god), and other phrases are some overt Christian references that I have heard.

powerful Christian figures; God, Jesus, Priests, and Bibles are taken up as operatives within Shipibo relations of power alongside plant spirits and other spiritual entities (Vilaça 2016).

Even the descriptions of the Shipibo cosmovision that I was taught by Profesor Eli Sánchez, a Shipibo expert on their language and cosmology, often relied on Christian imagery and morals. The Shipibo cosmovision, according to Eli, is divided into four worlds: *Jene Nete* (*world of water*), *Non Nete* (*our world*), *Panshin Nete* (*yellow world*—Eli translates this as the “world of sin”), and *Jakon Nete* (*good world*—translated as “heaven”). Christian ideology is more explicit in other ayahuasca traditions, including Peruvian mestizo *vegetalismo*, which also borrows from Shipibo and other Indigenous traditions (e.g. Beyer 2010); and especially among the Brazilian ayahuasca religions like Santo Daime, in which the drinking of ayahuasca is specifically construed as a Christian sacrament (e.g. Labate and Pacheco 2011).

On the other hand, hybridization can serve to manage an increasingly complex world. Some scholars have suggested that Christianity offers Indigenous groups a more universalist and rational ontology that is better suited to manage the world that is arising as a result of globalization and colonization (Geertz 1973; Vilaça 2016). Hybridization in this way has allowed Shipibo healers to reconcile antagonisms between Christian and Shipibo worldviews and values. Thus, hybridization can either exploit or reconcile ontological tensions or antagonisms. I see these two effects as mutually reinforcing when hybridized practices become naturalized. Vilaça and other authors have recognized the Amazonian cultures’ “intrinsic plasticity and transformability, which make it difficult to establish any dividing line between the new and the traditional” (Vilaça 2016, 11). Nonetheless, Vilaça argues that has influenced the individualization of personhood and morality, with transformational effects on relational Indigenous ontologies. Still, although relations have shifted, relational ontologies remain foundational to Shipibo worlds.

1 | 3 HEALERS & OUTSIDERS

In this section I will discuss the figure of the healer or *shaman* and how relations between healers and outsiders have shifted and persisted over centuries. Scholars have argued that the shaman is an ambivalent figure who harbors European projections, fantasies, fears, and desires (Stuckrad 2012). This is also how Taussig observed that healers were depicted in Colombia—simultaneously embodying the savage *other* and possessing magic and healing as objects of desire by foreigners (Taussig 1987). More romanticized images of the wise and knowledgeable or ecological healer have also become important in the conservationist and new age narratives around Indigenous expertise (Gearin 2017). Such images and narratives have been deployed, for example, by ethnobotanists and bioprospectors searching for medicinal plants. For outsider ayahuasca consumers, both of these conceptions of the Indigenous healer may operate simultaneously or each manifest at different times.

The figure of the *gringo* (generally referring to white people, colonizers, or outsiders) is also prominent in Amazonian imaginaries (Gow 1993). The gringo is often seen as powerful but also dangerous. For example, dolphins are portrayed as pasty white people with seductive spirits (Slater 1994) and *pishtacos* are pseudo-mythological gringos who steal the organs and fat of Indigenous people (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2011). Likewise, objects associated with gringos and capitalism are also powerful figures that can be appropriated—such is the case with gasoline, sometimes dieted or used for protection in ceremonies. Gringos, both actual and mythical, act as cultural agents who mediate the “operational sphere of shamanism, in which perspectives can be

exchanged and subjectivities appropriated” (Freedman 2014, 138). Here, Freedman is referring to the perspectival nature of Amazonian shamanism (Viveiros de Castro 2004a) in which the healer attempts to appropriate the subjectivities of certain spiritual entities like plant spirits. Pacifying or attaining the alliance of gringos can be important for the shaman’s social, financial, and geographic mobility. This, according to Freedman, has in some ways restructured the context for the healer’s spiritual operations (more in Chapter 4).

Interactions between the multiple terrains of power that are connected through exchanges between Shipibo healers and outsiders determine how power continues to take shape in Shipibo communities. The global interest in Amazonian healing practices from outsiders has complicated these tensions. While healers are able to use their association with outsiders to achieve stability or mobility, outsiders are also able to learn and appropriate (or hybridize) shamanic practices of attaining spiritual power with a sense of entitlement that is made possible through colonial orders of power. In this section, I will discuss how narratives about Indigenous healers and Indigenous expertise with respect to medicinal plants have shaped relations between healers and outsiders and attitudes toward Indigenous knowledge. Then I will outline a brief history of the commodification of ayahuasca in Ucayali. I show that Indigenous healers have now been recast as mediators for ayahuasca tourism. Lastly, I will tell part of a story about Maestra Beka, whose death illustrates how earlier encounters between Indigenous Amazonians and outsiders, and the image of the gringo *pishtaco* mentioned above still haunt the relations between present-day healers and outsiders.

HEALERS AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

The search for new plant medicines was a primary reason for many voyages to remote locales during the colonial period (Voeks 2004), and many medicinal plants were successfully extracted from the Amazon (see Chapter 2). The narrative that Amazonian forests might still hold yet “undiscovered” cures has been renewed in recent decades to promote conservation (Norman Myers 1988; Plotkin 1988; Schultes and Raffauf 1990; Newman 1994). As early as the 1600s, the knowledge Indigenous healers possessed of plant medicines was recognized as potentially valuable (Arriaga 1968) even as those healers were seen as hindering missionary efforts (Taussig 1987). As part of more recent narratives by environmentalists, ethnobotanists, and bioprospectors, Indigenous healers have been touted as likely holding the knowledge of important forest medicine if only researchers could interview them before they die – at the same time linking the loss of biodiversity with the loss of cultural diversity (Brosius 1997). Thus, after centuries of being derided as witch doctors and heretics, Indigenous healers have now been recast as embodiments of forest wisdom, whose knowledge may be useful for modern medicine. These narratives also shape the perception of healers among global ayahuasca consumers.

Fantasies that foreigners have about shamans can articulate with the healer’s fantasies about gringos to constitute their relationship. Papa Bari, for example, after quitting ayahuasca for five years, was eventually convinced to return to his shamanic practices by a young Swiss man who begged the elder to teach him how to be a shaman. The foreigner had come to Pucallpa to seek out a shaman he had seen in a film, who had once turned into a jaguar, *yana puma* — Papa Bari was this shaman. As Papa Bari tells it:

They told [the Swiss man] to look for the house with the mango in front. And he arrived, at around this time of day, begging me! Begging!
I said: “I used to drink [ayahuasca] but now I am a [Christian]. Go to my brothers, Beso, Meni...”
He didn’t want that. “I came for you,” he begged me!

“I am not Yana Puma anymore,” [I told him], but he insisted, asking me three times. He just begged me....

Two years went by...and he said “If you help me become Yana Puma I will pay you.”

I said, “I don’t even know where Yana Puma *is* anymore!”

“What do you say?” he said, “I will pay you 27,000 dollars.” With that I was convinced...With that I built my house...

The Swiss man was able to leverage his cosmopolitan and economic privilege to attain shamanic power, while also positioning himself as a “white savior.” At the same time, Papa Bari was able to leverage this relationship to build his house and attract other international clientele.

Since the Swiss man desired to learn how to be Yana Puma, the jaguar, Papa Bari instructed him in the practices by which he himself had learned, and prescribed him a long diet. However, according to Papa Bari, the Swiss man was upset that he had to diet so long. Papa Bari was sympathetic, since he himself had gone through a similar process and knew the intensity of the diet. “Poor thing, he was suffering. He had fasted for 27 days on the diet, poor thing! He was so skinny! He was suffering.” The Swiss man was unprepared to engage in the modes of exchange and reciprocity necessary to establish a relationship with the plant spirit and achieve the shamanic power he desired. Later, the Swiss man would end up threatening Papa Bari physically, demanding that he give him the power of his diets. Papa Bari did not or could not. Later in his life, Papa Bari would again give up drinking ayahuasca for a period, reportedly because of the jealousy the attention and money from outsiders evoked from his brothers and others in the community at the time. However, he has since resumed the practice and still holds ceremonies for a wide international clientele.

Colonial extirpaters tried to purge healers of their spiritual relations while also salvaging their material knowledge of medicinal plants. Knowledge about plants that is purged of its spiritual relations is easily extracted. This leads to a dynamic in which once the knowledge has been documented, the lives and cultures of the healers who possessed that knowledge is seen disposable. However, the knowledge that Shipibo healers possess is relational and is performed through practices, something that is difficult for outsiders to understand or replicate (see Chapter 4). This perhaps explains why Shipibo community members are more concerned with the theft of traditional knowledge by outsiders learning their healing practices than they are about bioprospectors (Chapell 2011; Brabec de Mori 2014). Stories regularly circulate about foreigners who diet plants and learn healing practices from Shipibo healers and subsequently take that knowledge to practice ayahuasca shamanism in their own countries, becoming rich doing so (e.g. Brabec de Mori 2014). These stories are generally exaggerated, and do not describe the majority of outsiders who practice shamanism in the Global North, though there are notable exceptions. However, these fears reflect the type of exploitative relationships that have characterized the relations between Shipibo communities and outsiders for several centuries.



Figure 1.3. Me (left) conducting the interview with Biri (middle) and Maestra Beka (right) in January 2015 in their home in the outskirts of Pucallpa. Photo by Paul Roberts.

THE COMMODIFICATION OF AYAHUASCA IN UCAYALI

“Cures were free, medicinal plants were free. Nobody charged you. Various doctors²⁵ would cure a sick person. But no one spent money. Free ayahuasca, free medicine, free medicinal plants.” (Biri, speaking about when her mother, Maestra Beka, was young).²⁶

In their home in a neighborhood mostly inhabited by Shipibo residents in the outskirts of Pucallpa, a Shipibo mother and daughter spoke with me at length about their experiences as healers. The elder, Maestra Beka, was wearing the style of dress typical of older Shipibo women: a dual-tone brightly colored polyester top with a distinctive round collar, and a knee-length wrap skirt. These skirts are often embroidered with distinctive Shipibo designs, but on this day hers was unadorned, what one might wear when working around the house. Her daughter Biri, in her forties, wore a jean skirt and a faded cotton t-shirt (Figure 1.3). She did most of the translating for her mother, who, though she understands some Castellano (Spanish), does not like to speak it. During this interview, they told me that Maestra Beka had conceived Biri in a dream during a floral bath she did as part of a plant diet. To make a floral bath, the leaves or flowers of a teacher plant (or a mix of plants) are steeped overnight in water, and the water is then used for bathing. The energy and aromas of the plants then infuse the dieter, which helps them connect with the plant spirit. After this bath, they told me, the Maestra had a dream-vision in which a line of soldiers appeared before her and placed a small doll in her vagina. Soon after this incident she would find out that she was pregnant.

²⁵ *Médico* or *doctor* is often used to refer to Shipibo healers

²⁶ Interview conducted in January 2015 by Paul Roberts and Laura Dev. Names listed are part of their Shipibo names, which are not commonly known, in an attempt to provide a certain level of anonymity while also crediting the speakers with their own knowledges.

Their small house had a dirt floor, and the only furniture in the living area was a worn mattress, a plastic sack that they had laid down for me to sit on, and a table that seemed to be used for preparing food. Paul²⁷ and I were seated across from the mother and daughter to conduct the interview. As we spoke, children and grandchildren popped in and out of the room and came to listen at the windows. Several useful plants—*tabaco*, *malva*, *bobinsana*—grew in the alleyways between houses, or in the streets, though quite dusty from the *motokar*²⁸ traffic in the roads. Many of the residents do not live there full time, also keeping a house in whichever rural community on the river they were born in. Sometimes husbands or wives are split between the city and the river community; sometimes entire families spend the rainy season (December - March) in the city, as certain communities are frequently flooded and living is harsh during those times. Many children of high school or middle school age live in the city even without their parents, to attend school there. Though still quite poor, the education in the city is higher quality than what they would receive in the community.

The commodification of ayahuasca is only a generation or two old in Ucayali. When Maestra Beka was a young woman, around sixty years ago, plant medicines and curing ceremonies were administered freely by traditional Shipibo healers with the aid of ayahuasca, the visionary plant brew that enabled them to perform these rituals and cure their patients. According to Maestra Beka, ayahuasca was taken communally back then:

They ate fish, and they drank *ayahuasca*. And they ate in separate groups: here a group of men, and there a group of women. Eating while *mareado*.²⁹ And the men would begin to sing the first songs. And the women would respond with their song, as they felt the ayahuasca. And that is how they lived: praising God. And that is how they lived, with the plants and ayahuasca *ikarado*³⁰ (*Biri* translating for Maestra Beka).

This communal style of drinking ayahuasca is not commonly practiced among the Shipibo anymore, if at all, likely because missionaries throughout the colonial history of Ucayali decried the plants as being “the work of the devil”,³¹ and in many Shipibo communities spiritual relations with plants have not persisted. In other communities, the more common style of ayahuasca curing ritual has persisted throughout the Western Amazon, which borrows Christian symbolism and is focused on curing patients of spiritual illnesses (Brabec de Mori 2011b; Gow 1996).

From the beginning, the commodification of ayahuasca and ceremonies was driven by contact with foreigners, including researchers. Several of the elder healers that I interviewed had long associations with anthropologists or ethnobotanists. Maestra Beka’s family was one of these. As Biri described:

My uncle was the first to drink ayahuasca with his *amigo* [foreigner]. But here in Yarina, the first time was my grandfather and his son. Before that, no one drank with you guys [foreigners]. He lived alone. Yarina was not a city like now. Villages. Big forest.

Foreign researchers began to seek out Shipibo culture and become exposed to their plants and practices in the 1950s (e.g. Tschopik 1958; Lathrap 1968), and by the 1960s-70s, especially after ayahuasca was brought into awareness in the Global North by William S. Burroughs (who

²⁷ Paul Roberts, my collaborator from the NGO Alianza Arkana, had introduced me to the two women.

²⁸ A *motokar* is a kind of auto rickshaw that is the most common type of transportation in the region.

²⁹ *Mareado* (Spanish) refers to experiencing the effects of ayahuasca. It literally translates to ‘dizzy’ or ‘seasick’.

³⁰ Sung to with special songs associated with ayahuasca (*ikaro* comes from a Quechua word).

³¹ From an interview with Papa Bari, 2015 by Paul Roberts and Laura Dev.

visited Pucallpa) (Lees 2017), Allen Ginsberg (Burroughs and Ginsberg 1963), and others, foreigners began to come to Pucallpa specifically seeking out ayahuasca. The first North Americans visited Paoyhan back when it was still called Ebenezer in 1960. Two medical anthropologists lived in Ebenezer for some time, and were said to have assisted the townspeople greatly, providing medical help while they lived among them (Macedo 2007). The interest in ayahuasca was generally welcomed, as at the time there were few other economic options. Certain families began to position themselves as having particular healing abilities or knowledge of the culture and traditions, which helped them gain economic advantage. Biri saw this association in a positive light, saying, “People from other countries helped us. We didn’t have anything. Traditionally the Shipibo were very poor. We didn’t have clothes, we didn’t have these ... underwear. Nothing.”

Pucallpa, along with Ucayali in general, has seen a steady rise in ayahuasca tourism since the 1990s, with a concentration in a Shipibo community near Pucallpa called San Francisco. There has been a remarkable boom even in the last 5 years for the entire Ucayali region, accompanied by a marked increase in awareness of ayahuasca worldwide. This is probably due in part to foreigners bringing Shipibo ceremonial practices back to their own countries. Only within the last decade have centers owned and run by foreigners become more prevalent in the Pucallpa area, though many work closely with a specific healer, or simply offer a space for rent, in which any group can contract a specific healer to hold ceremony. Most of the tourism still involves people going to visit specific Shipibo healers, either in the house of the healer, as with Papa Meni and Papa Bari in Paoyhan, or at a rented or curated space near Pucallpa, which is more how Maestra Beka operates.

Though the ayahuasca healing and tourism industry in Pucallpa remains centered on the Shipibo traditions, there are many mestizo healers or *vegetalistas* that are also well known in Ucayali. Mestizo healers have their own healing practices that have significant overlap with Shipibo practices, some of whom have trained with Shipibo healers. Brabec de Mori (2011b) and Gow (1996) both suspect that mestizo practices and Indigenous practices evolved together during the rubber boom era. This hypothesis has been contested. The evidence provided is largely conjectural. One piece of evidence that they have cited is that many groups living in the southern Amazon continue to seek out shamanic training and expertise from healers or groups further north (downriver), and in the larger cities like Pucallpa and Iquitos, which were important places of intercultural exchange during the rubber boom (Brabec de Mori 2011b; Gow 1996). The towns at river confluences not only accumulated more wealth from rubber extraction (see Chapter 2), but were also hubs where Indigenous knowledge and shamanic practices accumulated and were shared.

In Shipibo memory, from some of the elders that I interviewed like Papa Meni, ayahuasca was not always consumed by healers. There is evidence from other Indigenous groups, like the Huni Kuin and the Jivaro, of ayahuasca use before such groups engaged with the rubber economy (Córdova 2005). For example, Manuel Córdova (2005), a mestizo who was captured by the Huni Kuin, was taught shamanism and the use of ayahuasca by his captors. For these groups, ayahuasca was taken by the group to ensure success in hunting, or as part of shamanic warfare (Descola 1998). These types of ceremonies were more communal (as Maestra Beka described above) in contrast to the ayahuasca curing rituals that are most commonly practiced by Shipibo and mestizo healers in Ucayali today. Gow (1996) posits that because of recurring epidemics in the region, the current widespread practice of ayahuasca *curing* in the Western Amazon arose from that particular historical milieu during the conquest and rubber boom era, within large settlements in missions

and rubber camps. Drawing on Christian ritual and symbolism, these rituals were formed as what he considers to be a particularly *mestizo* practice (Gow 1996).

While there are certain elements of this argument that make sense, I believe it is risky to attribute these practices to mestizo or colonial origins without certain qualifications. Surely, Indigenous practices have been exchanged, evolved, and hybridized over millennia. While the introduction of ayahuasca for the Shipibo may have only happened within the last 150 to 300 years as contacts between Indigenous groups intensified, Shipibo rituals are premised on explicitly Indigenous relational practices like dieting plants. Botanical and cultural exchanges occurred within the Indigenous context of the time, which, as discussed above, was centered around missions and rubber camps. I would be careful to note that this context of exchange should not take away the indigeneity and fundamental relationality of Shipibo healing practices involving ayahuasca. Indigenous practices are often held up to inspection for their supposed lack of purity for borrowing other cultural elements that they come across. In contrast, Europeans and foreigners have been able to appropriate material and cultural resources for their own uses without it being seen as compromising their own cultural integrity. Thus, while Indigenous practices, like those of other groups of people may be a result of uncountable hybridities, that should not be used to discredit the indigeneity of those practices either.

Iquitos, located 500 kilometers to the North of Pucallpa in the region of Loreto, is thought to be the “epicenter” of ayahuasca tourism (D. Hill 2016). After its prominence during the rubber boom, Iquitos still maintains its place of power at the confluence of several rivers. As a destination for jungle treks, tour packages began featuring ayahuasca sessions for tourists as early as the 1960s, becoming more routine in the 1980s (Freedman 2014). In the 1990s, ayahuasca tourism expanded; foreigners or outsiders who had been trained by local shamans began opening their own lodges. Healing practices from several Indigenous groups can be found in Iquitos, giving foreigners their pick from among many traditional styles of healing to partake in. In the ayahuasca economy, Iquitos serves as a hub where Indigenous labor, practices, and plant vitality all contribute to the healing of foreigners.

Though many ayahuasca healing centers marketing to foreigners offer Shipibo style ceremonies, these centers are most often run by either foreigners or mestizos who hire Shipibo healers. As employees, the healers then have little say in the conditions of work or the structure of the ceremonies. This difference is partly because Iquitos is not Shipibo territory, though it is home to several other Indigenous groups. Maestra Beka worked at a foreign-run center in Iquitos at one point: “Before, she ran around, traveled to Iquitos,” said Biri. “She was strong and fat. Now look at her! Her knee!” Indeed, her knee, was quite swollen, and had been for several years. “When she worked there, she came back like this. She almost died. . . .she says that she fainted in the *maloka*.”³² They noted that many healers who went to work in Iquitos found it difficult to be away from their families, and there was a lot of jealousy and witchcraft that made the work dangerous. Two healers, both women, had even died while working there, apparently from witchcraft they encountered from other shamans (Shipibo or otherwise) in Iquitos.

Many healers have built a clientele through their time working at centers in Iquitos, and later were able to maintain themselves back in Pucallpa based on the reputation they had acquired there. It is common for healers in Pucallpa to work at centers in Iquitos when they are in economic need; they generally provide decent incomes even when the work is not desirable (see Chapter 3). Working at centers run by outsiders often means singing for a large number of patients (up to

32. A maloka is a (usually round or hexagonal) wooden structure where ceremonies are held.

thirty) during a given ceremony. Maestra Beka one time urinated in her skirt while singing during one of the ceremonies because there were so many people to heal and she felt she could not leave to use the restroom. My point in bringing this up is not that the outsiders running ayahuasca centers are mistreating the Shipibo healers that work for them. Rather, these stories reveal the ironies and power dynamics that come into play when healers become employees for outsiders in an economic system that is fraught with structural and internalized racism. This harkens back to Freedman's (2014) argument that outsiders are dictating the frame of operation for shamanic practice. In such cases where the healers do not have the autonomy to determine the conditions of work, outsiders get well and Shipibo healers fall ill.

Despite these critiques, many healers have been able to create meaningful livelihoods from working in the healing profession. Income from ayahuasca tourism is not limited to healers, but extends to the communities in which those healers live. Like the missionaries who provided services such as schooling and healthcare for Shipibo communities, outsiders who establish relations with healers often help with community development projects. I have seen several communities, including Paoyhan, gain water sanitation systems through the fundraising efforts of foreigners who came to learn from healers in those communities. These outsiders are also often enlisted into certain roles that were in the past fulfilled by missionaries. This includes becoming godparents to children, supporting local schools or sports teams, and sponsoring community events. Thus, the ayahuasca tourism industry, for most Shipibo healers and community members that I interviewed, was viewed positively. Ayahuasca tourism also represents a break from the past in which Shipibo spiritual practices and ideologies were repressed, and instead valorizes the knowledge and expertise of Shipibo healers. However, as I will describe later in the dissertation (Chapter 4), as Shipibo healing practices are increasingly performed for an outsider audience, the practices shift, along with the meanings and values associated with them, and new hybridizations emerge.

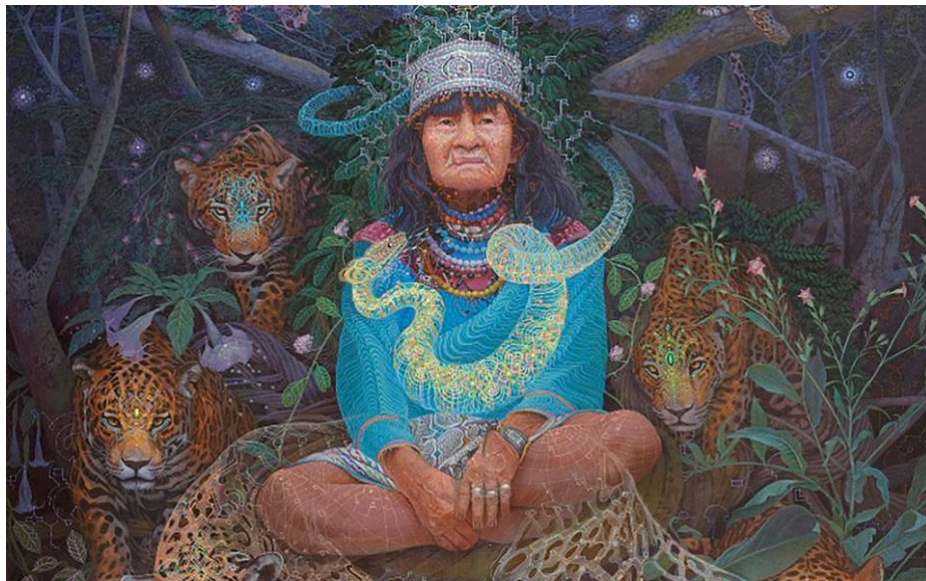


Figure 1.4. "Guardianes" - A portrait of Maestra Beka by Luis Tamani Amasifuen, a local artist from Pucallpa. Copyright by Luis Tamani Amasifuen.

THE DEATH OF A HEALER

Following the interview with Maestra Beka in Pucallpa in January of 2015, I sat in two ceremonies with the Maestra and her daughter Biri—these were among the first ayahuasca ceremonies I would participate in during my research in the Pucallpa area. The way their voices wove in and out of each other opened doorways in my visions. Lotuses and roses bloomed out of my body as I lay on my mat, and rose-colored discs opened inward and inward, like layers of gongs spinning. The sweetest sounds. That night, after singing to me, Biri told me I have *bichos*—parasites. She was right. A month later I found out Biri herself had tuberculosis, and she remained ill for several years.

A year or so later, I came across Maestra Beka's face in a geodesic dome art gallery at a festival in California. She was portrayed cross-legged, surrounded by jaguars under a full moon, with a brightly colored ethereal snake coiled around her neck. She was wearing a traditional Shipibo outfit and cloth crown. It was undeniably her. The painting is called "Guardianes" (see Figure 1.4), by a well-known artist, Luis Tamani Amasifuen, from Pucallpa. That same night, I heard a familiar song from another world come on over the speakers, set to a heavy bassline, sung in Shipibo. A song I have heard Papa Meni sing in ceremony. I knew it was Maestro Bene, a Shipibo healer from a community South of Pucallpa. The Californian music producer had come down to Pucallpa shortly before I had arrived, and done recordings and diets with Bene. At this festival, and in California in general, it is surprisingly common to see Shipibo embroidery work—clothing embroidered with designs, patches sewn onto bags, and more. Some people have acquired them on their travels in Peru, or as gifts from friends, or from people selling them at festivals or other venues in the United States. The art has travelled around the world, and is quite recognizable with its electrical-circuit-like designs. Shipibo art and practices have become hypermobile, carried by mobile outsiders of a certain demographic (i.e. mostly from the Global North, white, and in their 20s-30s), their cultural symbolism is recognizable in countries further than most Shipibo people will ever travel.

The next time I saw Maestra Beka, in 2016, I went to her house with one of my interlocutors, Juan,³³ a *mestizo* man from Yarina who said the elder healer was his godmother (*madrina*) and teacher. Juan cooks ayahuasca for export, and has his own European clients who come to sit in ceremony with him, and sometimes with Maestra Beka. He brought me to her house in the far outskirts of Yarina, through lush but cleared lands, past mango trees and various settlements, to a large compound with several simple houses with earthen floors. We came unannounced. The Maestra was not feeling well, and was laying down on a thinly padded bed in one of the houses. I spoke to her in broken Shipibo, mostly asking about her health — how she felt, where she had pain. We only stayed for around 10 minutes and then let her continue to rest.

A year later I was in Maestra Beka's neighborhood again. It was around Christmas time. My Shipibo god sister had bought land nearby, and had wanted to hold a *chocolatado* for the neighborhood children. The *chocolatado* is a missionary tradition that serves to create goodwill in communities and to ensure that the poorer children are given some sort of gift for the holiday season. I, like many outsiders who visit Shipibo communities, was familiar with the discomfort of being imbricated in colonial role-playing. The chocolatado seemed important to my god-sister, so I had donated 100 soles (around \$30 USD) to the cause. With the money, my two god-sisters bought the ingredients for hot chocolate, several *Pannetones* (a popular brand of fruit cake), and

³³ Name changed.

enough brightly-colored toys from Tottus³⁴ to give every child in the neighborhood their pick. There were inflated balls, action figures, dolls, toy guns, and stuffed animals. The toys had been divided into two piles—one for the boys, and one for the girls. My god sister’s son, who calls me *Tía* (aunt), though is not much younger than myself, was wearing a Santa hat. He announced to the assembled families that the chocolotado was made possible because of my generosity, and he also called me by their family’s last name—in a way, claiming me as their own. My nephew had a list of the names of all the children in the neighborhood, who he called up one by one to pick a toy. The pleased children then hurried away to show their parents and siblings what they had chosen.

After all the children had received toys, I saw Maestra Beka walk slowly over from down the street, where I knew her house to be. She was barefoot, again wearing a plain black skirt without designs, and appeared quite thin and frail. I invited her to sit in a chair, called her *maestra*, and reminded her of the previous times we had met. I felt certain that she did not remember me. We served her hot chocolate and fruit cake. She sat by me eating her cake quietly and later conversing with my god-sister, Jovita in Shipibo. I wondered if she had enough food at her house, and gave her more cake to take with her.

A few months later, in March of 2018, while I was back in the United States, I received several Facebook messages — from my god sister, from Juan, and from another friend in Pucallpa, notifying me that Maestra Beka had died. When I first saw the message I assumed that she had died of old age, as I knew that she had not been well. But unbelievably, the elderly Shipibo healer had been shot by a young Canadian man. News of the murder spread like wildfire over internet news outlets. Ronald Suárez, the president of COSHIKOX³⁵, a Shipibo political organization, happened to be at the United Nations office in New York for a forum on Indigenous Issues at the time of the murder, and made a statement in front of the crowd there before flying back to Pucallpa. I received several messages that week from friends worldwide wondering what had happened. I could not say. Truly, few people really knew or know what transpired between the Canadian man who was alleged to have shot her and the elder healer.

They say the murder happened in the early afternoon at her house in front of her grandchildren. According to some accounts, the Canadian man was her patient. According to others, she had refused to treat him because she was unwell and he had continued to harass her, asking her to perform ceremonies. Juan told me that the man had killed her because he was an organ trafficker; he was angry that Maestra Beka’s son had refused to work for him, and still owed him money. Local police also suspected that money was an underlying cause (Collyns 2018). Whatever the reason, witnesses say that the Canadian man pointed a gun at her and demanded that she sing him an *ikaro* before he shot her in the chest. According to an article in *The Guardian*, which came out a week later, “witnesses say she collapsed to the ground, gasping: ‘They’ve killed me! They’ve killed me!’ as her daughter [Biri] ran to cradle her dying mother’s head” (Collyns 2018). Soon after the murder, a group of young men from her neighborhood apprehended the Canadian man, lynched him, and buried his body nearby.

The article in *The Guardian* claimed that the deaths revealed the “darker side” of ayahuasca tourism (Collyns 2018). A statement by a white Pucallpa congressman shortly after the incident called the lynching “savage” in a tweet, blaming the deaths on Shipibo healers who were turning ayahuasca into a business. This statement was subsequently condemned by COSHIKOX and

³⁴ A Peruvian supermarket chain

³⁵ The *Confederación Shipibo-Konibo y Xetebó*, or the Council of the Shipibo-Konibo and Xetebó

others as racist. Journalists interviewed the man's family back in Canada, who claimed that these actions were completely out of character. According to the man's purpose for his trip, he was fighting addiction. People among the global ayahuasca community speculated that the man was probably possessed by a demon, or perhaps drinking ayahuasca had caused a psychotic break. COSHIKOX (the Shipibo political organization) used the Maestra's death to gain international recognition, and make public complaints about the exploitation of Shipibo healers. They called for greater regulation of tourism and the theft of traditional knowledge. They would call Maestra Beka a *meraya*, the highest class of healer. All my informants had previously claimed that *merayas* longer exist, but some now corroborated the claim that Maestra Beka was one. I did not know what to make of this event nor of the stories around it. I could not know what was true or what was not. I only knew that two people had died: an old Shipibo woman and a young Canadian man. How is this case different from the violence of missionaries, rubber barons, or logging corporations? What type of entitlement might have led the man to shoot her?

1 | 4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have argued that the colonial history of exploitation, ideological domination, and resistance in Ucayali has shaped Shipibo relations with outsiders. Colonization determined a world order in which European modes of power dominated, and Indigenous peoples were constructed as inferiors. Nonetheless, this history was marked by continual acts of resistance by Indigenous peoples as well as a gradual erosion of colonial power. During the colonial period, Indigenous uprisings repeatedly led to the expulsion of missionaries and colonizers from Ucayali. In response to religious oppression and attempts at extirpating Indigenous relational practices that involved spirits and natural entities, Shipibo healers adapted and hybridized Christian symbolism and modes of power. Finally, in response to the renewed interest in Indigenous plants and healing practices by outsiders, Shipibo healers have turned this interest to their own advantage. However, these moments of Indigenous resistance do not negate the violence and exploitation that has characterized these relations. I have shown that violent and exploitative relations continue to haunt ayahuasca tourism in Ucayali, even as many healers consider it to be an enterprise that offers hope for Indigenous communities and healers.

In contrast to other instances of the extraction and commodification of Amazonian plants (see Chapter 2), the ayahuasca economy is *not only* based on a disembedded plant vitality unattached to Indigenous relational practices. Instead, Shipibo healing practices have remained essential to the ayahuasca economy in Ucayali. Thus, the expertise of Indigenous healers has been revalorized by international ayahuasca consumers. Nonetheless, the ayahuasca economy is built on racialized histories that depend on the extraction of plant vitality and the exploitation of Indigenous labor. Scholarship in the ontological turn, particularly those that focus on emergent assemblages, have what Fitz-Henry (2017) has critiqued as a "presentism" that numbs us to the slow violence (e.g. Nixon 2011) of the contemporary global economy. Before I can discuss the dynamics of the ayahuasca economy in greater detail, which I will do in Chapter 3, I find it necessary to take a long view of Ucayali's extractive history to further illustrate how the past makes itself felt in the present.

In the next chapter, I turn my attention to how Ucayali's extractive history has shaped sacionatural relations in the region. I will show that current conceptions of indigeneity have emerged along with these extractive industries. This history is not separate from the history I have

told here. Indeed, the extractive history is deeply entangled with the history of encounters between outsiders and healers. These first two chapters cover the same periods of time, and some of the same events, but from different angles. The present chapter focused on the relationship between Shipibo healers and outsiders, and how this affects ayahuasca tourism today. The next chapter will focus on how the connections between Indigenous peoples and the extractive sector has shifted socionatural relations and concepts of indigeneity.

CHAPTER 2 | EXTRACTIONS

CO-CONSTITUTING INDIGENEITY & PLANT VITALITY IN UCAYALI

2 | 0 INTRODUCTION

OPENING: PRESENT-DAY PAOYHAN



Figure 2.1. Logging barges on the Ucayali River. Photo by Paul Roberts.

In the port area of the frontier city of Pucallpa, passengers embark for towns down and up the Ucayali River. Giant barges haul thick logs by the hundreds into port from further downriver where primary forest still may be found (Figure 2.1). The faster passenger boats, with final destinations in large river cities like Contamana and Iquitos, are mainly occupied by mestizo travelers (Peruvians of some European descent). Slow boats, with destinations in smaller towns, carry travelers slung in hammocks during night-long voyages; these are taken by Shipibo-Konibo and other Indigenous Amazonian passengers, visiting family or returning home with supplies to the communities that are peppered along the banks of the Rio Ucayali. I seem to be the only foreigner on board my boat, and I can recognize no other foreigners in the port at all.

It takes three or four hours by *rápido* (the fast boat), to get to Paoyhan, downriver near the fork of the Rio Pisqui. Upon disembarking, one must ascend the sheer crumbling riverbank to reach the higher ground of the town. The banks of Paoyhan are eroding, like much of the bank along the Ucayali. Although the river channel has always been constantly moving and reforming, certain human-induced changes have increased the speed at which the river banks erode: increasingly frequent and severe flooding due to climate change, increases in boat traffic on the Rio Ucayali, and deforestation (Hern 1992a). On my first visit to Paoyhan, though I had imagined

that I was heading into the “jungle,” I found my imagined jungle to be notably missing. There are some trees — coconut palms, papaya, many types of bananas, huito (a tree used to make a black dye) and a smattering of other useful species in peoples’ yards. There used to be other fruit trees growing there, but many died in 2005 during a time of severe drought in the region, which also lowered crop yields and fish populations, resulting in more food insecurity and disease due to difficulty accessing clean water (Sherman et al. 2015). There seems to be nothing resembling a forest in the town itself, which is mostly bare earth, or low-growing plants, with some cultivated areas in between houses. Just outside the populated area young secondary forest can be found, alongside fields of corn and yuca.

About 30 minutes by motorboat along a smaller tributary from Paoyhan there is an unpaved road, which leads to land owned by members of the community in Paoyhan. They call it *Nuevo Paoyhan*, and there are plans to move the entire community to this area, where the resources are more abundant, where the flooding doesn’t reach, and where the banks are not eroding. However, the move will be costly and some community members doubt as to whether people will actually choose to rebuild there. The site of Nuevo Paoyhan now only contains family *chacras*, the regional word for forested swidden agriculture plots, as well as mature secondary forest. In the *chacra* belonging to Papa Meni’s wife’s family (property is usually passed along the maternal line), they cultivate bananas, sugarcane, cacao, turmeric, potatoes, yuca, and many other species. On our way through the chacra, the maestro cut a bundle of sugarcane to bring back as a treat for the children of his household—his grandchildren.

During our walk to the site, it became clear that the access road was probably made by loggers, who passed us in trucks carrying freshly felled trees as we walked along the hot and unshaded path to the future site of Nuevo Paoyhan. Along the road, Papa Meni, who is one of the traditional healers in Paoyhan, stopped to cut back the growth around certain medicinal shrubs, trees, and vines with his machete. This helps ensure that these plants are not outgrown or shaded over by their less useful competitors. In the surrounding forest we visited a number of very old trees—some of the only old-growth trees I had seen on that visit—master teacher trees, which have been protected by Papa Meni’s family, because they use the bark and resins of the trees for healing and learning. The trunks and roots bear the scars of this history of use, but the trees are still mighty, some with roots that emanate like great serpents from the trunk, and others whose buttress roots towered over my head.

Early explorers referred to the Amazon basin as “jungle” a term that is fraught with colonial connotations of superiority, invoking simultaneously fear, and a need to be tamed (Raffles 2002b; Peluso and Vandergeest 2010). Related to the jungle version of the Amazon³⁶ is the myth of *terra nullius*, the empty landscape, which erases the long history of Indigenous occupation and stewardship of the forests. The terra nullius myth fosters narratives justifying the appropriation of land and the extraction and plunder of natural resources (S. Hecht 2008). “Rainforest,” on the other hand, has been used by conservationists to describe the ecological and global importance of these forests in maintaining the global climate and biodiversity (Slater 2004). This view obscures the role and influence of humans in forest history and also essentializes native Amazonians as “ecological Indians” living in harmony with nature (Follér 1998). This rhetoric has been used by conservation organizations and NGOs in support of the preservation of rainforest cultures. In such narratives, Indigenous cultures are often portrayed as untouched by the outside world. In my

³⁶ Although ‘Amazon’ refers to the great river, I also use it to speak of the vast forested region to which many great rivers give life to.

experience, neither the images of pristine primary forest invoked by the term *rainforest*, nor the dense impenetrable vegetation of what I imagine when I hear the word *jungle* were what I found in Ucayali. Perhaps there are those things too, but what people tend to say when they are going out into the forest is that they are going to *el monte* — the woods or forest — it is a humble word, and it is familiar. “Monte” implies a certain intimacy with the land that both *jungle* and *rainforest* lose with their exoticizing and political undertones that paint it as *other*—whether terrifying or beautiful, in need of taming or in need of saving.

OVERVIEW: EXTRACTION IN UCAYALI

Peru has the second largest area of natural forest in South America, and the forest in the Amazon Basin is considered a global biodiversity and endemism hotspot (Cossío et al. 2014). Humans have been shaping the structure of the tropical forests of Peru for millennia (Erickson 2008; Pinedo-Vasquez, Hecht, and Padoch 2012). However, with growing interest in the extraction of botanical forest resources over the last 150 years, changes in the landscape of the Ucayali region have been dramatic, and claims over forest lands highly contested. In this chapter I focus on the ways in which Shipibo-Konibo communities and Indigenous identities in Ucayali have interacted with and been co-constituted along with Peru’s extractive sectors that have structured the region’s economy. I show how extractive industries have restructured socionatural relations in the Ucayali region. This has facilitated the oppression of Indigenous forest users and the objectification and commodification of plants.

There have been several periods of resource frontier expansion in Ucayali, and each has bled into the next. The primary forests of the Ucayali Region are rich in botanical resources, including hardwoods, fiber, roofing and building materials, fruits, latex, countless medicinal plants, an abundance of food plants, and also animals—all of which were hunted and eaten by the Indigenous people of the region (Erickson 2008). Until the past 50 years, the Ucayali River itself was plentiful with fish, which provided a staple for the river-dwelling Shipibo and Konibo. Over the last two centuries, Indigenous communities have become increasingly embedded in the market economy on both local and global scales, but have remained hindered in advancing socio-economically due to a long legacy of exploitation of Indigenous lands and labor.

Complex dynamics have been unfolding between Indigenous Amazonian communities and extractive industries that depend upon the natural abundance along the Ucayali River. This chapter investigates the political actors, state policies, and historical processes that mediate Indigenous identities in relation to extraction. I argue that access to forest resources has shaped current socionatural landscapes and racial hierarchies in Ucayali, the region around the Ucayali River³⁷. Power relations in the Amazon regions have long been centered around river infrastructures (Chapter 1). The waves of extractive industries that have passed through the region have both taken advantage of these existing power structures, as well as altered the dynamics — creating racialized social hierarchies, streamlining production and export, subjugating native groups to slavery and exploitation. There are competing claims over the right to harvest trees and the right to access and govern the forests. There is also a conflict over worlds and identities.

³⁷ The Ucayali Region is a political demarcation, with Pucallpa as its capital. Although Ucayali was only designated as its own region in 1980 (separated from Loreto), I use ‘Ucayali’ and ‘Ucayali Region’ throughout this chapter and dissertation to refer to the watershed around the Ucayali River where I conducted my field research, with overlaps with the present-day demarcation of the Ucayali Region.

Extractive industries have further shaped new ontologies in Ucayali that have shifted the relations between humans and natural beings—what Carolyn Merchant (1989) calls an ecological revolution. For instance, there is an ontological tension in how trees are understood. As seen in the opening vignette, at times, trees are identified as medicines, teachers, or otherwise interacting socially with humans. Other times, trees are objectified, valued for their bark, latex, or timber—already dead, a commodity to be harvested and sold. Human identities are formed in relation to these trees; trees and humans are continually co-constituted and reconstituted in a web of social and ecological relations. All these social relations, however, operate within a colonial legacy of racialized violence associated with the extraction of forest resources; this has given rise to contested landscapes of access and control.

I will discuss how conflicting conceptions of nature (and natural beings) have interacted, in turn shifting socionatural relations in Ucayali. Both nature and indigeneity have been constructed in dialogue with modernity, colonialism, and extraction. Extractive industries and forced Indigenous labor helped to create the current dynamics of coloniality that characterize social and political power in Ucayali and Latin America more broadly. I suggest that vitality has been a key issue in these struggles. Vitality, the most basic substance of life, which dominates systems of exchange in Amazonia (Santos-Granero 2015), has continually been extracted from Ucayali toward the Global North in the form of both plant vitality and human labor. I view plants and other-than-human entities as co-contributors to the formation of human societies and empire, not merely as passive resources that have been exploited. These dynamic interplays continue to determine and overdetermine Indigenous identities, access to capital, and more-than-human relations. Indigenous resistance and resurgence, and Indigenous knowledge and power have equally shaped the region. These dynamics have both constrained and enabled the development of the ayahuasca tourism industry, and continue to shape the power relations therein. However, before I discuss ayahuasca's own commodification in detail (Chapter 3), I want to situate the ayahuasca boom within Ucayali's ongoing extractive history. Therefore, I will not discuss ayahuasca in the present chapter.

In order to illuminate the dimensions of the commodification of plants and nature, this chapter is divided into four remaining sections. In section one, I focus on the early history of forest extraction in the Ucayali Region. I show that the extraction of plant vitality from the Amazon was essential in structuring the racialized labor relations that continue to define the Ucayali region. The rubber boom, in particular, was responsible for solidifying racialized hierarchies through the enslavement and genocide of Indigenous peoples. In section two I discuss how Indigenous land rights have developed, and how they interact with the neoliberal development projects that have descended upon the Amazon. More recent forms of plant extraction from Ucayali include medicinal plant bioprospecting and timber. I show that these contemporary forms of extraction rely on the racialized labor structures that were defined during the early extractive period, while at the same time rebranding Indigenous expertise and knowledge of the forest as potentially valuable. I use theories of access and territorialization to understand the power dynamics at play in competing claims to land, forests, and trees. I show that neoliberal development projects were also used to bring Indigenous peoples and territories under state control. In section three I discuss how extractive industries have influenced contemporary conceptions of indigeneity. I show how concepts of indigeneity remain bounded to land, trees and plants, and how these identities have been articulated to create political momentum and stake claims.

2 | 1 EARLY EXTRACTION & RACIALIZED EXPLOITATION

In this section, I discuss the first waves of extraction that passed through Ucayali. I argue that the racialized violence and enslavement of Indigenous peoples during early extractive endeavors laid the groundwork for structuring the racialized hierarchies that are ongoing in the region. Since European colonization, the Amazon regions have been marked by continual struggle for access and ownership rights over native lands, resources, and bodies. The Americas, and particularly Latin America, were recognized as useful for its resources like gold and silver, but also for several important plants that were “discovered” there—rubber, sugarcane, and cinchona—to name a few. Each of these plants was influential in enforcing European imperialism and propelling the increasingly globalized economy, through which resources and capital were concentrated in Europe (Schiebinger 2009). At the same time, Europe’s economy was dependent on the dominated races (e.g. Indigenous Americans, enslaved Africans and later, American-born blacks) as sources of unpaid labor that reproduced the material subsistence of Europe’s labor force (Federici 2014).

COLONIALITY AND RACE IN THE WESTERN AMAZON

Under colonial logics, race was used as a distinguishing factor to differentiate social hierarchies between the European colonists and their descendants, and Indigenous peoples. When Peru’s first Constitution was passed in 1822, and modified in 1832, it granted equality before the law to all citizens. However, such citizens were primarily limited to those that were Catholic and Spanish-speaking. Indigenous peoples were referred to as “semi-civilized” when they had trade or labor relations with Europeans. Indigenous peoples in the Amazonian region, looked upon even more unfavorably due to their tumultuous colonial history (see Chapter 1), were referred to in Peruvian legislation as “savage tribes” (1832), “uncivilized natives” (1837), “barbarian” and “reduced Indians” (1847) (Kania 2016). In 1825, Simón Bolívar, named the first dictator of a newly independent Peru, abolished Indigenous community properties, which had previously been allowed as long as they paid tribute to the crown. This resulted in the dispossession of native territories throughout Peru, and enabled the spread of the *hacienda* system in which elite white landowners would force Indigenous peoples to labor on lands that previously belonged to them.

Indigenous peoples of the Amazon have maintained their own conceptions of both white people (*gringos*), and “wild Indians” that continue to co-constitute Indigenous identities in the region (Gow 1993). Gow argues that *gringos*, on the one hand, and wild Indians on the other, serve as two poles on a continuum by which Indigenous peoples of Western Amazonia place themselves. Both sides, thus represent an *other* to the Indigenous subject, which is useful for differentiation. Quijano argues that these relations of domination and inferiority have persisted over the centuries since colonization, and continue to structure power relations, particularly with regard to the global market, labor, and the distribution of resources and products. Thus, whiteness was (and continues to be) equated with access to money, capital, resources, commodities, and privileged labor positions within the world order. Quijano (2000) argues that these same power structures of global capitalist coloniality of power, are responsible for the disparity in wages still faced by Indigenous, black, and other non-white laborers worldwide.



Figure 2.2. An advertisement for Sands' Sarsaparilla, a New York City business established around 1835. Sarsaparilla was one of many medicines to be patented as a cure-all. Later advertisements read: "For the removal and permanent cure of all diseases arising from an impure state of the blood or habit of the system" (Utica NY Oneida Morning Herald 1850).

ZARZAPARRILLA & CINCHONA

Two of the first medicinal plants that were successfully extracted from the Amazon and turned into commodities were zarzaparrilla and cinchona. Zarzaparrilla (from several *Smilax* species) was a dried herb that was used to treat rheumatism and syphilis as early as the sixteenth century (Hvalkof 2000). It was used in North America as a popular remedy as well as for the flavoring of soft drinks (Sarsaparilla—see Figure 2.3). More recently it has revived as a popular herbal supplement. Iquitos became a major shipping port for the herb, which was extracted by the Indigenous peoples of the region and often traded in missions along the Ucayali (Marcoy 1873):

Some white residents of the Marañon banks are accustomed to go up part of the Napo River with some peons to extract zarzaparrilla; and while the Indian peons they brought with them are occupied with the extraction of this root, the patrons go inland to hunt and capture by surprise the tribes ... in their settlements. They used to carry out incursions called *correras* just when the shipment of zarzaparrilla was ready to embark (Villavicencio 1984, 368—quoted and translated by Hvalkof 2000, 91).

As shown in the above quote, with increasing demand for zarzaparrilla, the slave trade became the common way of exploiting Indigenous labor for extractive purposes.

Cinchona bark, extracted from the Peruvian tree *Cinchona officinalis* (and several other trees of the same genus), was necessary for making quinine, which was used as a prophylactic treatment for malaria-induced fevers. Cinchona bark had been an Indigenous remedy for fever that was known by Europeans at least since the 1600s. However, it was not popularized as an export commodity until the 1800s, when malaria proved to be prohibitive in advancing Britain's colonial

project. In 1860 around two million pounds of cinchona bark were exported from South America (Brockway 1979). At this time, cinchona was a key commodity in allowing Britain to secure its hold on Africa and India, as the European powers were then able to control the spread of malaria (see Figure 2.4) (Brockway 1979). The surgeon-Major of the British Army emphasized the importance of this plant in obtaining their Indian colonies:

...to England, with her numerous and extensive Colonial possessions, it [cinchona bark] is simply priceless; and it is not too much to say, that if portions of her tropical empire are upheld by the bayonet, the arm that wields the weapon would be nerveless but for Cinchona bark and its active principles (Bidie 1867, 15 quoted in Brockway 1979).

It was not long before cinchona was smuggled to the Kew botanical gardens in England, its medicinally-active compounds isolated, and it was cultivated in plantations in Southeast Asia. The plantation-produced cinchona subsequently outcompeted the South American market (Brockway 1979).



Figure 2.3. A 17th century engraving of Peru, portrayed as a small Indigenous child, offering a cinchona branch to European science and empire. A tall European wearing a conquistador's helmet holds a spear, the head of a lion hung by a rope dangling from the right arm, accepting the offering from the child. It appears that this figure is receiving counsel from the hooded and robed figure, assumed to be a priest or priestess – often, Science is depicted as female. The robed figure presumed to be Science is pointing a wand toward a statue in the background; the statue is under a stone pavilion, and the head of the statue is depicted in the midst of toppling. The pavilion is engraved in Latin “Dea Febri” (Goddess of Fever). In front of the pavilion, two people are tending to a tree. A cherub flies over the figures in the foreground, carrying a banner that reads in Latin: “Erroris expers et nescia fa__” (the final word is illegible, but which I believe is “falli”), translating to, “without error one cannot be deceived.” This engraving indicates the importance of Indigenous knowledge of plants for both European medicine and imperialism.

During the height of its exports from Peru, cinchona was primarily harvested by Indigenous laborers who were treated as slaves or peons. Smallpox was still a major fear for the Indigenous peoples of the region, continuing to spread with increased contact with foreigners. European reports of the time portrayed the Indigenous peoples with distaste, while simultaneously recognizing the value and difficulty of their labor: “The hardships of bark collection in the slightly

accessible primeval forests of South America are undertaken only by the half-civilized Indians and people of mixed race, in the pay of larger or smaller speculators or companies located in the towns” (Flückiger 1884, 29).

Cinchona grew in Ucayali, and was traded on the river during the 1800s. However, the demand fizzled before it was able to have a lasting effect on the region. Nonetheless, the extraction of cinchona bark paved the way for both the rubber boom and later bioprospecting of medicinal plants, particularly through the slave runs (*correrías*) and the routes of trade that were established during this time in Ucayali.

AMAZONIAN RUBBER BOOM (1860-1910)

The first major capitalist economic expansion in the Amazon was the rubber boom, which began in Brazil in the 1860s following the invention of the vulcanization of rubber by Charles Goodyear, and its subsequent high demand in the European Industrial Revolution. By the 1880s, with the invention of the rubber bicycle tire, rubber had become one of the world’s most coveted commodities. It was also the source of a political skirmish to define the precise boundaries of the Western Amazon between Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia (S. Hecht 2008). Partly because of the way these borders were drawn in 1903 with the treaty of Petrópolis, Brazil remained by far the largest producer of wild rubber.³⁸ Peru and Bolivia were the next largest producers, each contributing around 5-10% of the total South American rubber supply (Barham and Coomes 1994). Though *Hevea brasiliensis* trees produced the highest quality latex and fueled Brazil’s rubber economy, another type of latex, *caucho*,³⁹ was extracted from *Castilloa* tree species, which were more abundant on the Peruvian side (Barham and Coomes 1994).

The aristocracy dominated the rubber investments and trading houses of the Amazon (Barham and Coomes 1994).⁴⁰ Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald, a notorious rubber entrepreneur, amassed a large fortune in the south of Ucayali after discovering a portage between two rivers, opening new lands for extraction (Barham and Coomes 1994). A new wave of colonists flooded into central and eastern Peru to engage with the booming rubber economy. The rubber boom was responsible for a restructuring of the Amazon regions of Peru both economically and socially. This had devastating effects for Indigenous Amazonians, whose labor and botanical resources powered the economy. This economic expansion also brought racialized violence and terror into the Amazon regions, with the enslavement, torture, and genocide of native peoples (e.g. Taussig 1987). I argue that the rubber boom would set up the infrastructure and racialized hierarchies that defined the subsequent extractive endeavors in the region that were to follow.

LABOR, DEBT, AND SLAVERY

During the rubber boom, regional traders who had been dealing in cinchona bark became middlemen for rubber suppliers while migrants and Indigenous Amazonians traded collected latex

³⁸ The 1903 Treaty of Petrópolis, demarcated the national boundaries between Peru, Brazil, and Bolivia, in large part based on the density of the *Hevea* trees, and therefore the most lucrative rubber extraction regions, with Brazil being the clear winner in the deal (Salisbury, López, and Alvarado 2011).

³⁹ The extraction of *caucho* required killing the tree to extract the latex; although it produced much larger quantities per tree than the *Hevea* latex, it was considered to be of inferior quality.

⁴⁰ During the late 1800s, the *Civilismo* political group representing the land-owning aristocracy reigned in Peru (de la Cadena 1998).

in exchange for material goods at trading posts. Trading posts were located at river confluences and traders operated riverboats to bring the collected rubber to larger port towns from where they were exported. These traders then acquired wares in the port towns to bring back up the rivers to the rubber *patrónes* or bosses. These *patrónes* ran the trading posts of the Amazon's tributaries and controlled large Indigenous labor forces who worked in the interfluvial zones in exchange for goods. Indigenous labor was necessary for the bulk of extraction because the *Castilloa* trees grew in remote interfluvial areas far from centers of European populations. The low cost of Indigenous labor and the superior ability of the natives to locate the widely dispersed rubber trees allowed a much greater geographic area to be exploited than would otherwise have been possible (Veber 2014).

Rubber extraction and accumulation was based on a hierarchical system of debt-peonage called *habilitación*, which depended on the enslavement of Indigenous Amazonians to unpayable debts. These natives extracted rubber to pay off "debts" to their *patrónes* for advances of weapons, iron tools, and other goods, which they were sometimes forced into accepting (Taussig 1987, 70). The Indigenous laborers, having little concept of the value that Europeans placed on such goods, were exploited heavily. They were overcharged for goods, and underpaid for their work to the point which it was nearly impossible to pay off their debts (Bodley 1972). Once indebted, the Indigenous people were considered property of their *patrón*, and could then be bought and sold, or stolen by other traders (Hvalkof 2000).

These practices were surrounded by violence, raiding missions to capture Indigenous laborers from remote villages, and terror used to keep the Indigenous laborers loyal to their (predominantly white) *patrónes* — the rural elite.⁴¹ Michael Taussig (1987) wrote extensively about the violence and "regime of terror" that pervaded the Putumayo region (North of Iquitos) during the rubber boom. Roger Casement, who was sent to the Putumayo region to investigate the atrocities after reports had reached London observed in 1912:

The number of Indians killed either by starvation—often purposely brought about by the destruction of crops over whole districts or inflicted as a form of death penalty on individuals who failed to bring in their quota of rubber—or by deliberate murder by bullet, fire, beheading, or flogging to death, and accompanied by a variety of atrocious tortures, during the course of these 12 years, in order to extort these 4,000 tons of rubber, cannot have been less than 30,000, and possibly came to many more (Roger Casement as quoted in Taussig 1987, 20).

Taussig (1987) studied Roger Casement's reports in depth, and demonstrated that accounts of the means used to enlist the Indigenous laborers are riddled with tales of extreme violence. The degree of violence likely varied geographically and according to the personalities of the various *patrónes* (Taussig 1987). However, Taussig argues that the distinctions between physical violence and ideology matter little in the spaces of terror; the body of the Indian had become the grounds of contestation for modernity's own battle with wildness:

But perhaps it was neither the political economy of rubber nor that of labor that was paramount here in the horrific "excesses" of the rubber boom. Perhaps...what was paramount here was the inscription of a mythology in the Indian body, and engraving of civilization locked in struggle with wildness whose model was taken from the colonists' fantasies about Indian cannibalism. (Taussig 1987, 27).

Although many report on the atrocities of the rubber boom as if the Amazonian natives were hapless victims, others argue that this erases their agency. Veber (2014), for example,

⁴¹ In the Amazon regions there were also some mestizo *patrónes* that were part of the rural elite.

suggests that working in rubber camps may have been an indication of bravery and manhood. Some scholars claim that the system of *habilitación*, and the advancement of goods, can be seen as a “fit” with Indigenous systems of gift-giving and reciprocity, such that from the Indigenous point of view they were actually taking advantage of the *patrónes* strategically (Hugh-Jones 1992; Walker 2012). These strategies may have involved pacifying the *patrónes* or domesticating them in order to gain access to their tools and weapons, enlisting foreign goods and power for the sake of their own continuity (Santos-Granero 2018). Tools and machetes were necessary to extract rubber in such large quantities, and because of violence in the region, weapons became increasingly necessary for Indigenous peoples to defend their villages against raids. Furthermore, with so many men occupied extracting rubber rather than hunting, people also began to subsist on outside food provisions. Thus, Indigenous groups working in the rubber economy quickly became dependent on the goods they traded for.

Manuel Córdova (2005), a mestizo kidnapped at the age of 15 from a rubber camp by a group of Huni Kuin on the Purus River, reports that he was made to teach his captors how to extract the *caucho* and use the rubber trading system in order to procure weapons and goods:

The new guns were unpacked first and there was a gasp from the crowd at the sight of them. The chief made a speech. “These will defend us from our enemies,” he said. “You have seen what happens when they speak with the voice of thunder. We will dominate the forest and live without fear. ... We can get more if they are needed. Other things can be obtained with caucho....Next were the axes and machetes, which were unwrapped. The chief told the crowd, “with these we will produce more caucho to buy more guns, and these tools will make it easier to clear our plantations.” Another shout of approval went up from the crowd (Córdova 2005, 223).

Accounts like Córdova’s indicate that Indigenous peoples were taking advantage of the rubber economy to their own ends. However, this must be understood in the context of the regime of terror that made Indigenous peoples live in constant fear of being enslaved or killed.

Although Indigenous men in some cases may have sought out work in rubber, and voluntarily entered into the unequal labor-relations of debt-peonage, their continued stay in rubber camps and the labor conditions they were subjected to was often enforced through extreme and gratuitous violence. Furthermore, the premiums Indigenous laborers got for their latex were much lower than the mestizo equivalent (Barham and Coomes 1994). Thus, the system of *habilitación* played into the structuring of racialized labor hierarchies in the region, with foreign international traders at the top, mestizo traders and *patrónes* in the middle, and Indigenous rubber tappers at the very bottom. Only those at the top were able to gain capital from the system, while the others only gained goods in exchange for debt that could be paid off in rubber (Hvalkof 2000). The processes of capital accumulation during the rubber era thus depended on the parallel accumulation of debt in Indigenous bodies to create a free wage-labor system (Taussig 1987).

Eduardo Kohn (2013) describes the hierarchical labor and trade system of *habilitación* as a pattern that is self-same regardless of scale. Kohn argues that the rubber economy was able to amplify and take advantage of the underlying forms of the rivers of the region, chains of predation, and the distribution of rubber trees. As such, the rubber economy became its own force and form that was difficult for Indigenous peoples to escape (Kohn 2013). The system of predatory labor relations, in concert with the structure of the Amazonian riverways, served as a concentrating mechanism for this extractive endeavor, funneling rubber away from its source in the forests and into the larger river confluences and tributaries where the trading posts were located (Kohn 2013). The geographic shape of the river networks that have long-structured power in the region (Kohn 2013) means that as capital was shifted toward river confluences, and then toward Europe and the

Global North, Indigenous Amazonians were increasingly dependent on those trade networks for industrial goods. Economic power and wealth accumulated around the confluences of larger rivers and foreign export was dominated by just a handful of foreign-owned export houses in larger port towns like Iquitos (Barham and Coomes 1994), where the Marañón, Ucayali, and Napo rivers all converge to feed into the Amazon River.

Taussig has likened the debt-peonage system to a sort of “debt fetishism,” in which indebtedness had become alienated from the actual value of the debt compared with the labor owed (Taussig 1987). This thereby concealed the actual nature of the social relations involved. Debt fetishism is meant to be analogous to Marx’s idea of commodity fetishism, whereby capitalism creates a fixation of commodities with their monetary value. Viewing commodities as relationships between objects obscures the labor of production and the social processes that gave rise to the products (Marx 1976, 168–69). In this case, viewing rubber as a commodity not only obscures the violent social means employed in its production, but also its identity as a material extracted from ecologically embedded trees. This process renders Nature as an alienated commodity through the creation of a narrative designed to conceal the violence inherent in primitive accumulation (Peluso 2012, 100).

RUBBER IN UCAYALI

Before speaking of the region of the Ucayali I wish to draw the attention of the Supreme Government to the infamous trade in buying and selling boys and girls which for years has been practised in these parts of the montaña (*i.e.*, the forest region), in spite of the repeated prohibitions of the Government, just as if these poor savages were irrational beings (*seres irracionales*), or, to be still more clear, just as if they were sheep or horses. ... This is done by different traders (*comerciantes*) by means of their *peóns*, particularly some of those of the Upper Ucayali. I could cite many examples in confirmation of this, but I will cite one alone which took place last year (1906). Here it is:—

The Campas Indians of the River Ubiriqui were dwelling peacefully in their houses when suddenly, as is reported, there fell upon them men sent on a *correría* by one of the traders of the Upper Ucayali, who lives near Unini. These, without warning, attacked the innocent Campas, seizing those whom they could, killing many of them so that few escaped their cruelties, so that even up to now the number of their victims is not known. It is certain that many bodies have been found in a state of putrefaction, and that all the houses of the Ubiriqui are burnt. These deeds have exasperated the Indians (*los infieles*), and if no effective remedy is applied, later on we shall not be safe even in the mission villages (*pueblitos de la misión*), nor shall we be able to spread our winning over and civilising of the savages who dwell in our forests (A report to the Minister of Justice by a missionary in Contamana in 1907, quoted from Roger Casement’s report in Hardenburg 2014, 298–99).

Rubber *patrónes* and tappers came to the Ucayali Region during the 1880s during the Putumayo rubber boom, when extraction of latex intensified in response to increased global demand. Although latex extraction along the Ucayali was not as intense as it was further north near Iquitos or east in Brazil (Schmink and Wood 1992)⁴², and the violence perhaps not as extreme as was well-documented for the Putumayo region (e.g. Taussig 1987), Ucayali was a regional center

⁴² *Hevea brasiliensis*, the most highly coveted of the two types of rubber trees, was more sparse in the area west of the Sierra del Divisor mountain range, which separates Peru from Brazil, where the Ucayali River lies (Salisbury, López, and Alvarado 2011).

for the Peruvian rubber trade. The region became populated with trading posts where merchants exchanged latex (primarily caucho)⁴³, that was then transported to Iquitos downriver (Veber 2014).

Masisea, south of present-day Pucallpa on the Ucayali, was a small village at the time, and served as a waypoint for traders, raiders, and rubber buyers, where rubber, goods, and native captives (mostly women and children) would change hands (Veber 2014). It was also a destination for Indigenous men to seek out work. From there, they might be enlisted by *patrónes*, who would advance them goods, and bring them to work upriver or in tributaries on their estates. In the rubber estates, Indigenous men from various groups would work the rubber trees for several months at a time (Barham and Coomes 1994). Euclides Da Cunha, a Brazilian who traveled to the border with Peru in 1873, observed: “In general there are five Peruvians for 100 Piros, Campas, Amahuaca, Conibos, Sipibos, Cornuas, and Jaminuauas which one stumbles across in various types of usage and indolence, all conquered by the shotgun, all deluded by extravagant contracts, all now yoked to the most complete slavery” (quoted in S. Hecht 2008, 56).

The way that different Indigenous groups interacted with the system of *habilitación* was dependent on the beliefs and values of those groups (Walker 2012). For instance, the Konibo, who had long conducted raids on other Indigenous groups, and had been selling slaves to Europeans and Peruvians (Chapter 1), continued in this role during the rubber boom, though their social dominance fell simultaneously, mixing with the other exploited and enslaved debt-peons in Indigenous rubber camps (DeBoer 1986). Slave raids (*correrías*) that were ongoing in the region during the rubber boom were part of the *patrónes*' efforts to acquire new labor, the primary scarcity in the rubber industry (Barham and Coomes 1994). Many native Amazonians were employed to conduct raids on other villages by specific *patrónes* or to hunt down escaped workers; others sold native captives to traders independently. Observers in Indigenous communities during these times noted many “widows” whose husbands had gone to work in rubber never to return.

In 1874, Padre Sabate, a missionary, descended the Ucayali and reported the regime of terror the region:

On these rivers all is fright, shock, dread, and panic-terror; no one on them thinks himself secure and not even life is guaranteed here: much distrust reigns among these people, and at each moment they fear to be victims of sudden assault. Neither are the women and children secure here, who are robbed by those that pass there, nor less are their goods that are taken from them by the savages that pass by the river: and finally neither do the men have security, exposed, as I have indicated, to be reduced to slaves or to die at the shot of an arrow (Sabate 1877: 148) (Quoted and translated in Bodley 1972, 222)

During this time, missions formed a relatively safe haven for Indigenous peoples in Ucayali (see Chapter 1), and many laborers sought safety within the missions, as villages were no longer safe (Bodley 1972). Thus, Indigenous peoples were faced with a decision between the violence of rubber camps, and the indoctrination of missions.

⁴³ The presence of *varaderos* (portage trails) that linked the Ucayali basin to the more Hevea-rich areas over the newly-established border in Brazil, also allowed Peruvian *caucheros* to tap into the Hevea latex (Salisbury, López, and Alvarado 2011).

COLLAPSE OF RUBBER

In 1910, the price of rubber reached an all-time high, and Iquitos and other trading towns were booming. Merchant houses significantly increased their imports as well as the amount of credit they extended to the rubber traders and *patrónes* upriver (Santos-Granero 2018). However, the following year rubber that had begun to be cultivated in Southeast Asia was introduced to the international markets and the price of wild rubber crashed. A combination of events — an armed clash between Peru and Ecuador, a labor shortage, and a heavy rainy season—hindered rubber extraction in Peru (Santos-Granero 2018). The region was faced with an economic crisis, forcing many trading houses and traders into bankruptcy. Furthermore, news of atrocities in Putumayo had sparked long investigations by the Peruvian and British governments into the rubber companies' treatment and alleged slavery, news of which had reached London and the United States. Because of such reports, over 200 people were arrested associated with the Casa Arana rubber operations in Putumayo⁴⁴ (Hvalkof 2000). Rubber trading activities and the advancement of credit abruptly slowed in the Amazonian outposts.

According to Santos-Granero (2018), Indigenous peoples of the region understood little of the geopolitics that fueled the global demand for rubber, and did not understand why the collapse of rubber prices should disrupt the supply of foreign goods that they had come to depend upon — clothes, food, weapons, and tools. Indeed, they may have seen this as a breach of reciprocity that had been part of their agreement with their *patrón*, whose role was to supply the goods for which they were willing to work. On the other hand, when these provisions stopped, widespread revolts in Ucayali ensued. Many *patrónes* had resorted to deception to coerce their workers to stay, making empty promises that were never fulfilled. The sudden change in the terms of agreement with the *patrónes* was not taken kindly and racial tensions grew (Santos-Granero 2018).

Between 1912 and 1914, the Asháninka (formerly called Campa) led a movement in Ucayali with the goal to expel all whites from their territory (Santos-Granero 2018). They targeted six points along the Pichis Trail,⁴⁵ which were burned, and looted by bands of Asháninka armed with carbines (Bodley 1972, 222). Post offices, trading stations, and *patrón* estates were attacked, and missions were destroyed. Dozens of white and mestizo colonists were killed in the attacks. At the same time, World War I broke out in Europe, inflaming the economic crisis in the Amazon with a further contraction of trade and credit. Many of the rubber traders lacked the capital even to run their ships (Santos-Granero 2018). By 1915 the rubber economy had entirely collapsed, and even the *correrías* (slave runs) had mostly ended (DeBoer 1986). There was a further exodus of Indigenous laborers from the rubber camps, with credit no longer available.

In September of 1915, another Indigenous revolt began in upper Ucayali. Many of the Indigenous groups of the region allied to attack several river boats that had been active in the regional slave trade of Indigenous women and children (Santos-Granero 2018). Important roles in this revolt were played by the Konibo and Shipibo, who would later be persecuted, with some of the leaders captured and sent to prison in Iquitos. However, this revolt was primarily led by the Asháninka, who also took the women and children of rubber *patrónes* captive. This uprising was

⁴⁴ No one from Casa Arana was convicted, and all charges were eventually dropped. Pablo Zumaeta, the company manager implicated in many of the crimes, was later elected mayor of Iquitos in 1914 (Hvalkof 2000).

⁴⁵ The Pichis Trail was a mule trail that opened in 1891, and ran through Ashaninka territory to Puerto Bermudez, which connected with Iquitos by steamboat. This trail served as a major passage linking Lima and the Amazon region (Bodley 1972).

largely successful; few settlers remained in the Upper Ucayali after the uprising, and no new settlers would enter the region until the 1920s.

RESETTLEMENT AND REFORM

In 1919, Peru ushered in a new era of reformist politics, the *Patria Nueva*, marking the defeat of the *civilismo* and the downfall of the landowning aristocracy (de la Cadena 1998). This began a period in which Peruvian coasts and cities were dominated by radical leftist intellectuals and *indigenismo*, a political movement that sought to assimilate Indigenous groups into the Peruvian economy. This was a mestizo-driven political response to other Indigenous uprisings in the sierra region. With a new Constitution in 1920, several pieces of legislation concerning Indigenous matters were introduced, including the recognition of Indigenous communities and the state protection of Indigenous peoples, giving them special rights to cultural development (Kania 2016). However, these policies remained paternalistic (more on this later).

Meanwhile, Julio Arana (the notorious rubber baron of Putumayo) was elected senator of Iquitos in 1922, and his 6 million hectares of landholdings were recognized by the Peruvian government (Hvalkof 2000).⁴⁶ Although the *indigenismo* ethos was not particularly strong in the Amazon, far from Peruvian political centers, the policies nonetheless affected migration and land ownership. With the new policies of the 1920s, settlers surged into the highlands of the Upper Ucayali, formerly Asháninka territory, with newly acquired land titles, to convert this land into farms. As part of this rush, Adventism spread throughout the region. The Adventist missionary Stahl came to the region preaching about the end of the world (see Chapter 1), establishing the Perene mission on land owned by the Peruvian Corporation,⁴⁷ where many Asháninka were employed. The Adventists encouraged Indigenous laborers who still worked for *patrones* to flee to missions, which incited the wrath of the region's most powerful *patrón*, Pancho Vargas. Vargas tried to kill Stahl, but failing, had several Adventist preachers arrested for subverting the region's order (Santos-Granero 2018).

The enslavement of the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon during the rubber boom can be seen as part and parcel to the tyranny of imperialism that helped establish and cement the coloniality of power in the Americas. Slavery and torture, Philipose (2011) argues, are methods by which the victims of imperialism are rendered from subjects into objects and stripped of their agency. This can be done through physical and psychological cruelty, sexualized violence, humiliation, shaming, berating one's religion or culture, and disrupting families, communities, and support networks. All of these techniques were employed against the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon. These served the privileging of European-descended people, while excluding others from the category of citizen or subject. In 1924, for example, a Penal Code was introduced that divided the population into four categories that determined their right to self-determination: *civilized*

⁴⁶ Part of Arana's land overlapped with a border dispute between Colombia and Ecuador, and he would later be compensated generously for the loss of some of his holdings (Hvalkof 2000).

⁴⁷ The Peruvian Corporation was formed by British, French, and Dutch holders of Peruvian bonds that purchased Peruvian debt after Peru lost their nitrate-rich provinces in a war with Chile, and thus a large portion of their national income (Santos-Granero 2018). The Peruvian Corporation forced Peru into signing the Grace Contract in 1889, which gave the corporation concessions including the ownership of Peru's railway system, the right to export all guano in Peruvian territory, and 2 million hectares of land, much of which was Ashaninka and Yanasha territory. The Ashaninka were allowed to stay on their former land if they worked in the coffee fields that the Peruvian corporation planted in this concession (Bodley 1972).

peoples (creoles⁴⁸ and mestizos); *Indigenous peoples*; *semi-civilized peoples*; and *savages* (Kania 2016). Indigenous Amazonians were still considered to be in the latter category, meaning that they were deemed incapable of self-determination legally or economically.

2 | 2 NEOLIBERAL DEVELOPMENT AND ACCESS

This section details the progress of Indigenous land titling and the continuous struggle for Indigenous rights in the face of new waves of extraction and the neoliberal policies of the 20th century. Neoliberal forms of extraction that began in Ucayali in the 20th century are a continuation of the early extractive industries that came before. I begin with describing the rise of timber extraction in Ucayali as a major driver of development and Indigenous land relations. Racialized labor systems that were developed during the rubber boom continue to shape timber extraction. I use concepts of access and territorialization to frame how Indigenous communities struggle to benefit from the resources on their own territories. Many achievements in Indigenous rights have been won as a result of Indigenous organizing and greater awareness of Indigenous issues globally. However, ongoing neoliberal policies that facilitate transnational development and infrastructure projects facilitate the corporate extraction of resources on Indigenous lands and threaten Indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous forest users are still limited in their ability to benefit from the extractive industries on their territories that depend on their labor and knowledge.

TIMBER

With rubber extraction in the entire Western Amazon largely ended by the 1920s, it was not long before Amazonian hardwood trees began to be harvested and sold as timber commodities. The logging industry took off in the region, selectively targeting high-value species like mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) and cedar (*Cedrela odorata*), followed later by other species (Cossío et al. 2014). In the beginning, the logging industry relied primarily on timber harvested by native communities and rural populations, often continuing in debt-peon relations with local *patrónes*. Timber trading activities in Pucallpa (the capital of Ucayali) intensified with the opening of a road connecting it to Lima in 1943 (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2011). With increased global demand for lumber due to World War II, Pucallpa quickly became Peru's main site for lumber processing, and developed into a boom city.

As Ucayali's population and industry boomed, Shipibo lifeways came into increasing contact with mestizos, foreigners, and the market economy, in which the relations of exploitation, paternalism, and debt-peonage still prevailed. Logging in Paoyhan began in the 1970s, when several big companies came, facilitated by government policies. At this time there were few options for Shipibo communities to participate in economic activities aside from selling their trees at very low prices to loggers, or to work for logging companies at low pay, often away from their families for months at a time. One of my interlocutors in Paoyhan told me that working for a logging company "does not pay well, but due to the need they except the work. Otherwise there is nowhere to get work, to maintain the wellness of the home and the children."

⁴⁸ Creoles, or Criollos, are Latin Americans who are primarily of European descent.

The forest around Paoyhan has changed significantly since then, because the community sold all of their commercially relevant trees that they had on their territory to the logging companies. According to the *teniente* (lieutenant) of Paoyhan, Humberto Rojas,

the government facilitated for us to work with some companies, and the Jefe went to look for them to be able to work with wood. So, then, the big companies came and they paid us more less 30% to the community and 70% for themselves. There are a lot of expenses [of logging], like petrol, all expenses that corresponded. We, as a community, had no money to buy petrol or any machinery, and so... we needed to work with the loggers. Loggers come from Pucallpa, they are big businessmen that work with foreign businessmen outside of Peru.⁴⁹

Throughout Ucayali, logging remained at relatively low intensity until the last several decades, with increasingly industrial and mechanized operations enabling new access points and more aggressive extraction. By 1990, an estimated 75% of forest along the lower Rio Pisqui⁵⁰ was removed and partially replaced by secondary growth (Hern 1992a). Timber production continues to be a major economic driver in the Peruvian Amazon, with the Ucayali Region producing around 21.8% of the country's timber (as of 2009) (Cossío et al. 2014). Around half of the productive forests in the Ucayali Region are currently designated as permanent production forests (Porro et al. 2014). Logging is also an important source of regional employment, employing an estimated 40-65% of the economically active population in Ucayali, including many Indigenous people (Cossío et al. 2014).

The vast majority of logging in the Peruvian Amazon is illegal, with an estimated 80-95% of harvests made through informal arrangements rather than through legal channels (Cossío et al. 2014). The informal patronage system, *habilitación*, which was established during the rubber boom, has taken on a new face in the logging industry. *Habilitación* now functions as the network of social relations, including corrupt officials, that provisions legal documents in the complex forest regulatory system (Sears and Pinedo-Vasquez 2011). Because of this system, regardless of its origins, all timber arrives in the port of Pucallpa with proper documentation claiming its legality—a widespread process known as “timber laundering.” Indeed, Sears and Pinedo-Vasquez (2011) found through monitoring logging activity on the river that almost none of the timber actually originated in the locations specified on the permits. In practice, permits are often either obtained from legal concession contracts or bought or swindled from native communities, and then used to harvest elsewhere. These illegal harvests are facilitated by multi-level corruption along the commodity and regulatory chains, and pervasive lack of oversight. The prevalence and ease of illegal logging, which does not have to go through the permitting process, creates unfair competition and little incentive for legal harvests. Timber corporations also have great covert political power that has served to undermine environmental policies and efforts to increase transparency and monitoring.

INDIGENOUS LAND CLAIMS

During widespread agrarian reforms in Latin America in the 1960s, there was a push for Indigenous rights regarding the land claims of native peoples. The Agrarian Reform Law of 1969 gave state support to form peasant cooperatives, reclaiming land from the wealthy landholding class. While this was a powerful symbolic move, the Agrarian Reform did not play out as intended.

⁴⁹ Interview by Laura Dev in 2017.

⁵⁰ The Rio Pisqui is a river that converges with the Ucayali just a short distance north of Paoyhan.

Mismanaged cooperatives gave way to a new elite class, while a large proportion of peasants and Indigenous peoples still remained landless (Hvalkof 2006). Although the 1920 constitution had given Indigenous peoples the right to territory, *Amazonian* native territories were specifically recognized for the first time only in 1974 with the Law of Native Communities and Agricultural Promotion of the Selva and Seja de Selva Region—at the time called “The Jungle Law” (de Jong and Humphreys 2016). A second law was passed in 1979 that would organize the Amazonian peoples into legally-designated *native communities* (*comunidades nativas*) (Kania 2016). The Peruvian Constitution that passed in 1979 recognized Indigenous lands as “inalienable, unmortgageable, and imprescriptible” (Roldán Ortega 2004), meaning that ostensibly these lands cannot be taken away, given away, or otherwise sold, and that these rights cannot be legally revoked or rewritten. This was after decades of struggle by Indigenous groups to achieve political and territorial recognition that would defend them from colonization and extraction (de Jong and Humphreys 2016).

Humberto in Paoyhan recalls how his grandparents had to travel to Lima for several days in order to solicit the community’s land title.

In the year 1965, my grandparents did not know to read or write, but had knowledge in their minds. A group went to Lima to ask for communal territory. That is why we have our land title for Paoyhan. As we got that land title for the community, we made a line, triangulating to see until where the community land belongs. When they came to Paoyhan, the people of the community gathered waiting for the commission that went to Lima, and they brought back the land title for the communal territory of Paoyhan.

The Jungle Law represented a formalized codification of Indigenous Amazonian rights, acknowledging the negative impacts that extractive industries had reaped on Indigenous lands. However, it did not entirely protect these communities from future extraction. The Jungle Law, for example, did not concede belowground rights to Indigenous communities (Howe 1974). This would open the way for the installation of mining operations on Indigenous lands. An exception was later passed for designated forest lands, further weakening Indigenous land rights and enabling the state to grant extraction concessions to corporations on Indigenous territories (Roldán Ortega 2004).

Furthermore, lack of state oversight and reach in the Amazon made illegal extraction and violations to Indigenous rights difficult to monitor or enforce. In 1987, for example, serious international human rights abuses were brought to public light in upper Ucayali. The Asháninka people of Atalaya, the last large river port on the Ucayali, appealed to the national Indigenous organization, AIDSESEP (Inter-Ethnic Association for Development of the Peruvian Rainforest) (García Hierro 1998). In Atalaya, *patrónes*, now working in timber, were still routinely subjecting Indigenous people to forced debt-peonage, kidnapping children, and raping women. Of the many testimonies that were recorded by AIDSESEP during their investigations, I include one here for a general idea from an Asháninka man of 30 years in age:

The estate owners... of the “Chanchamayo” estate ... have illegally appropriated an engine of mine (20 horsepower Peque-Peque), threatening me with physical violence if I showed any resistance. This motor was given to me for work carried out over a number of years and for various employers, but they took it from me claiming that it had been lost and forcing me to work for them again, by removing 200 (two hundred) pieces of timber but I have still been paid nothing and they have not given me my engine back. Thus I have worked for 10 (ten) years with no payment or other settlement.

But I am not the only one to have suffered this wrongdoing, the same thing has happened to 60

Asháninka who have been enslaved on the “Chanchamayo” estate for many years (between 15 and 30). I now find myself in a situation of anxiety since Mr. Capi Cagna has threatened me with violence because of the complaints I made to the Atalaya Subprefecture and he usually threatens all my compatriots with a gun.

This man has committed a number of assaults on indigenous people, with the aid of two local guards ...whose responsibility it is to capture anyone who runs away, beat them up and put them in cells built by the indigenous people themselves on the orders of the estate owner. Because of all of this, I am asking you to intervene in the matter so that this situation of slavery and constant abuse may be brought to an end, not only for me but for all my indigenous brothers who work on the estates of the Cagnas. (Quoted in García Hierro 1998, 22–23)

In response to the overwhelming complaints and similar statements, AIDSESEP and the nascent Asháninka organization OIRA (Regional Indigenous Organization of Atalaya) were able to rapidly title Asháninka land and end the abuse with a period of intense negotiation with Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture⁵¹.

The liberation of the Asháninka of Atalaya heralded a period in which Indigenous organizations gained political strength⁵². The organizing and struggle of the Asháninka was able to elevate the issue of Indigenous land rights for the benefit of other Indigenous groups as well. Over the next ten years, more than 200 communities would be titled in Ucayali, including the recognition of three reserves for groups in voluntary isolation (García Hierro 1998). Thousands of Indigenous people were also registered with the Peruvian state, finally enabling their participation in local politics.

Native communities now hold titles to 12 million hectares in the Peruvian Amazon, but many communities are still untitled, and many native forest users do not have the legal status of *native community* (Cossío et al. 2014). This is a legal term for recognized Indigenous territories, and this designation grants communities the ability to apply for land titles granting collective use rights to land and resources. However, in order to attain community land, there are two separate legal processes—one to grant native community status, and another to grant land titles (Roldán Ortega 2004). Both of these processes are lengthy and complicated, requiring legal knowledge, Spanish language skills, and expensive travel to and from Lima. It is common for the process to be drawn out over years or even decades.

Alberto Fujimori, Peru’s president from 1990-2000, passed several pieces of legislation that facilitated the expropriation of Indigenous lands for extractive development, particularly oil mining (Kania 2016). This administration was known for racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples and their rights. The constitution the Fujimori administration passed in 1993, for example, weakened the legal standing of Indigenous land claims, enabling them to be bought and sold, essentially allowing its commodification (Roldán Ortega 2004). In 1994, Peru ratified the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) Convention 169, which recognized Indigenous lands under the concept of territories, under which the Indigenous peoples retain full ownership of their lands in perpetuity. However, the current constitution of Peru still does not support their territoriality, still allowing the land in practice to be bought, sold, and repossessed, and with limited rights over designated forest land.

⁵¹ With help from the International Work Group for Indigenous affairs (IWGIA) and the Danish International Aid Agency (DANIDA).

⁵² The Asháninka later organized their own autonomous army to fight off the violence they experienced at the hands of political insurgent group, the Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*), and counterinsurgent military groups that passed through their territories.

Despite advances in land titling, nonconsensual resource extraction is ongoing on native lands. Several Indigenous activists involved in protesting illegal logging on their territories have been murdered, and the deaths attributed to executives or henchmen of major logging companies. Asháninka activist Edwin Chota, for one, was defending his territory in Saweto from illegal timber harvest and coca trafficking, and was killed by loggers in 2014, just three months before I began my field work in Ucayali. A few months later, his community was finally granted a land title, after Chota's ten-year struggle to title their land. However, the title offers little guarantee of enforcement against future infringement onto their territory.

Indigenous communities nominally have exclusive utilization rights and administrative and decision-making power over natural resources on their land, but ultimate ownership of both renewable and non-renewable resources belongs to the state, and decision-making power is shared formally with the state (Roldán Ortega 2004). Security of land tenure is also not guaranteed to native communities—even titled land rights are insecure because below-ground resource rights to oil and minerals are still owned by the state, and prospecting concessions can be granted on titled native lands (Cossío et al. 2014). According to the International Property Rights Index, Peru scores a 3.7 on a scale of 0-10, which is in the bottom 25% globally (Kerekes and Williamson 2010). Although urban areas have shown improvements in land titling, in rural Peru, government land titles are not sufficient collateral to guarantee a loan, and there is no evidence that government land titling corresponds to actual property rights. Thus, Indigenous land titling has not been enough to allow Indigenous communities to capitalize on their territories.

The land-granting process that delimited native communities from the 1970s to the present also established Indigenous subservience to the Peruvian state. In order for native communities to establish territories in Peru, they must meet certain state-mandated categories of indigeneity and community. This reinforces specific institutionally sanctioned identities in the production of governable subjects, and serves to produce those categories more than reflect existing ones. Territorialities produce places as claims, and these claims are associated with specific racialized identities.⁵³ Territorialization involves staking a claim of authority and control over land and resources, but it also involves the enclosure of land, and delimits authority over who can accumulate from the enclosed land. This delimiting of boundaries, rights, and authority reproduces existing terrains of struggle, both material and ideological — determining the limit of Indigenous authority, and access to resources (Sikor and Lund 2009, 2). The act of accepting an allocation of land confers authority onto that granting institution, thereby reinforcing both the institution's political power in the region (e.g. the state's right to allocate), and the recipient's subjection to that political authority (Sikor and Lund 2009). Territorialization in Ucayali can be seen as the process by which a previously Indigenous “commons” is officially granted back to those who meet state standards of *native community* by the state, but with borders and new legal limitations on access.

ACCESS AND THE ABILITY TO BENEFIT FROM EXTRACTION

Access is a central concept for understanding the contemporary power dynamics at play in the Peruvian Amazon. Property rights are unclear, and actual practices do not follow state regulatory devices. Without strong state governance and enforcement, the logging sector has

⁵³ In addition to native communities, there are also designated ‘campesino communities’, which are mestizo riverine communities that have settled along the river. Mixed communities are called ‘*caserios*,’ and do not have legal rights as communities, nor collective land rights. Some colonists (*colonos*) and smallholders also hold individual land titles across the Ucayali region (Cossío et al. 2014).

developed its own strong informal governance whose primary purpose is providing documents to fulfill state-imposed bureaucratic constraints (Sears and Pinedo-Vasquez 2011). Theories of access allow us to conceptualize the power harnessed in these informal and illegal channels as their “ability to derive benefits” from forest resources, which is not necessarily linked with systems of property and rights (Ribot and Peluso 2003). Ribot and Peluso suggest that following the flow of benefits gained from the harvesting of trees can help identify the power relations underlying the mechanisms of forest access. The informal system of *habilitación* can be viewed as a highly adaptable network of actors (Sears and Pinedo-Vasquez 2011) that mediates and controls forest access. This network is dominated by large timber corporations, which are able to use the access mechanisms contained in the network to ensure their continued accumulation of capital (Villavicencio 2010). These mechanisms include technology, capital, markets, labor, knowledge, identity, authority, and social relations (Ribot and Peluso 2003, 159–60). The degree to which actors in the web of access, including Indigenous communities, are able to benefit from the timber resources, depends on their ability to utilize mechanisms of access.

The Peruvian state enacted forest policy reforms in the year 2000 that were meant to facilitate access to production forests for smaller-scale loggers, but in practice the contracts were often actually held by large logging companies (Cossío et al. 2014). The reforms were focused on conservation and sustainable forest management (Sears and Pinedo-Vasquez 2011). However, because such a large proportion of logging is illegal (Cossío et al. 2014) and therefore not subject to state regulatory structures, these policies did little except to advance the narrative that the Peruvian government was interested in conservation. These reforms also granted native and *campesino* communities the right to extract timber and non-timber forest products from their designated territories, and supposedly gives community claims priority over company claims when the two are in conflict.

In order for native communities to legally extract resources from their own lands, permits are required that outline formal management plans. Permitting is a slow, complex process, which is often too time-consuming, challenging, and costly for native community leaders to navigate. The management plans require development by government-registered professionals, which is often not feasible for communities who lack capital, so in order to extract legally they often need to falsify these documents or obtain support from NGOs (Cossío et al. 2014). For communities that *do* extract resources from their own lands, market access is a challenge—transportation is expensive, and competition from illegal markets means that market prices barely cover transportation costs for legally harvested timber (Cossío et al. 2014).

Native communities sometimes willingly or unwillingly participate in illegal logging operations (Cossío et al. 2014). Timber companies can gain access to Indigenous resources by either forging documents or making agreements, often with corrupt community leaders without the consent of the rest of the community. Sometimes, timber companies are able to persuade native communities to allow them to harvest on their land. These companies are then able to fabricate labor debts by offering to “help” the native community obtain a harvest permit, and then use it to launder their own illegally harvested timber. The fee for helping the community must then either be repaid in timber or labor from the community. This system is the continuance of the debt-peonage system that dominated the region during the rubber era, and functions quite similarly to the debt fetishism described by Taussig (1987). Native communities may make agreements with timber companies, who pay them very low prices for the trees or may also pay in undervalued goods. It has been reported that they may only receive \$6-60 USD for an individual tree harvested.

Mature mahogany, for instance, can then be sold for thousands on the international market (Cossío et al. 2014).

The case of the Asháninka in Atalaya that I introduced in the previous section represented an extreme of this system, where relations with Timber *patrónes* were even more exploitative, violent, and egregious than elsewhere in Ucayali. In AIDSESEP's 1988 report to the Peruvian Government on Atalaya, it is apparent that the inability to access authority played a central role in the prolonged exploitation of the Asháninka in Atalaya:

Obviously [the Indigenous communities] do not know how to make the requests, but of course no government employee will give them technical support in this and promotion of such work is obviously not directed at the indigenous population. Finally, the indigenous people are swindled in terms of prices, quality, volumes and so on. In the face of aggression, deceit, unpaid work, etc., they have no authoritative body to which they can turn. There is no Land Court or Court of First Instance and the rest of the authorities clearly form an impenetrable circle. Even the Justice of the Peace, who demands vast sums of money to write or accept accusations, is inaccessible for someone who earns a pair of trousers for a year's work. A side effect of this is that whilst whole families are forced to go and log wood, the settlers (at a signal from the government employees) take advantage of this to invade communal indigenous lands and obtain certificates of possession through on the spot visits organized with prior knowledge. Accusations on the part of communities are refuted by the local government employees, who deny their existence, something which could be "proved" if they were to visit a community which had been forced to go logging in order to cover the arrears on their interminable debts (Quoted in García Hierro 1998, 39).

Without access to legal processes and authority, Indigenous communities have few options for recourse when faced with unfair labor conditions or expropriation of their lands. However, the income they receive from timber is nonetheless important and even gross underpayments create strong incentives to engage with logging. Timber extraction, thus, offers an important livelihood opportunity, though there are few opportunities for advancement or capital accumulation for native communities because of barriers to access (Porro et al. 2014). Thus, forest extraction continues to primarily benefit settlers, who are located higher in timber commodity networks.

MEDICINAL PLANT BIOPROSPECTING

Ethnobotanists have long maintained that Amazonian forests might hold cures for some of the world's most defiant diseases like cancer and AIDS, and have used this narrative to promote conservation (Norman Myers 1988; Plotkin 1988; Schultes and Raffauf 1990; Newman 1994) and generate funding to search for such cures (Hayden 2002). Indigenous healers have more recently been identified as potentially having valuable knowledge about the uses of plant medicines, and were included in many schemes for medicinal plant bioprospecting that also promised benefits for Indigenous communities. Issues of biopiracy have been concerns for Indigenous groups. When medicinal compounds are extracted and commodified as a result of Indigenous knowledge, the community has typically seen very little compensation while the pharmaceutical companies gain (Goldstein 2019a). Still, the possibility of finding medicinal plants has been used as a way for conservationists to rally support from more capitalist-minded agendas for the preservation of primary forest and Indigenous knowledge alike.

The extraction of tropical medicinal plants proved challenging for early explorers and priests—tropical seeds were not easy to store, transport, and germinate in Europe (Voeks 2004).⁵⁴ Although South American countries have tried to prevent the export of seedlings to Europe, species were nonetheless eventually smuggled to Europe’s botanical gardens and later cultivated and extracted, as mentioned earlier with cinchona (Brockway 1979; Schiebinger 2009). The extraction of biologically active compounds from medicinal plants brought significant advances in modern medicine during the 19th and 20th centuries (Merson 2000). Alkaloids were extracted from many Amazonian sources that led to important cures in Europe, including quinine, which was first extracted in 1819, cocaine in 1860, and tubocurarine in 1935 (Merson 2000).

In 1930, the United States passed the Plant Patent Act allowing for the patenting of reproduced plants from plant breeders (Merson 2000). Until the 1930s, it was generally thought that plant resources should be considered a common biological heritage. By the 1960s, international trade agreements were established that protected plant breeders’ rights, known as the UPOV Convention (The Union of New Varieties of Plants). Such laws undermined customary rights and traditional varieties of plants, allowing them to be patented as long as there were modifications to their genetics through breeding or genetic engineering. In some cases, large agrochemical corporations were making billions of dollars in revenue from compounds extracted from traditional medicines of the global south, with no compensation to traditional communities (e.g. with Neem and Grace Chemicals) (Merson 2000). Such cases spurred concerns about biopiracy in the developing world. Contracts between underdeveloped countries and pharmaceutical industries were proposed (e.g. Costa Rica and Merck Corporation) (Merson 2000), enabling developing countries to justify the conservation of their forests economically, and providing opportunities for new industry. However, critics are concerned that these agreements are just another form of neo-colonialism in which poorer states cede their control and natural capital to powerful global corporations, simultaneously putting Indigenous communities at risk for exploitation.

Current narratives around bioprospecting center on biodiversity as an economic investment, potentially holding many valuable genetic resources that must be managed (Hayden 2002). The Peruvian Amazon is estimated to have over 2,000 medicinal plants that are used as medicines by the Indigenous peoples of the region (Aponte et al. 2009). Ethnobotanists have found that working with Indigenous healers to identify potentially useful plants results in a significantly greater frequency of encountering bioactive compounds than they would encounter otherwise (Aponte et al. 2009; Carlson and Maffi 2004; Fabricant and Farnsworth 2001). However, bioprospecting plans that aimed to compensate Indigenous communities for their botanical knowledge proved difficult to carry out. In Mexico, for instance, such planners could not find communities that met the criteria for containing altogether the plants, knowledge, people, territory, and decision-making authority that would allow them to receive community development funds from the bioprospectors (Hayden 2002). Thus, such forms of compensation that are mediated by markets have been unsuccessful, and often lead to the appropriation of such partnerships by more powerful entities or communities.

The UN Convention on Biodiversity was passed in 1993, affirming state sovereignty over biological resources and simultaneously imploring states to conserve their biological diversity and genetic resources. The convention also specified that states must respect and preserve Indigenous

⁵⁴ Furthermore, certain plant species were monopolized by the Dutch, who considered it to be an act of war to ship such plants to Europe unauthorized.

communities and lifestyles that are relevant for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and “encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices” (United Nations 1992 Article 8). In 2002 and 2004, Peru implemented its own laws protecting against biopiracy: Law 27811, “Introducing a Protection Regime for the Collective Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples Derived from Biological Resources,” and Law 28216, “Protection of Access to Peruvian Biological Diversity and the Collective Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples,” which outline responsibilities and practices pertaining to intellectual property rights. INDECOPI (National Institute for the Defense of Competition and Protection of Intellectual Property) was given responsibility for protecting the collective knowledge of Indigenous peoples that was defined by those laws. Peru was the first country in South America to pass such legislation on biopiracy (Chapell 2011).

INDECOPI implemented a database for registering Indigenous collective knowledge not in the public domain with the aim to protect it against biopiracy. Under these premises, Peru has successfully contested several international patents for plants that have been used by Peruvian native peoples, including maca, camu camu, and sacha inchi (Chapell 2011). However, while such initiatives claim to act on behalf of the protection of Indigenous knowledges, the actual relationship and benefits for the communities they claim to represent is unclear. Instead, the plants have been protected as national heritage of Peru, and thus the lawsuits and claims seems to serve the interests of the state perhaps more than of the communities themselves, while the traditional knowledge it claims to protect is subsumed by state instruments.

Several species commonly used by the Shipibo have been the subject of International patents. Amazonian medicinal plants like Cat’s Claw and Camu Camu have become popular supplements for U.S. and international consumers. Cat’s Claw (*Uña de Gato*), *Uncaria tomentosa*, is a woody vine commonly used by Indigenous peoples to treat inflammatory conditions, and has now been identified as having potential anti-cancer and AIDS compounds as well (García Hierro 1998). Cat’s Claw has been patented several times for various uses, and its patents remain in effect despite its widespread documentation as an Indigenous remedy. Because its patent had already expired prior to its registration with INDECOPI, such knowledge was regarded to be in the public domain, and thus not able to be protected from further appropriation (Chapell 2011). The extraction of Cat’s Claw has facilitated a new wave of invasion onto Asháninka lands (García Hierro 1998). Camu camu (*Myrciaria dubia*), a fruit containing high levels of vitamin C, has also been used traditionally, and is now cultivated plantation-style throughout Ucayali for sale to international supplement companies (Chapell 2011). Though camu camu producers claim to give benefits to local communities, such benefits are dubious, and in some cases only negotiated through a single community representative without distribution to other community members.

Dragon’s blood (*sangre de grado*), a red sap obtained from *Croton lechleri* trees, has long been used for wound healing by Indigenous communities, including the Shipibo. One of its alkaloids, taspine, has also been used in two patented applications (Aponte et al. 2009). Shaman Pharmaceuticals, a (now defunct) progressive bioprospecting company who sought to attain benefit-sharing agreements with communities, was involved in the prospecting of dragon’s blood with Ecuadorian Aguaruna groups. However, the benefit-sharing agreements have been criticized for being mainly one-sided decisions with the company’s interests taking precedent over community consultation (Dorsey 2003). Furthermore, it appears that the company intended to synthesize isolates from the plants that would later exclude the Indigenous groups from profit sharing for the final product by cutting off their dependency on local suppliers (Dorsey 2003). Because Shaman Pharmaceuticals eventually went bankrupt, many of the promised benefits did

not materialize for Indigenous groups, while their patents were transferred to other pharmaceutical companies who had no such agreements with Indigenous communities.

Ayahuasca was the subject of a biopiracy scandal when a strain of caapi vines (also called “ayahuasca vines”) was patented in 1986 by a U.S. man, Loren Miller. The patent was later revoked in 1999 after Indigenous groups throughout the Amazon fought the claim (Fecteau 2001). COICA (*Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica*), representing more than 400 groups of Amazonians, denounced the patent, under the premise that it plundered and disrespected the knowledge and culture of native peoples and desecrated a “sacred symbol,” and they declared Miller “an enemy of the people” (Dorsey 2003). Several organizations, including Shaman Pharmaceuticals, made statements in favor of COICA’s denouncement and against the patenting of the supposedly “new” strain of caapi. Still, the patent was later reinstated by the U.S. Patent Office in 2001 without much explanation (Dorsey 2003). The fact that Miller’s patent was ultimately upheld for a plant that has been widely used and cultivated throughout the Amazon, was for many a confirmation that intellectual property laws do not protect the rights of collectively held Indigenous knowledges, and instead are biased toward the privatization of intellectual property, which favors economic expansion and the commodification of such plants (Dorsey 2003). Although the patent itself is now expired, patents do still exist for several derivatives of caapi, including harmaline and harmine, though their link back to the original plant sources is obscured in the language of the patents (Chapell 2011).

NEOLIBERAL DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Due to the nature of tropical forests, limitations on corporate extraction of forest resources in the region have primarily been geographic. The highway connecting Pucallpa to Lima, which opened in 1943, enabled the easy transport of lumber out of the rainforest regions and contributed to Pucallpa’s primacy as a lumber processing site for the timber coming out of the Amazon region (Eidt 1962). This highway also facilitated a rush of settlers from the coastal regions of Peru, including foreigners from the United States and Europe, who then staked claims on significant tracts of land around the city and highway (Eidt 1962). New infrastructure and technological advances in the Amazon created opportunities and threats for forest access, leading to conflicts over resources and large-scale land-cover change.

Infrastructure boomed in the Amazon in the 1970s-1980s, when the Peruvian government aggressively promoted colonization, deforestation, oil mining, and road building projects (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2011). The first wave of hydrocarbon activity in the Peruvian Amazon took place in the 1970s (Finer and Orta-Martínez 2010). These activities brought a new wave of colonists from the coastal regions and Andes into rural Ucayali (Hern 1992b). New neoliberal policies pushed by Peru’s populist regimes in the 1980s and 1990s encouraged extractivism with little state interference, and facilitated the rise of large transnational logging corporations by enabling foreign direct investment and broad-scale privatization. These policies also drove fundamental disconnects between development, civil society, the state, and the environment (Pieck 2015).

Alberto Fujimori’s “self-coup” in 1992 served to accelerate the neoliberal agenda of Peru, and even after his removal from the presidency, this neoliberal agenda remained, making it one of the most open economies in the world for foreign investment (Pieck 2015). Increased infrastructure and direct foreign investment has led to an increase in oil prospecting, mining, and the proposed extraction of belowground resources. Under Fujimori’s successor, Alan García, the Amazon was

effectively opened to large-scale private investment by national and transnational corporations. A Peru-U.S. Trade Promotion Agreement was used to advance these neoliberal policies that aimed to modernize the Amazon. Such policies would enable further expansion of logging, mining, and agri-business—mainly oil palm plantations.

In the 2000s, international agreements were made among several national governments and international financing institutions for cross-border integration and trade expansion. Specifically, the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) was created, with the Interoceanic Highway as one of their first projects (Perz et al. 2014).⁵⁵ The creation of this highway would open transport into large swaths of the forested area in the Amazon, which were previously only protected by the difficulties posed in accessing the land. The aim was to facilitate the extraction of resources and movement of capital (Pieck 2015). In addition to the Interoceanic Highway, IIRSA also proposed over five-hundred other development projects in the Amazon region alone, including roads, bridges, dams, waterways, and electrical power (Pieck 2015).

Through the 20th century, the Peruvian state was not well-formed and lacked reach in the Amazon regions. Instead, Catholic missions, NGOs, and *patrones* were the primary regional political figures (de Jong and Humphreys 2016). At the same time, Peru's environmental regulatory structure has been underfunded, corrupt, and ineffective, only creating a Ministry of the Environment in 2008 (Pieck 2015). Because of longstanding governmental neglect, the regional Amazonian governments still often oppose Lima's policies. Increased infrastructure threatens not only the environments and resources of Indigenous communities, but increased traffic also brings violence from drug and human traffickers that sometimes target Indigenous villages (Goldstein 2019a). Thus, neoliberal policies in favor of infrastructure spurred widespread Indigenous protests (de Jong and Humphreys 2016). President García's view was that the protection of Indigenous lands and conservation of the forests was "backwards" as it was preventing investment and the exploitation of Peru's abundance for national development. Increased infrastructure would not only make Peru's economy more open to foreign investment, advancing the neoliberal agenda, but would also put Peru's frontier regions, like Ucayali, more firmly under state control by creating governable spaces and subjects (Scott 1999).

2 | 3 INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES IN SPACES OF CONTESTATION

In this section I discuss how Indigenous identities have been shaped alongside conceptions of nature, by both colonizers and colonized peoples. The forests that had previously been sources of new commodities, in the 20th century were threatened as they were transformed by timber concessions, mining, cattle ranching, and oil palm plantations. In spaces of contestation over Indigenous worlds and resources, Indigenous identities and lives articulate with Peruvian politics and economic opportunities.

⁵⁵ The IIRSA was developed partly in response to pressure from China, which aimed to secure access to food sources and intensified its relationship with the Brazilian government to do so (Pieck 2015).

INDIGENEITY

The social and ecological outcomes of extraction in the Peruvian Amazon have given rise to conflicts that have disproportionately impacted Indigenous forest users while at the same time extending the control of the state and the ability for colonists and foreigners to profit from forest resources. This undermined the ability of Indigenous communities to govern and manage their own forests (Agrawal and Ostrom 2008). It is unfortunately a common enough narrative that modern development is accompanied by the loss of livelihoods, dispossession or cultural genocide of Indigenous groups, and ecological degradation. These types of casualties are often portrayed as necessary but unfortunate within the discourse of improvement (Li 2007). Marisol de La Cadena (2010) discusses how the narrative of inevitable progress forces Indigenous people to either join with progress and leave behind their indigeneity, or to die. Either materially or metaphorically, she says, “letting Indians die was necessary to achieve progress” (de la Cadena 2010: 347). She describes the formation of indigeneity as a process of collaborative friction (Tsing 2005), which results in partial connections, leaving Indigenous people in a nether region between an essentialized version of indigeneity, and *mestizo*—the modern Peruvian citizen.

Although I have sometimes been using the categories of *Indigenous*, *Mestizo*, and *White* as if they are natural categories, they are not given. Racial designations are not essential to a person, but rather serve to locate them relationally in the specific hierarchical positions within the socioeconomic power of the region (Gow 1996). These categories are linked to the extractive history of western Amazonia. Gow suggests that, from Indigenous perspectives, the origin of the mestizos was in the mutual seduction between Indigenous forest magic and the industrialized goods of the white people. Rather than seeing this history as one of conquest, it is seen as a taming of the forest people. This seduction is at the heart of the system of *habilitación*. According to the hierarchies established through the systems of *habilitación*, to be white is to be higher up in the chain of credit, while to be native is to be at the bottom of the hierarchy, and yet closer to the forest. The mestizo category can equally include those of mixed blood as well as Indigenous people who have adopted the ways of the colonists and missionaries, forsaking their language and traditional clothing, often against their will when they were adopted as slaves in the households of *patrónes*. This reflects the earlier category of “semi-civilized Indian” or “Christian Indian” who were positioned as mediators between the white people and the Indigenous peoples of the forest.

The leftist politics and the *Indigenismo* political movement in Peru, which gained popularity in the 1920s, focused on ending the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and including them in Peruvian society and politics. This movement was critical in the construction of *the Indian* and the framing of Indigenous matters by scholars and politicians in Peru and Latin America more broadly (de la Cadena 1998). *Indigenismo* was taken up by the APRA (*Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*), a longstanding populist party in Peru, centered on disrupting the old elitist social order. However, the “Indigenous problem,” framed around how Indigenous people could be incorporated into the economic and political activities of the Peruvian state, was almost entirely discussed by mestizo politicians and scholars claiming to speak on the Indians’ behalf (Rama 2004). *Indigenismo* was seen by critics as primarily benefitting the rise of the mestizo middle classes by challenging the longstanding power of the land-owning elites (Rama 2004). Therefore, *Indigenismo* also served to produce indigeneity, and the figure of the Indian, as representative of alterity in Latin America in contrast with dominant mestizo classes.

After several decades of political struggle and upheaval between the populist peasants’ movements and the old order, the “Indigenous problem” still remained a question in Peruvian

politics. In 1959, a contract between the UN and the Ministry of Labor and Indigenous Affairs resulted in a Peruvian state project—the National Integration Plan for the Aboriginal Population (de la Cadena 1998). This was an attempt to integrate Indigenous peoples into the Peruvian culture while respecting their “norms and cultural values.” However, while this represented a move toward viewing Indigeneity as a more social and cultural issue rather than racial, the state’s classification of *Indian* still relied on biological definitions of race (“pre-Columbian blood not mixed with races”) over the cultural aspects of Indigeneity (de la Cadena 1998).

A decade later, in 1969, when General Juan Velasco Alvarado gained military rule of the Peruvian government, he would declare an agrarian reform that aimed to “end forever the unjust social order that impoverished and oppressed the millions of landless peasants who have always been forced to work the land of others” (Velasco 2005). This would also mark a change in the rhetoric around Indigenous issues toward a focus on class issues, as opposed to the cultural rhetoric that had defined *Indigenismo*, leading to a masking of underlying racial tensions (de la Cadena 1998). Velasco would abolish the word *indio* from the official lexicon, replacing it with *campesino* (peasant), which he claimed would help erase the racism that had plagued Indigenous peoples. However, this also served to enfold them under the rule of the state. In the same speech, Velasco explained this reform:

In response to the cries for justice and rights from Peru’s neediest people, the Agrarian Reform Law gives its support to the great multitude of peasants who today belong to Indigenous communities and from this day forward—abandoning unacceptable racist habits and prejudices—will be called Peasant Communities [*Comunidades Campesinas*] (Velasco 2005).

In response to a growing political consciousness among Indigenous peoples of the region, the Jungle Law of 1974, formally titled the Native Communities and Agricultural Promotion in Jungles Regions Law, centered Pucallpa in a movement for the emancipation of “Jungle Indians.” This piece of legislation enacted by Velasco’s military government, was the first law that promoted and spelled out Indigenous rights (Hvalkof 2006). In addition to property rights and community titling, it also provided avenues for technical training and financial assistance (Howe 1974). At this time, the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon had been pushed onto poor lands away from the main river channels, and many were working as cheap laborers for lumber and oil companies. The Shipibo-Konibo had been forced to navigate their Indigenous identity within the context of government-funded and missionary-led educational initiatives that were focused on assimilating Indigenous groups into mainstream *mestizo* Peruvian society, particularly through tactics of language domination (Best 2019). During this period, Shipibo culture and language were greatly suppressed. Maestra Beka’s daughter, Biri, recalled: “... in our community, at the time when I was little, like 7 or 8 years old...there was practically not any culture any more. Rather, each community had their professors who were Spanish [speakers].”

In order to mobilize claims on forested land in Ucayali the Shipibo-Konibo *articulated* their Indigenous identities with Peruvian policy (Li 2000; Hall 1996). Indigenous identities are continually constructed in relations between the Shipibo-Konibo and state and non-state entities, other humans and non-humans. Before the agrarian reforms, assimilationist politics and cultural repression meant that the Shipibo were primarily concerned with negotiating a way of life between their own customs and *mestizo* society, and did not particularly represent themselves as “Indigenous” or otherwise perform their indigeneity (Brabec de Mori 2011a). However, the political changes of the 1970s meant that claims to Indigeneity could be leveraged to claim community land titles, thereby serving to link state-sanctioned Indigenous identities with the land. Meanwhile, the missionary-run Summer Institute of Linguistics (1947-2002), based in

Yarinacocha, aimed to conserve and revitalize Indigenous languages. According to Bernd Brabec de Mori, these institutions, as well as the interest of ethnographers and anthropologists, helped to precipitate a reclaiming of indigeneity and thereby a re-indigenization of the Shipibo-Konibo and other Amazonian ethnic groups beginning in the late 1970s (Brabec de Mori 2011a, 179). The interest in Shipibo healing rituals and medicinal plants by foreign anthropologists and “spiritual tourists” have also allowed the Shipibo to use their Indigenous identities for economic and political advancement.

ARTICULATING INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES WITH ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Despite advances for the rights of Indigenous peoples, the racialized power structures that were cemented during the rubber boom have changed little outside of more recent Indigenous organizing efforts. This includes responses to the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) in the 1990s, during which Indigenous communities like the Asháninka established their own self-defense militias (Veber 2014). The Shining Path, a leftists paramilitary group who celebrated violence as the only method for true revolution, gained increasing power in the 1980s, declaring war in earnest in 1989 (Stern 1998). Since they started as a radical intellectual movement, the Shining Path took Peru by surprise in its power and effectiveness as a war machine. By some estimates, over 6,000 Asháninka and other Indigenous groups in the Amazon died in confrontation with the Shining Path and counterinsurgent troops, who both occupied Indigenous territories during the war (Hvalkof 2006). Sporadic violence and political terrorism passed through the lower Ucayali during this time as well, and many colonists evacuated the area out of fear (Hern 1992a). Biri recalls nearly being kidnapped as a teenager during that time. In 1993, as a counterinsurgency effort, the authoritarian government under Alberto Fujimori seized control of Indigenous communities, placing them under control of the armed forces—this was in direct opposition to the constitutional right to autonomy. In 1996, after the Shining Path was defeated, the Ashaninka organizations delivered a report:

In order to achieve (peace) the Asháninka people has seen more than 3,500 of its sons and daughters, men, women and children, cruelly die. The population of more than 50 communities was obliged to abandon their homes and become displaced. More than 5,000 Asháninkas were taken captive and some still remain prisoners today. More than 10,000 Asháninkas have been forcibly displaced and left with no home and no means of survival. For 6 years we have all lived on a war footing and have been the targets of harassment, assassinations, night raids, torture and massacre of a large number of our leaders. And today you live in peace. The genocide and the suffering of the Asháninka family is of tragic proportion and has seriously compromised our existence as a people in a number of ways... (Statement to the Nation signed by the Asháninka Emergency Committee, 1996) (Quoted in García Hierro 1998, 16).

During the Shining Path’s reign, in conjunction with cholera outbreaks in the region, many communities were abandoned—Indigenous and mestizo alike. In the sierra, a Reproductive Health and Family Planning Program was later launched by Fujimori that would force sterilization of more than 260,000 Quechua women (Kania 2016). This was done under the auspices of public health and prevention of disease, with Fujimori making the case unofficially that it would drive down poverty and enable control of rural populations. This was exemplary of Fujimori’s racist politics. After the defeat of the Shining Path in 1992 with the assassination of their leader, a Repopulation Program was created to encourage Peruvians to resettle such areas (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2011), appropriating many Indigenous territories in the process.

In 1999, in response to lack of environmental oversight by President Garcia’s neoliberal regime, community leaders from over 1,200 Indigenous communities throughout Peru (mostly

Andean) formed the National Confederation of Communities Affected by Mining (CONCAMI) in order to challenge the negative impacts of mining (Poole 2010). Despite regional protests, García moved forward with national development policies, bypassing usual routes of legislation, and international conventions (ILO 169) that mandated free prior and informed consent from Indigenous communities. Two of García's decrees would have allowed 50% of Amazonian forests to be reclassified from forest land to agricultural land, enabling their conversion to commercial plantations. Spurred by the passing of this legislation, 65 ethnic groups held a national strike in 2008, demanding the withdrawal of 38 of the decrees that had been enacted. AIDSESEP, which represented Peru's Indigenous federations, had initiated the strikes in Amazonian towns, including Pucallpa. In the town of Quillabamba, a road blockade was instigated at Bagua, which was a key road from the coast to the interior (de Jong and Humphreys 2016). This blockade was held for over a month, after which the Peruvian government declared a state of emergency in the Amazonian departments, including Ucayali and Loreto.

The conflict between The Peruvian state and the Indigenous federations led to violent confrontations, culminating in June 2008, when 33 people were killed and 170 injured. Investigations concluded that García's legislation had been unconstitutional. Although some of the decrees were revoked, many oil and mining projects initiated under the García administration are still in operation. As of 2010, around 75% of the Peruvian Amazon was under oil concessions, with 58 out of 64 concessions located on titled Indigenous lands, including many protected lands (Poole 2010).⁵⁶

Meanwhile, the forests in Ucayali and Loreto have continued to decline with ongoing timber extraction and overfishing—the last large fish migration in Ucayali, an annual event in which rivers were said to be thick with fish for days, was observed in 1989 (Hern 1992a). As Humberto Rojas told me,

Before, we would use arrows to fish. Now no one fishes with arrows. They use a trap or net. And they bring about 200-300 fish. But before we would fish to eat. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Now you cannot do it, because fish are becoming scarce. The lake that had many fish, has disappeared. Now, small children, they do not know *paiche*, do not know *gamitana*, do not know *tucunaré*, those fish.⁵⁷ There were lots of fish in the lakes, and now it has disappeared.

This also marks a steep decline in Indigenous communities' abilities to subsist on their natural resources. Even among communities whose land titles are, for the moment, secure, Indigenous peoples in Ucayali continue to have higher poverty rates than mestizos (Porro et al. 2014). This is largely due to structural constraints on that Indigenous peoples face in participating in economic networks and benefitting from their forest resources.

Indigenous identities are increasingly being mobilized in struggles over natural resources in Amazonia. During the violent conflicts at Bagua, the political voices of non-humans were able to be articulated through indigeneity when Indigenous protestors and activists called the river their brother, and appealing to the corporations and government to care for their kin (de la Cadena 2010):

We speak of our brothers who quench our thirst, who bathe us, those who protect our needs—this

⁵⁶ Indigenous communities have been affected by oil. For example, in 2010 four hundred barrels of oil were spilled into the Marañon River in Loreto, which is the territory of the Cocama and Achuar peoples (Poole 2010). The quantity of oil was tested to be extremely high, and yet the spill was dismissed as inconsequential by the Peruvian government.

⁵⁷ Paiche, gamitana, and tucunaré are types of fish.

[brother] is what we call the river. We do not stab our brothers. If the transnational corporations would care about our soil like we have cared for it for millennia, we would gladly give them room so that they could work here—but all they care is their economic benefit, to fill their coffers with wealth. We do not understand why the government wants to raze our lives with those decrees. [Los Sucesos de Bagua, <http://www.servindi.org/producciones/videos/13083>, quoted from de la Cadena 2010].

This conflict arose despite the ratification and adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, which declared that Indigenous peoples be recognized as self-determining peoples, with “the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired,” (United Nations 2007 Article 26) and granted protection of their environmental, biological, and cultural integrity.

Silvio Valle, the Shipibo-Konibo mayor of Masisea, speaking at the first Meeting of Ambassadors and Ministers of the Amazon on Climate Change in Masisea, related human health to the health of the river, saying: “We consider and believe that the waters are like the veins that human beings have, and the blood of our mother earth.” This was part of a request that the National Water Authority create a clean-up effort and no-pollution proposal for rivers and lakes.

Relating the health or wellbeing of the environment to the wellbeing of human beings is also how one of my interlocutors in Paoyhan, an older man who was the acting Justice of the Peace for the community, framed the logging that occurred in their territory—as an attack and a violation:

Well, all the forest is all violated, all violated... the people are in the forest and the animals run. It has changed. Before it was not like that. The forest was virgin. Pure. Now it's not. Loggers are invading us, in all communities today, there are a lot of loggers. In communities there is still wood. In other places there isn't. Loggers attack us. They attack the community.

“They attack? What type of violence?” I asked.

And he replied, “the trees, they cut down wood.”

Many Shipibo people I know are mobilizing their Indigenous identities in political movements allied with environmental concerns, particularly around deforestation. Every few months, it seems, the streets of Pucallpa fill with marches for Indigenous rights. These are organized by the Federation of Native Communities of the Ucayali (FECONAU), aimed to mobilize Indigenous groups from all over the region to voice demands from the government about Indigenous concerns. Around five thousand people showed up to the first march I attended in 2015, from at least 12 different Indigenous groups in Ucayali. They marched several kilometers through Pucallpa's center in the hot sun, bearing signs that read, “NO to the destruction of the forest!” and “In defense of our territories and forests” (Figure 2.5), among other demands both social and environmental, including calls to end discrimination. Evident at the march is a deep embeddedness of environmental concerns within articulations of Indigeneity. For example, one sign, painted read “Don't cut down the tree of wisdom, because we are its fruits!” (Figure 2.6).



Figure 2.4. An Indigenous march in Pucallpa in August, 2015. The sign on the front left reads: “NO to the destruction of the forest.” The Sign with Edwin Chota’s picture demands justice for the Asháninka activist who was killed by illegal loggers while defending his territory in 2014. The sign behind that reads “NO to discrimination.” The rear, hand written sign translates to: “We are not merchandise in the hands of lying politicians.” Photo by Laura Dev.



Figure 2.5. At an Indigenous march in Pucallpa in August, 2015. The sign reads, “Don’t cut the tree of wisdom, because we are its fruit!” Photo by Laura Dev.

In 2016, Peru adopted the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the Organization of American States (OAS). This document is considered to be one of the most important human rights changes, with recommendations for protecting Indigenous rights with regard to their self-determination, self-government, education, health, culture, lands, territory, and natural resources (Kania 2016). Although Peru's recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples seems to be progressive, there continues to be ongoing loss of territory and exploitation of natural resources on Indigenous territories without consent. Indeed, in 2019, FECONAU and several other Indigenous federations put out a statement titled the *Declaración de Yarinachoca*, decrying the Peruvian state's lack of action on issues of land infringement, titling, dispossession, and the murder of many Indigenous land defenders:

We suffer the serious impacts and damages of the biased gaze of the entities of the Peruvian State who see our territories as a simple spoil of natural resources put at their service to exploit or declare untouchable. As a result of them, we live cornered by invasions of our territories by settlers, drug traffickers, loggers, fishermen, miners and recently by agro-industrial companies of oil palm, papaya, cacao and rice. These activities turn our rivers and lakes into drains, our forests into deserts and our leaders into targets of threats and criminalization that puts their lives at risk simply by defending our forests. On the other hand, much of the forests and ecosystems that we have nurtured and cared for over generations have been converted into natural protected areas where they treat us as intruders for the simple deed of wanting to access the forest to feed our families, build our houses and sustain our identities. For us, the forest is not a natural resource to exploit, it is life (see Appendix 2 for full statement).

Through the articulation of Indigenous discourses with concerns for the environment, natural beings (e.g. trees and forests) entwine with human struggles (Robbins 2011: 23), and in doing so take on new roles and importance and are transformed in the process. Networks between humans and non-humans emerge, which are able to leverage power and influence in the political arena, but still face immense structural barriers.

Although the project of modernity was born through violence and conflict, it is also constructed by colonized people, who are part of modernity even as they are excluded from its benefits (Mignolo 2000). According to Walter Mignolo, Indigenous identities occupy a border region, in which hierarchy and difference become stark. These borders are the productive areas where the genesis of both modernity and indigeneity can be found. De la Cadena terms the hybrids of this particular border region "Indigenous-mestizo" (de la Cadena 2010). Such hybrids, she asserts, are socionatural formations of human identity that are linked with and inclusive of non-humans and of nature. These socionatural subjects emerge at sites of socio-ecological struggle, at the frontiers of resource extraction and primitive accumulation, with new identities and ideologies. These ideologies contain within them a plurality of worlds—that is, in these sites of ideological struggle, the ontological nature of the world is at stake. According to de la Cadena, this is an epistemic misalignment resulting from the elimination of "nature" and non-human beings from the political sphere and their conversion into extractable commodities (De la Cadena 2010).

The ontological tension that I brought up in the beginning of this chapter was between two ways of understanding the existence of a tree: as a being that exists in an ecology of selves (Kohn 2013), or as timber—an objectified resource commodity. Indigenous relational ontologies of Ucayali recognize certain trees and other plants as having the capacity to teach, heal, sing, and embody human form (see Chapter 4), and they form their own identities in relation to those trees. Indigenous identities are coming into being at an intersection between multiple ontological understandings of the world, which are antagonistic to each other. According to de la Cadena

(2010), this antagonism influences the identity formation of the Indigenous subject, whereby the tree's subjectivity is essentially incorporated into the concept of Indigeneity, constructed in opposition to mestizo-ness and the world that understands trees as inanimate objects. These antagonistic ontological understandings are then able to represent themselves politically through the mobilization of these identities in relation with the environment. Struggles over meanings and worlds play out in the physical sphere.

2 | 4 CONCLUSION

In Ucayali, infrastructure, mining, logging, coca cultivation, and more recently the introduction of plantation agriculture in the form of oil palm have threatened Shipibo territories. Cartel-owned oil palm plantations have engulfed the land of several Shipibo communities near Pucallpa, often with falsified land titles, threatening violence to locals who protest their occupation. These forms of corrupt land trafficking represent another wave of neo-colonialism in the region. The Peruvian government has done little to combat such infractions on Indigenous territories, and often overlooks the damage done by extractive activities in favor of Peru's modernization and economic growth (Kania 2016). State and transnational institutions have gained power by monopolizing access to the material flows of resources, and controlling the direction of economic and political connections that would allow for Indigenous communities to capitalize on their resources.

In this chapter I have argued that Indigenous identities have been co-constituted along with the extractive industries that have long-defined economic development in Ucayali and the Amazon region more broadly. These industries have relied on exploited Indigenous labor, constructing racialized hierarchies that continue to structure the region's economy. They have also relied on the extraction of plant vitality from Ucayali's forests. These dynamics have reconfigured socionatural relations in Ucayali irreversibly, in which trees and other forest beings have been constructed as "natural resources." These types of ongoing ontological antagonisms centered around trees articulate with questions of Indigenous sovereignty over their own territories in the political sphere.

The commodification of ayahuasca and Shipibo ceremonies unfolds between outsiders and Indigenous peoples within the pathways laid out by centuries of violence, exploitation, and extraction. However, it also comes about at a time when Indigenous groups are gaining unprecedented political power, where the international community is increasingly recognizing and allying with Indigenous rights, and with a growing sense of crisis regarding the depredation of Amazonian forests and the potential consequences for the global climate. Thus, the ayahuasca economy has both liberatory and extractive potential. On the one hand, it offers promise for healers in acquiring new and better livelihood opportunities in which their indigeneity is valued rather than de-valued. On the other hand, the systems of power that have structured Amazonia for centuries are still alive and well. In the rest of the dissertation, I will explore how the ayahuasca economy interacts with these existing systems of power and hierarchy.

CHAPTER 3 | PATHWAYS

AYAHUASCA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH MORE-THAN-HUMAN AND MORE-THAN-CAPITALIST ECONOMIES

3 | 0 INTRODUCTION

The second day we were to enter the forest where we were studying caapi vines, Orestes told me, “I had a dream last night that was very good—the owner of ayahuasca came to me.” In the dream, he had assured the spirit (*ibo*)⁵⁸ of the plant that we were not there to do damage to the plants, but that our idea was to increase the number of plants, to help the forest. He later explained to me that it was important to ask the spirits of the plants when coming to a new place, if it is okay to be there. Otherwise the forest can be quite a dangerous place for human beings, and any number of bad things can happen to a person if they do not receive permission. “The spirits make us dream in order to warn us not to hurt the plants.” Orestes explained this in a matter of fact way, and was sure to emphasize to me that this is the normal and proper way of relating with spirits—there was a seeming acknowledgement that since I am not Shipibo, that I probably do not know these things. I am not sure what Orestes actually conveyed to the spirit of ayahuasca in his dream, or whether the spirit truly understood the scientific purpose of what had brought our team into the forest there. But nonetheless, it gave him its blessing, and he felt that he had dreamed well. For my part, I could not be sure I understood the spirit of ayahuasca in the same way that Orestes did, and it seemed that Orestes was serving to mediate my relationship with these plant beings, with whom I was not accustomed to relating in these ways, though I was slowly learning.

Our business in the forest was to conduct a population study of caapi vines because the Shipibo community of Junin Pablo wanted to make a forest management plan for the harvest of caapi. Only a few years ago did they realize that their forests were full of the vines that are the primary ingredient in making ayahuasca. Though there were a few healers in Junin Pablo, it was not a tourist destination for ayahuasca. Rather, they had been approached by a company from California, Caapi Drops, who wanted to create a pure caapi extract for sale to U.S. consumers for microdosing on sacred plants.⁵⁹ Although there is opportunity to sell the vines to Peruvian middlemen that cruise the river looking for vines, the company, Caapi Drops,⁶⁰ would offer them a much better price per roll, and furthermore wanted to set up a non-profit for the community in which sales from the caapi extract could fund community projects, the first of which would be a system to provide clean drinking water to the community.

⁵⁸ *Dueño, madre, or espíritu* are often used interchangeable to refer to the *owner, mother, or spirit* of a plant, or *ibo* in Shipibo..

⁵⁹ Microdosing is a practice gaining popularity in the Global North, in which people will consume small amounts of psychedelic substances in order to have an energetic or spiritual connection, but not a fully psychedelic effect.

⁶⁰ Name changed.

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

Once ayahuasca and its component plants entered into global circulation, they became visible to a wide variety of outsiders who previously had no relation with them, and the relations among these plants and humans shifted along several entwined trajectories. First, the plants became commodities—objects of capitalism—something to be hunted and extracted from the forest. There is a tension between more extractive relations that produce ayahuasca as an object or resource, and Shipibo practices that follow the dictates of the plant spirits as guides and teachers. For example, the practice of asking permission from the spirit of ayahuasca, as exemplified above by Orestes' dream, establishes a relationship in which the plant spirits must be appeased by those who would enter the forest to disturb or harvest the plants. Secondly, ayahuasca and the spirit of ayahuasca came into contact with a greatly expanded web of humans—as outsiders began consuming the brew—than they previously had. As illustrated by the intention of Caapi Drops, consumers in California who have never been to the Amazon or taken ayahuasca, could take small quantities of caapi extract before a yoga class or meditation session, in order to “connect with the energy of the sacred plants.” Finally, in a reciprocal and related movement, as ayahuasca as a commodity moved geographically away from the Amazonian regions in which the plants grow, greater numbers of outsiders like myself from the Global North, and their money, were drawn deeper into forest places and rural Indigenous communities to seek and learn from these plants—in both material and spiritual form. In addition to the plant materials themselves, ayahuasca entered global circulation accompanied by specific cultural practices and Indigenous (or religious) ceremonial forms. These together are what I have been calling the *ayahuasca complex*. It is an object of cultural density, meaning that it is particularly laden with cultural value, significance, and practices (Owens 1999). Because of this, the pathways this plant takes through commodity chains is different than the paths taken by other forest products or even other psychoactive plants.

The relationships among plants and humans in Ucayali, Peru have been growing and changing over the history of the forests there. Whereas the previous chapter focused on the relations of extraction and exploitation that have dominated the Amazon forests over the last several centuries, this chapter will focus on present-day global commodity forms that emerge through the ayahuasca complex. Ayahuasca's constituent plants may seem to be just two more in a long list of forest species being sought, harvested, and extracted from the extraordinarily rich biodiversity of the Amazon basin. Although extractive and colonial histories shape the commodification of ayahuasca, plant beings also have properties and relations—what I call *tendencies*, after Michael Marder (2013)—that shape their pathways of commodification. The particularities of how ayahuasca relates with humans as an ecological, economic, social, and spiritual being, if not unique in every regard, are remarkable enough that they allow us to see more clearly how plant beings as actors participate in both regional and global economies—primarily through tendencies to resist commodification. I use the word *resist* in the vein of Bakker and Bridge (2006) who discuss the ways in which socionatural beings or resources resist certain types of commodity relations (see Introduction) through their properties and relationships. By following ayahuasca's trajectory of commodification, I will show how the plant's agency reveals itself within those pathways.

There is a growing economy structured around the use of ayahuasca in Ucayali, elsewhere in Peru, and internationally, which is specific in its differences from other global socionatural commodities. Ayahuasca displays “unruliness” as a commodity (George 1999), in that it does not follow a smooth or linear trajectory of commodification, and has moved beyond its original

intended use to become an object of international desire. By exploring the particular dimensions of ayahuasca's enrollment into human value systems, I expose some of the underlying forms and logics that differentiate ayahuasca from other socionatural commodities that may seem otherwise similar. Although the commodification of ayahuasca may seem anathema to its ceremonial use and status as a sacred plant for the Indigenous cultures that use it, the brew's imbue with culture, spirit, and sacredness, also contributes perhaps the most socionatural value to ayahuasca as a commodity as it moves across regimes of value (Appadurai 1986a). As ayahuasca is exchanged across intercultural regimes of value, it becomes entangled with new meanings, values, identities, and rules of consumption as demonstrated with the example of Caapi Drops.

Most of the ayahuasca in existence comes from Peru, Brazil, Colombia, and Hawaii.⁶¹ The assemblage involving the production, transport, and use of ayahuasca seems to forge its own unique paths and relations. This means it does not rely on only existing supply routes—even those with geographic overlap—such as narcotrafficking networks for coca, and corporate supply of medicinal plants for supplements or pharmaceuticals (e.g. cat's claw, another woody, medicinal rainforest vine). For instance, in terms of international distribution, ayahuasca is generally mailed already cooked from ayahuasca cooks or suppliers in the Amazon regions to specific healers or facilitators who host ceremonies abroad. In the Amazon, and increasingly worldwide, ayahuasca is recognized as a potent agent for healing (Coe and McKenna 2017). However, because of its controlled status in the U.S. and internationally—a legacy of the prohibition on psychedelic substances that followed in the wake of the 1960s (e.g. Pollan 2018)—it is exceedingly difficult to conduct clinical research on ayahuasca. Most of the clinical work on ayahuasca is currently taking place in Brazil, where ayahuasca is legal for religious or ritual purposes (Viol et al. 2017; Labate and Feeney 2012; dos Santos et al. 2016). Despite significant evidence to show that ayahuasca has potentially important medicinal benefits, it has not been taken up by pharmaceutical drug development either. Thus, the current ayahuasca supply chain is far from corporate, and yet it does not follow the usual routes of “black market” commodities either. In creating a pure caapi extract, however, companies like Caapi Drops seek to get around U.S. legal limitations that restrict ayahuasca's use and importation based on its dimethyl tryptamine (DMT) content—a psychoactive chemical that comes from the addition of chakruna.⁶²

There are currently no restrictions on ayahuasca use or consumption in Peru, and it is protected as part of the National Cultural Heritage (*Patrimonio Cultural de la Nación*) as of 2008. Because of this, Peru has been perhaps the most prominent country taking advantage of the ayahuasca tourism boom, mostly targeting foreigners from the Global North. Most of the ayahuasca produced in Ucayali, Peru is probably not consumed there. Some is exported abroad, but a large portion is also sent to other tourist destinations in Peru—most prominently, Iquitos, with an estimated 120-200 ayahuasca centers—but also to the Sacred Valley area around Cuzco, and elsewhere. One well-known ayahuasca center in Iquitos, *The Center*, is estimated to have around 50 liters of ayahuasca shipped there each month from Pucallpa, Ucayali's capital city.⁶³ The ayahuasca tourism industry is also steadily growing in and around Pucallpa. Several new ayahuasca centers have opened in the last few years, and there is a notably increased number of

⁶¹ Caapi vines were planted in Hawaii by Terence McKenna in the 1970s, and now there is a thriving population on a few of the islands. I have also heard that it is now growing in Australia, though not generally for export. However, it is possible to buy the raw materials on the internet.

⁶² DMT is a Schedule I substance in the United States, making its importation and possession illegal. However, as caapi vines do not contain DMT, caapi products without the addition of chakruna are not illegal in the U.S..

⁶³ This calculation is according to a Shipibo man I interviewed who cooks ayahuasca for the Center.

foreign tourists walking around the streets in Pucallpa at any given time, though these numbers are still quite low compared with Iquitos. In small Shipibo communities like Paoyhan, where there are prominent healers, the numbers of foreign visitors has also been steadily increasing.

California, specifically Los Angeles and the greater San Francisco Bay Area, is one of the hotspots in the Global North for ayahuasca use. Although it is impossible to know just how many clandestine ceremonies are happening, it would be safe to estimate that dozens of ayahuasca ceremonies and retreats are held in California on any given weekend night.⁶⁴ These ceremonies encompass many different ayahuasca traditions and styles: various Indigenous lineages; Brazilian ayahuasca religions; New Age ceremonies with a mix of Indigenous elements; and “communal” type ceremonies with no clear leader and accompanied by a playlist of music. Taken together, this could amount to a fairly conservative estimate of 25-100 liters of ayahuasca being consumed each week in California alone.⁶⁵ However, in the Bay Area, for example, unless one was already connected in “medicine circles” or to suppliers in South America, it would be difficult to come by ayahuasca “on the street” or outside of the context of a ceremony or retreat setting.

This chapter grounds itself in the particular connections between Ucayali Peru and California. Within this fragment of the larger commodity web of the global ayahuasca boom, I focus specifically on Shipibo ayahuasca practices, and the ways that ceremonies, plants, and capital travel between rural Shipibo communities and users in the Global North. The question motivating this chapter is whether the ayahuasca boom is just another extractive industry like those I discussed in the last chapter or whether it differs in significant ways. I address this question by tracing the flow of more-than-material substances that circulate as part of the ayahuasca complex. These include plant matter, vitality, and ceremonial practices that co-constitute plant spirits. In order to situate this analysis in a multi species framework that sees plants as alive and agentive in the process, I draw on conceptions of vitality as a more-than-material substance that is key for defining ayahuasca’s value and relation with humans. I follow not only the commodity circuits of the plants comprising ayahuasca, but also the transformational steps that occur along the chain of valuation, resulting in the commodification of ayahuasca and ayahuasca ceremonies.

Part of this story involves the influx of outsiders into certain Indigenous forest places, including my own presence there; throughout this chapter I examine how the presence of outsiders and foreign capital interact with Indigenous economies. I show that these interactions and exchanges are not just extractive and colonial, but also can be healing and reciprocal. I argue that the ayahuasca economy, comprising both human and non-human actors, cannot be explained in terms of capital, labor, and commodities alone. The ayahuasca complex traverses multiple worlds, not all of which have materiality. More-than-human and more-than-material entwinements, Indigenous practices, vitality, healing, kinship networks, collective transformation, and care are also important factors. However, there are those who profit from this economy. I examine how the ayahuasca assemblage articulates across different spatial scales, from local to global; where money and power accumulate; and how the ayahuasca complex interacts with landscapes and livelihoods along the way. I argue that the emergent form of the ayahuasca assemblage is generated from a nuanced interplay of tensions between market forces and resistances—the plantly relations that regulate how ayahuasca is consumed. Thus, the trajectory of ayahuasca’s commodification follows

⁶⁴ My estimate is on the same order as Michael Pollan’s (2018) estimate of “...any given night there are probably dozens if not hundreds of ceremonies taking place somewhere in America (with concentrations in the San Francisco Bay Area and Brooklyn). (p. 27)”

⁶⁵ This is based on a standard estimate of around 1 L supplying 20 people with medicine.

a specific pathway that is formed by plant-human relations as well as the particular socio-political dynamics of this place and time.

In order to develop these arguments, I conclude this introduction with a discussion of how socionatural value is produced and transformed across different cultural contexts through various forms of exchange. The remainder of the chapter is divided into three sections that correspond to the primary steps that create added value in the production of ayahuasca and ceremonies as objects of exchange: harvesting, cooking, and ceremony, which add value both through human labor and the transformation of the substances in question. These three steps also correspond to the moments of resistance that ayahuasca poses to commodification. In section one, I show that before ayahuasca is cooked, its component plants follow a trajectory similar to many of the other socionatural commodities that have come from the forests in Ucayali. Nonetheless, the ecology of the caapi vines makes them difficult to cultivate and mass produce, providing the first point of resistance. In section two, I discuss how the cooking of caapi transforms the value of the plants through both human and plant vitality. I argue that ayahuasca's unique relationship with human bodies promotes its embeddedness in cultural forms. Thus ayahuasca is consumed *ceremonially* even as it moves to different contexts. In section three, I show how this cultural embeddedness generates value. Shipibo healers and communities are able to use this value to create alternative livelihoods that allow them to benefit from their spiritual and cultural expertise. This is a shift in the exploitative and extractive labor relations that dominated Shipibo interactions with the global market economy previously. Together, these factors serve to shape, constrain, and regulate the use and commodification of ayahuasca as it circulates globally.

VALUATION & VITALITY IN MORE-THAN-CAPITALIST ECONOMIES

The production of ayahuasca involves several transformative steps as two individual forest plants, each with their own spirits and ecological situatedness, become a bitter psychoactive beverage that is consumed by people in different parts of the globe for the purpose of having a healing, spiritual, or cultural experience. Yet, ayahuasca's economic trajectory is different from the botanical commodities that came before, such as rubber, cinchona, and timber, described in the last chapter. The reason is found in differing conceptions of value and meaning, and the role of Indigenous labor and expertise in the process of creating economic value. It also lies in the way that Indigenous societies themselves have more recently been valued and fetishized globally (Meyer and Royer 2001).

In order to follow ayahuasca's commodity circuit, it is important to understand how commodities are produced, alienated, and exchanged. I use a relatively simple definition of commodity, to mean an something that is produced in order to be bought and sold (Polanyi 1944). Value, following Arjun Appadurai's culturalist approach, in this case refers to a social assessment of the object, and thus inheres in the politics of economic relations that surround it (Appadurai 1986a, 3). However, the creation of economic value is a complex and mysterious process, particularly when such objects already have significant social and natural meanings and relationships (Swyngedouw 1996; Bakker and Bridge 2006; Peluso 2012). I follow Peluso's (2012) analysis of rubber to view ayahuasca as a socionatural commodity in which both human labor and the plant's biophysical properties enable and constrain its commodification. Both rubber and ayahuasca undergo socionatural transformations across the different contexts and regimes of value within which it is used and understood. Thus, ayahuasca is not *only* a natural product; as I will show in the following sections, it acquires much of its added value through human labor, cultural

attachment, and ritual. However, it is not simply a human commodity either; the agency emergent through plant-human relations and the material tendencies of plants co-constitute the ayahuasca complex and the value that inheres therein.

Marx described commodities as “full of metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (Marx 1976, 163), which are not readily apparent, but are hidden behind the simplistic relations “between things” that commodities become when they enter into economic circulation. According to Marxian thinking, a commodity is a mediator of social relations among capitalists, laborers, and, often, nature (e.g. Peluso 2012). Commodity fetishism is the process by which these socionatural relations are obscured (Marx 1976). Thereby, value is abstracted from the labor and socionatural relations that went into producing the commodity. The process of valuation is dependent on this abstraction and is central to the exchange process in which exchange value becomes more than use value, sometimes through the workings of human labor (Marx 1976). However, some commodities are not only fetishized through *alienation* from their origins of production or growth (Tsing 2009); as the case with matsutake mushrooms, value is imbued in ayahuasca *through* its associations with Indigenous cultures and cultural representation, rather than through abstraction from culture.

‘Value’ not only refers to shared cultural and relational understandings, but also the worth that is applied to something for the purpose of exchange and generated during exchange (Appadurai 1986a). It is difficult to translate value across diverse cultural contexts, as it is always relational, situated, and embedded in the relations of its production and reproduction (Santos-Granero 2015).⁶⁶ Commodities, according to Appadurai, circulate through different cultural and historical milieus that create economic value through “desire, demand, reciprocal sacrifice and power” (Appadurai 1986a, 4). The trajectory and value of these things must be evaluated as they are produced, circulated, exchanged, and consumed in order to understand their meanings and social significance—not *just* the processes of their production. I claim that these trajectories are shaped by the socionatural relations in which the commodity participates, and therefore encode the agency of the commodities themselves.

Oftentimes there are multiple, potentially competing, regimes of value that are navigated even within a singular cultural context (Gregory 1997). As detailed in the previous chapters, Shipibo communities have been engaged in market relations and capitalism for over a century, and thus Indigenous values and economies cannot be easily separated from the global and regional economies. However, since Indigenous Amazonians have been engaged with capitalism primarily as exploited and enslaved laborers, socioeconomic relations within Indigenous communities have persisted that are tangential to and not fully embedded within regional market economies. Multiple systems of value operate in Shipibo communities—those that are more dependent on relational Indigenous ontologies and values (like kinship and affinity), and those that are based in historical and geopolitical hierarchies (Gregory 1997).

Distinguishing between Indigenous forms of barter, gift, and exchange and capitalist exchange tends to create overly simplistic dualities (Appadurai 1986a). Instead, capitalist modes of commoditization must be seen as interacting with Indigenous modes of commoditization. Thus, Stephen Hugh-Jones (1992) described a “fit” between capitalist economies and Indigenous exchange practices, though they maintain that the meanings, values, and cultural relations that inhere within those exchanges may be incongruous, antagonistic, or duplicitous. Indeed, the

⁶⁶ Some scholars argue that it is cross-cultural exchanges that result in fetishization of commodities, and create hybridity—both a sharing and divergence of meaning—as it traverses regimes of value mediated by the exchange of heterogeneous things (Owens 1999).

cultural or social understandings about the object and its value may only be minimally shared when dealing with intercultural exchanges (Appadurai 1986a). Contemporary Indigenous societies and economies tend to dwell in the tension of conflicting regimes of value and meaning (Waters 2004; Cusicanqui 2012). The ayahuasca economy embodies these contradictions and antagonisms, which are ontological, cultural, spiritual, and capitalistic. Considering the ayahuasca economy to be “more-than-capitalist” allows us to attend to the diversities and differences that structure it (Henderson 2013).

According to Fernando Santos-Granero (2015), value and wealth for Amazonian peoples inheres in multi-species webs of relationality in the form of vitality, a “much-coveted cosmic substance that shapes the exchanges between all living beings” (16). Vitality is an animate principle that is necessary for the production and reproduction of life. The value of vitality goes beyond the production of healthy human bodies and into a web of interspecies relations. Vitality is essential to the ceremonial techniques used by healers, who appropriate life-giving vitality from spirit masters (e.g. *ibo*) and redistribute it in order to increase useful plants and animals, heal, protect, or even cause harm (e.g. *brujeria* (witchcraft), or *shitana* in Shipibo).

Power, knowledge, and healing are three attributes of ayahuasca that relate to the use value of ayahuasca in the Shipibo context. However, the value of these “services” provided by the brew are not easily captured in economic valuation. The view of vitality as an essential substance of value that inheres in social relations requires an ontological shift from a world that construes value in terms of utility and human labor. While it does take human labor, certainly, to produce ayahuasca as a consumable product, the particular properties that give it power, knowledge, and healing, are aspects of vitality of the plant beings that comprise it. Instead of the instrumental and economic assessments of value that define capitalism, vitality is a life-force that can be transferred among different types of beings, and is essential to survival, while also serving to animate beings with consciousness and agency (Santos-Granero 2019). As such, healing, knowledge, and power are important manifestations of ayahuasca’s vitality that are transferred and exchanged between humans and plant beings. Importantly, it is the plant spirits (*ibo*) that are seen as producing the vitality that inheres in material plant specimens. In this analysis, I center vitality in order to show how plant beings participate in more-than-human economies through the lending of their own vitality.

Within the ayahuasca economy that produces ayahuasca ceremonies for consumption by outsiders, it is not simply the plants that are commoditized, but the ceremonial experience itself. Economically, this can be understood as the provision of a service by an expert. Thus, it is also the expertise of the healer, and both the technical and cosmological knowledge embodied within the healer, that is commodified (Appadurai 1986a). However, the valuation of this expertise is slightly different between Shipibo and non-Shipibo consumers, which will be detailed more in Chapter 4. When focusing on consumption practices and values, a shift between tourist modes of consuming ayahuasca and ceremonies, and local modes of consumption is apparent. Namely, among outsiders, I argue that ayahuasca ceremonies fall into the category of luxury commodity, which is defined by Appadurai as a certain type or register of consumption that is signaled by the following:

- (1) restriction, either by price or by law, to elites; (2) complexity of acquisition, which may or may not be a function of real “scarcity”; (3) semiotic virtuosity, that is, the capacity to signal fairly complex social messages (as do pepper in cuisine, silk in dress, jewels in adornment, and relics in worship); (4) specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for their “appropriate” consumption, that is, regulation by fashion; and (5) a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person, and personality (Appadurai 1986a, 38).

Meanwhile, within Shipibo communities, and even for local mestizos (recall Rawa's ceremony in the Introduction),⁶⁷ traditional healing ceremonies do not function as a luxury item but as a normal cultural practice—accessible to anyone, not only elites, often given free of charge to those in need, and part of an embedded cultural and ecological value system rather than as a commodity that defines or enhances one's identity or status.

Commodities that are not originally created for consumption or sale on the market are what Karl Polanyi refers to as fictitious commodities (Polanyi 1944)—with the primary examples of land, labor, and money. When such objects are treated as commodities, and are subjected to the logics of the market, rather than protected and embedded within social institutions, Polanyi argues that the commodity itself is put in danger. According to Polanyi, in non-market societies, there are strict social norms of reciprocity, kinship, and religious or spiritual taboos that govern exchange and are important for safeguarding against overexploitation. In capitalist market societies, in contrast, social relations are embedded in the economy. This framework is useful in understanding what happens as ayahuasca moves out of embedded socionatural contexts in Shipibo communities, and into global contexts, in which exchange is governed by economic relations rather than social norms and institutions. This in turn affects Shipibo relations with ayahuasca as well.

At each step in the production of ayahuasca as a resource and commodity, its valuation takes on a different character. Value is determined at multiple stages—by its use value, certainly, but also by the supply and production process, by speculation, by market processes, and finally by a concern with meaning and cultural significance (Rajan 2006, 200). The process of commodification is never complete, since economic value cannot replace the way that things are valued socially, and commodities are still intimately entangled with social relations that are not determined by markets (Nevins and Peluso 2008). The way that natural beings become commodities is both reflective of and emergent from their social relations and histories, and determined at every step in the process (production, exchange, circulation, and consumption). Therefore, the way that ayahuasca becomes a commodity is different in Ucayali, Peru than it is elsewhere, with different outcomes and responses produced and reflected by the social relations in which they are embedded. The generation of recent increased demand for ayahuasca derives from the interaction between the plants beings' own tendencies⁶⁸ (through chemical expressions), with the bodies and cultural imaginaries of non-Indigenous humans and cultures (what I have been calling *outsiders*). The next sections will examine the particularities of the ayahuasca economy to show how ayahuasca's own tendencies become evident in the paths by which it travels and the relations it forms.

3 | 1 ECOLOGIES OF AYAHUASCA PRODUCTION

In this section, I follow the component plants of ayahuasca from harvesting and cultivation through regional trade networks to show how international demand for the plants affects local livelihoods and territories. This part of ayahuasca's commodity circuit, I argue, is not fundamentally different from those of other socionatural commodities that are being extracted from the forests. However, the difficulty in cultivating caapi vines *does* pose a resistance to the

⁶⁷ Referring to the dominant Peruvian cultural identity.

⁶⁸ I use the term "tendencies" to refer to plant agency after Michael Marder, as opposed to properties on one hand and desires or intentions on the other. (Marder 2013)

mass-production of ayahuasca, similar to what Mann and Dickinson argued for agricultural production in general (1978).

HARVESTING



Figure 3.1. A caapi vine growing in the forest. Note the coiled pattern of the vines. Photo by Laura Dev.

Around the side of a tall root mass of a fallen tree, there was once a very large caapi vine, now a gnarled stump; perhaps the thickest I have seen, based on what is left. The vine tells the story of the encounter written in the forest: some years ago the vine had associated with a large tree, had grasped onto some piece of it, some branch of it, and continued to climb. Over time, several small shoots of the vine itself had fused, and then several of those fused vines had entwined together again, and again, forming a tight corkscrew around itself at the base. Now, this base is thicker than the largest part of my leg, though it has now stopped growing as most of the vine has been harvested. We estimate the vine to have been more than twenty-five years old at the time of harvest. The tree it was attached to was felled to harvest the vine—by whom, we are not sure. Shipibos? *Colonos*⁶⁹ (colonists)? They have come and gone, two years ago, at least.

All around the corkscrew caapi stump, ramets (young, clonal, shoots) have emerged. In fact, there are dozens of them, which here and there sprout in tufts of 3-6 ramets from a single point. If they survive and reach an attachment point above, they will eventually fuse together below, in some sort of serpentine shape to form a thicker vine or coil, and sometimes these thicker coils will in turn entwine back upon each other, or fuse together with the bark of the companion tree that they grow with (Figure 3.1). This pattern of entwinement and fusing together with itself gives these vines a very distinctive cross-sectional pattern when sliced all the way through. Some

⁶⁹ *Colonos* is a term used to describe the non-native colonists that inhabit this part of the river, the colonizers. This is more of a Brazilian term, as we were not too far from the border, though still 5 days by boat.

of the small shoots coming from the harvested giant are now several meters long, though still only millimeters thick. I am equipped with a set of digital calipers, and it has become my role, among others, to measure the thicknesses and heights of the vines. Spread around the clearing made by the fallen tree, more clones have emerged further away. Although it seems more than probable, we dig around in the earth to be certain that these are all clones from the same mother vine—we find long, thick runners networked along the forest floor, leading back toward the mother, from which several groups of clones originate.

The harvest was done with a chain saw, and there are some small chunks of the vine that fell around the clearing. Several of these pieces, perhaps only a few inches long, also have new clonal ramets⁷⁰ growing from them, even though they are only connected to the earth by small, hair-like roots. Of the small clonal ramets that we tagged last year, around half of them survived to the second year of measurements. Although large vines were once common, now most of the very old ones that are in easily accessible locations have been harvested, and the remaining large vines are being harvested at rapid rates. Many of the thicker vines that we tagged the previous year had been harvested in the interim.

Across the lake are a few *caseríos*, villages where the *colonos* live. These neighbors, I am told, harvest the ayahuasca from the territory of the Shipibo village; at several vines we visited that had been cut, our guides said that the neighbors “*han robado la ayahuasca*”—had robbed the ayahuasca (referring, in this case, to the caapi vines).⁷¹ Implicit in this statement is ownership. The caapi vines, according to my guides, belonged to the community because they were within the community’s territory. This part of the Shipibo community of Junin Pablo’s territory is also part of a regional conservation area that has been zoned for the community’s forest management plan (“*Plan Maestro del Área de Conservación Regional Imiría*” 2014). The management plan currently allows them to harvest only timber species and *bijao*⁷² from the area, with certain constraints, though they are trying to amend the management plan for harvesting caapi. There may be Shipibo cultural identity tied up in the possessiveness of the statement also. As the *jefe*⁷³ of the community told me in an interview, regarding the caapi vines, “this resource we have is from our ancestors—and now we continue to have it, continue to defend it.”

In addition to state regulations around harvesting in protected areas, relations with the spirit master (*ibo*) of ayahuasca demand their own *customary* regulations on harvesting, though not all Shipibo follow these plantly regulations. A young woman whose family is in the healing profession told me that according to tradition it is “necessary to ask permission and to say why you are harvesting, whether it’s to cure or whatever.” However, fewer and fewer people are asking consent in this way — “if they know, they will ask,” she said, “the *maestros*⁷⁴ do—but others don’t ask, and the *dueños* [spirits/owners] can do harm to them. This is what my mother has taught me. She always has a lot of care with these things, and she taught me that way. My father, not as much.”

Rawa told me how one time, when he was harvesting ayahuasca, he did not ask the plant’s permission, and the mother of ayahuasca came to him in his dream to chastise him:

When I had harvested a very thick ayahuasca vine, I had a dream, the mother of ayahuasca asked

⁷⁰ Clonal ramets are vegetative shoots of new individual vines that are genetically identical to the parent vine.

⁷¹ Although I have been using the name caapi to refer to the vines in order to distinguish them from the cooked ayahuasca brew, the vines are often interchangeably referred to as ayahuasca as well.

⁷² Bijao is a type of leaf that is used to make *juanes*, a typical regional food, in which a type of rice ball is wrapped and steamed in the leaves on a grill.

⁷³ Jefe is an elected position.

⁷⁴ Healers, *onanya* in Shipibo

me why I had cut its arm. I was scared. "You are bad, why have you cut my arm, do you want me to cut your arm?" In my dream. But then the plant told me, go and ask with love, apologize to the plant, because you did wrong." Because it is a mother of ayahuasca, you have to respect it. I went the next day to tell ayahuasca, forgive me, I will cut you to cook you, I will not take you to throw you away. I will take you to cook you and learn things from you. That is how it was.

In contrast, a young man from Junin Pablo told me that they used to ask permission from the ibo because they feared that something bad would happen otherwise, but when he saw the mestizos harvesting and nothing bad happened to them, he thought "well, why not me too?" Evident in his statements is an ontological antagonism or conflict over two different cultural perceptions of plants—as beings whose consent needs to be granted, or as resources or commodities to be used by humans. This ontological tension is part of a cosmopolitical struggle; the cultural perception that wins out, according to Mario Blaser, will determine the relationship with the "resource" or "being" at stake, as well as who is able to access and use that "resource" (Blaser 2013b).

I was working in the forests of Junin Pablo while accompanying Michael Coe, an ethnobotany PhD student from the University of Hawaii, to conduct his dissertation research in a way that could also inform the creation of the community's caapi management plan (Coe 2019). I had become involved because I had linked Michael with the community, who was currently in negotiations with Caapi Drops. The company wanted to source their caapi vines sustainably from the community and thus was funding the creation of the management plan for the community of Junin Pablo. In conjunction with a study that Peruvian agroforesters hired by Caapi Drops were conducting to locate the caapi and determine sustainable harvest levels, Michael's study aimed to identify the life stage of caapi that was most important for the stability of the population, and the life stages that would be more acceptable to harvest (more on this study in Chapter 5).

In Peru, much of the national supply of caapi vines comes from forests in Ucayali, but the wild populations are becoming more scarce, to be found deeper in the forest, and vines are being harvested at younger ages (Kilham 2018). Furthermore, harvesting practices are changing and pathways are becoming more streamlined out of Ucayali. Ayahuasca does not grow everywhere in the forest along the Ucayali river. In Paoyhan, for example, located 11-13 hours downriver toward Iquitos, there is more intense seasonal flooding that inundates the village and kills many types of plants, including the caapi vines. Even in the higher lands outside of the village, infrequent larger flooding events and greater historic harvesting pressure has killed all the vines that were growing there, and they have not come back. Although there used to be large quantities of caapi available to harvest up near Iquitos, it seems that most of the wild population there has been exhausted, and according to Chris Kilham, most of the centers in Iquitos are now getting vines from the area on the Rio Tamaya, precisely in the conservation area where we were conducting the study in the forest (Kilham 2018).

It is perhaps unsurprising that the land in which most of the Peruvian caapi is harvested is in a government-protected area, *Area de Conservación Regional (ACR) de Imiría*. This land overlaps with the official territory of the community of Junin Pablo, as well as seven other officially recognized Shipibo communities, and a dozen other communities whose land rights are not officially recognized (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs 1998). The conservation area also encompasses traditional territory of these communities that is *not* officially recognized as their land, but which is part of their historic and/or ongoing subsistence basis. The creation of the protected area, similarly to many protected areas in Latin America and globally, was effectively both enclosure and state territorialization. This protected area restricts the native

communities' access to their usual subsistence activities; state authorities mediate who can benefit from commodity production through allocating property rights (e.g. Mollett 2016; Kelly 2011). This was eloquently stated in the community's own declaration against the creation of the protected area:

We express our grave concern that the creation of the ACR may result in restrictions of our use of, and access to, our territories given the experience of other ACR in Peru (e.g. ACR- Sierra Escalera- San Martín) where charges are being pressed against community members for the legitimate use of their forests. We note for example that the text of DS-006-2010 indicates that “the direct use of renewable resources are only permitted with management plans or specific plans” which could be interpreted to control our subsistence activities. Since time immemorial we have organized the protection of our lakes based on our traditional knowledge as Indigenous peoples. More recently and since the start of the 1990s we confronted the commercial fishing industry which has resulted in the recovery of fish stocks. For this reason we consider ourselves to be the original protectors of this area and therefore key actors in any conservation initiative. For this reason we demand that our contribution must be recognized and supported instead of being treated as potential threats (Comunidad Nativa Shipibo de Junin Pablo 2012) (see Appendix 3 for full declaration).

This statement was part of a larger declaration made on the part of several local communities, as the “First Meeting of Indigenous Leaders of Masisea” that was called by the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the District of Masisea⁷⁵ in collaboration with the organized cross-community resistance effort that had emerged around the creation of the protected area. The resulting declaration was presented in August of 2012 to the Regional Government of Ucayali, the National Protected Areas Service of Peru (SERNANP), regional authorities, and the national, and international institutions linked with the management of protected areas and defense of the rights of Indigenous peoples. The communities surrounding the proposed protected area had not been consulted properly about the implementation of the protected area, they argued, and made several demands about both the process and the proposed outcomes of the projects that hinged on re-initiating the consultation process to include Indigenous-led planning of the conservation project.

The protected area was eventually implemented without such Indigenous-led planning, and the communities' only concessions were the management plans that enabled them to harvest certain important species within the protected area. However, these management plans are costly, and are now required in order for the community to have legal rights to harvest forest resources from their traditional territories, including caapi. Although the land has been enclosed by the Peruvian state and is subject to enforcement, illegal access to forest resources still thrives. The community of Junin Pablo hopes to attain the legal right to harvest caapi through the development of a management plan, though there is little option for enforcement of illicit harvesting, which will make compliance to the management plan more difficult, and potentially detrimental economically to those who comply, compared to those who harvest regardless.

The community members, in the community assembly process (*asamblea*), had formed an ayahuasca committee to oversee the management plan and harvesting of caapi vines, and to work directly with Caapi Drops. Until the management plan is realized, however, almost all of the caapi extracted from this area is being done so illegally, and perhaps mostly by people from outside of the community. Already, tensions in the community were evident. One man in Junin Pablo claimed to be selling large quantities of caapi vines from the forests, though this directly went against the wishes of the ayahuasca committee who was managing the harvest of the vines. However, the

⁷⁵ Masisea is the district of Ucayali that Junin Pablo is part of.

president of the ayahuasca committee denies this, and claims that this other man is lying in order to inflate his own self-importance. It is unclear exactly how much is being harvested by whom, though the number of large vines that we tagged in our study the first year was significantly reduced when we went back to relocate them a year later. Therefore we know that these vines are being harvested more quickly than they are likely to regenerate.

Aside from people who have vines in their yards or *chacras*,⁷⁶ most of the remaining wild vine is located fairly deep in the forest, as the most accessible vines have been harvested already. Therefore, the people who harvest caapi vines are almost exclusively men, as it is not common for women to work in the forest. Some people do this for a living and generate a constant supply to those cooking ayahuasca in Pucallpa or Iquitos. Many of these people are Shipibo, as they are most familiar with the forests. People who live in riverine mestizo and Indigenous communities also may harvest vines opportunistically when they come across them, and sell to middlemen who pay them significantly less per roll (around \$10 USD) than they would receive in Pucallpa, where rolls go for \$25-\$30 USD. For these people, harvesting caapi is likely not the primary income strategy. Furthermore, because of racism and language barriers faced by Indigenous peoples, the Shipibo who harvest caapi may fetch an even smaller price than their mestizo counterparts. Indeed, the supply system on the rivers echoes and replicates the trading system that has dominated these regions since early settler occupation, in which mestizo traders sought forest resources from the Indigenous communities along the rivers in exchange for overpriced goods (see Chapter 2).

Caapi vines are not becoming more scarce simply because of harvesting pressure. Extractive logging is reducing the forested area of the entire Amazon region (see Chapter 2). This may be one of the reasons why the remaining caapi in the Ucayali is concentrated within a conservation area. However, it is evident that global demand for the vines is playing a role in the increasing scarcity of the remaining populations. The forest is an unruly place in which care is challenging, especially when everything is a potential product. Even when Indigenous communities want to protect their vines or develop sustainable management plans, this is not always possible given their limited resources, and the material complexity of the forest that makes it difficult to monitor.

CHALLENGES OF CULTIVATING CAAPI

It is commonly said among both Shipibo healers and outsiders that the quality of the ayahuasca is better and stronger when the vines are older and larger. Caapi vines take at least 5-7 years to reach maturity, to a size that could even be harvested. However, to reach a very desirable thickness, the vine should be allowed to grow for closer to 12 years. One of the main indicators of the increasing scarcity of the vines is that throughout the Amazon they are being harvested at smaller and smaller sizes as the large vines become less accessible. However, as more diverse actors clamor to get access to the vines, new types of articulations form between plants and humans. In recent years, ayahuasca centers and individual healers are increasingly cultivating caapi.

Many Shipibo healers believe that cultivated vines have a different character from the vines that grow in the forest. There was often a sense of pride when maestros told me that they had ayahuasca *sylvestre*—from the forest. “The plants that are planted, for the most part, don’t have the force or power of the plants that grow in the forest, which are more dangerous,” explained

⁷⁶ The local word for swidden agricultural plots

Rawa, the young man in the healing profession whose ceremony I described in the Introduction. On the other hand, cultivation was sometimes described with a positive tilt: “they grow with people, so they are more accustomed to the energy of the people,” implying that the ayahuasca experience will be better, while several other interviewees echoed sentiments that “the plants in the forest are stronger, and have the energy of nature with them.” These two views are not necessarily incongruent, but do seem to imply that there is some change in the spirit of ayahuasca that occurs with cultivation.

According to Rawa, who is now 22, he has noticed this scarcity, even during his own lifetime, and feels that planting is going to be necessary:

We know ayahuasca is becoming scarce. Some people do things for money. They ruin ayahuasca. Instead of just cutting it down and selling it they should at least replant. Many people cut ayahuasca and do not care about the world, they only care about money. Now, ayahuasca will be gone. When I was a kid, I would see in my backyard, or my chacra, there were many ayahuascas. Now where there were ayahuasca, there is nothing anymore. Only overgrowth. Now it is far away. People go look for 15 hours. Some go with their mosquito net and their whole bed to bring ayahuasca out of the forest. I think ayahuasca will be gone if people do not plant it.

Some maestros like Papa Meni, who lives in Paoyhan, have decided to start planting their own vines. Just last year, he planted around two hundred vines in a forested area just outside of the village, a feat for which he is proud; he consistently updates me on the status of his vines when we speak. Stories like this are more and more common. Papa Pete, an outsider practicing healing in Pucallpa, has also planted vines on his land, that he says should be ready to harvest within the next few years. Some established ayahuasca centers in Pucallpa and Iquitos already do have harvestable vines. However, most have only begun planting within the last five years and due to the long maturation time of the vines, the majority of these ayahuasca “plantations” are not yet mature. Thus, at this point most of the caapi used to produce ayahuasca is still harvested from wild populations, but I expect that within the next five to ten years as these plantations come into harvestable age, there should be a shift in relative harvest pressure on some of the wild populations of caapi.

Caapi germinates easily and, as with the small pieces sprouting new life when lying on the forest floor, they will readily grow when stuck into the ground vertically. This is the method by which most people cultivating would use to begin a new vine—either planted in the ground or sprouted in a pot (or bag) beforehand until it is a stronger sapling, and then planted. However, in order to grow to a harvestable size, the vines need companion trees to climb; this is one of the constraints for those who would cultivate caapi—having big enough trees—thus, it cannot be planted just anywhere. It needs to be around trees, in an area that doesn’t flood, and with a high enough canopy. This is part of caapi’s resistance to cultivation, or at least to a monocrop style of cultivation. Although some centers are working on growing it on trellis systems, it is unclear how successful they will be.

CULTIVATION OF CHAKRUNA

Chakruna, the other principle plant comprising ayahuasca, differs botanically and ecologically from caapi. It is a relatively common shrub found in forests throughout the region. It is also easily cultivated by either taking cuttings or planting from seed. It grows much larger and with more leaves when planted in aerated agricultural soil, such as in the *chacras*, the swidden agricultural land that is cultivated by most Shipibo families. Those who plant chakruna in their

chacras often grow yuca, corn, or other products for sale. One Shipibo couple in their fifties that I interviewed in their community, two hours by boat from Pucallpa, had been steadily increasing their production of chakruna. They now have over one thousand plants planted through several different *chacras*. They supply around four different ayahuasca cooks in Pucallpa, and had recently begun sending sacks of chakruna leaves to Iquitos also. Most of the cooked ayahuasca these days uses cultivated chakruna rather than chakruna from the forest, as it is much easier to harvest and more abundant. However, there are nonetheless some indications that the demand may be overtaking the supply. For example, ayahuasca cooks in Iquitos are more frequently searching out chakruna suppliers in the Pucallpa area, as suppliers in Iquitos are not able to keep up with the growing demand. This process is not so different from that of other new forest commodities.

The part of the chakruna plant used in making ayahuasca is only the leaves, so harvesting does not harm the plant as long as a certain proportion of leaves are left. It is estimated that two-thirds of the leaves can be harvested from each plant every three to four months. One plant could generate around two sacks of harvested leaves, that are then sold for around \$21 USD for a sack, each weighing around 15 kilos. Because chakruna is easily (and has long been) cultivated and does not kill the stem of the plant to harvest it, there are not the same concerns about scarcity of chakruna as there are for caapi. Maintenance of the plants is fairly simple, as they do not need any inputs or amendments to grow in local soils. After planting, the only maintenance required is keeping the area clear, removing any insects from the leaves by hand, and harvesting, which entails the most intensive work. Both men and women will help with the labor of planting and harvesting chakruna, as, according to the couple I spoke with, this type of task “requires many hands.”

When asked about the harvesting practices for their chakruna, and whether or not it is necessary to ask permission of the plants before harvesting, the couple acknowledged that when using plants for medicine, or to diet, it is necessary to ask permission; in the case of plants cultivated for sale, it was not, even if they were sold for use in healing. The chakruna is grown in the *chacra* to be used and harvested by humans; to find the chakruna in the forest, it would be in the domain of the forest spirits, in which case it would be necessary to ask permission from the *ibo* of the chakruna. This implies that once cultivated and produced with the intention of exchange on the market, the socionatural context of the plants has changed, and therefore the plant spirit’s cultural and spiritual regulations for harvest no longer seem to apply.

LOCAL EXCHANGE AND MARKETS FOR THE RAW PLANT MATERIALS

From the Rio Tamaya area, caapi vines are common cargo on any of the boats heading to Pucallpa, along with other regional produce. The boats are often so weighted down with produce that it can add several extra hours (on top of the usual seven hour journey) to navigate the river back to Pucallpa because the boat rides so low in the water. In order to ready them for market, the vines are cut into lengths of about three feet, and gathered into *rollos* (rolls), which are essentially tied bundles of vines, weighing around 30 kilos each, a standard unit of purchase of the raw plant material. Once in Pucallpa, the rolls are either sold to the local markets, to purchasers from Iquitos, or to local people who will cook the brew (either to serve locally, or to export).

In 2018, when I last conducted this field work, the prices of wild and cultivated caapi were the same, indicating that there is little market differentiation between the two types of products. Unlike certain commodities (e.g. matsutakes), caapi is not typically sorted into different grades, but is valued per kilo, and does not shift in a systematic way according to quality. The purchasers put in a request not knowing what the quality or size of the vines will be, only that they will receive

a certain quantity by weight. Though the quality of caapi vines (indicated by thickness) appears to be decreasing, the price continues to rise—an indication of the increasing demand and scarcity.

When I began my fieldwork in 2015, it was commonplace to see caapi vines at any of the major markets in Pucallpa—there are special sections of these markets that sell mainly medicinal plants. At these merchants, one can find various barks and flowers from the forest, tobacco products, perfumes, and bottles of various plant extracts, including ayahuasca. A decade ago these were the primary purchasers of caapi harvested in Ucayali, which in turn supplied local healers and the occasional tourist with bottles of the brew or the raw plant materials. However, in the last few years I have encountered notably fewer vines in the marketplace. Only occasionally will I see a vendor with a roll of caapi lying in the corner of the shop. More commonly, small pieces will be sold individually, probably as more of a keepsake or to add to baths or perfumes than to turn into ayahuasca. Meanwhile, truckloads of caapi vines can be seen rolling by close to the river port in Pucallpa. Increasingly, it seems that freshly harvested caapi vines are already destined for various cooks or retreat centers. This indicates that the routes the vines take out of the forest and out of Ucayali are becoming more diverse and perhaps more streamlined. Caapi vines are bypassing the regional markets entirely. Instead, ayahuasca cooks and ayahuasca centers are already linked with their regular harvesters or intermediaries, who keep a steady supply coming out of the forests in Ucayali. This is the case for chakruna suppliers as well, who deal more or less directly with those who are going to cook the plants into ayahuasca.

One effect of the increased advance purchase of caapi vines by buyers in Pucallpa is that it has become more difficult and expensive for small-scale purchasers to acquire the vines. These are often individual Shipibo healers, especially those living in more rural communities, who may cook one batch of ayahuasca per month or even much less. Papa Meni in Paoyhan, for instance, as of 2018, often has to wait a week or more to receive a shipment of caapi. Previously, he could place an order with relatives upriver in the Tamaya region and receive a shipment of caapi in only a few days. Now, they are not able to acquire the vines as quickly because their destinations are predetermined and “back-ordered.” Furthermore, when going through intermediaries, people in more rural areas pay a price premium, which is at the very high end of prices paid in Pucallpa, at around \$25 USD per roll. This price has risen significantly over the past few years. Previously, plants harvested from the forest could be purchased in rural communities for lower prices than they would pay in Pucallpa markets. Therefore, it is these rural, smaller-scale healers that seem to be disproportionately burdened by the increasing external demand for the vines.

At this point in the supply chain, caapi and chakruna behave similarly to any other medicinal plant or non-timber forest product that is harvested and sold in regional markets. Cat’s claw (*Uncaria tomentosa*), for example, is a similar medicinal woody vine that is also extracted from these forests for sale on the market. However, cat’s claw is sold to regional markets, as well as distributors that then supply the supplement-making business with the processed, raw vine. At this stage in the production of ayahuasca—the caapi vines bundled into rolls and placed on the boat, the chakruna leaves stuffed in a plastic sack—it is difficult to see the plants as animate. They seem very much objects. Dead. There is little room for animation. The life of the vines seems to be back in the forest, the new tendrils regrowing from the part that was cut. The chakruna, in the chacra. And yet, they continue to have their effects on human actors who busy themselves transporting these plants along the unique trajectory that they take into human bodies, different than the more humble rainforest plants like cat’s claw.

3 | 2 THE BECOMING OF AYAHUASCA: MAKING MEDICINE

Much of ayahuasca's economic difference from other plant products can be attributed to the materialities of the chemical expressions that are encoded in the plant material, and only accessible to humans once the two plants, caapi and chakruna, are cooked together. Therefore, I suggest that ayahuasca as a medicine is constituted by both plant vitality and human labor. This section describes the dynamics of the cooking and export of ayahuasca, and details its relations with the human body. Ayahuasca's particular physiological relationship with the human body, I argue, gives ayahuasca a resistance to commodification. Ayahuasca's effects do not encourage frequent or mass consumption. Instead, this plant-human relationship demands very specific terms of consumption that are culturally and socially embedded.

FROM PLANTS TO MEDICINE

On a sunny day, walking through the street in Bena Jema, a Shipibo *comunidad nativa* in the outskirts of Pucallpa, for even a short way can be exhausting because of the thick heat and lack of trees to provide any sort of shade. Nonetheless, I always do end up walking during the hot part of the day as I make the rounds between different contacts in the community. This draws a detached curiosity from the Shipibo residents, who take shelter in the shade of their porches, in hammocks or seated on the floor. A typical scene: several women are seated on a tarp, each working on her own embroidery project, every so often swatting away mosquitos or biting flies, with several small children of various ages playing in the unpaved street nearby, and a man half-sleeping, swaying in the hammock, his feet and hat just visible over the sides. He has perhaps already returned from his day's work, performed in the early hours of the morning when it is cooler, in his nearby chacra.

Down one of the small alleyways between the houses, the characteristic red earth gives way to a covering of dark brown, fibrous plant material, resembling a sort of mulch layer, which thickens as I near the house I am seeking—this is the discarded material from the caapi vines after they are cooked. The corrugated steel gate to the yard swings open only part-way before catching on the ground. Two dogs wrestle in the yard, and steam billows from several huge pots that always seem to be cooking beneath a large steel roof structure for shade. A mestizo man in his forties with lean, muscular arms, greying hair and a pointed goatee tends the pots—a sheen of sweat is ever-present on his skin from the heat of the fires he tends beneath the shelter. He seems too busy to pay me any mind. Also beneath the shade structure is a stack of firewood, several other large pots, and a pile of spent caapi vines. Inside, though still humble, the house is uncharacteristically modern compared with the other houses in the neighborhood. It has tile floors, a separate bedroom with a door and doorknob (unusual), a working toilet, a flat screen TV, and a simple but modern kitchen, complete with a microwave and a nice gas range.

Arnal,⁷⁷ the young man who runs the ayahuasca cooking operation, appears to be in his late 20s. With sparse black facial hair and crooked teeth, he smiles readily as we chat, slipping back and forth between English and Spanish. He is perhaps the only person in the neighborhood who speaks English, and does not speak Shipibo. Though not Indigenous, he is a Pucallpa local, and learned English in order to be able to work with tourists to chauffeur and guide them around Pucallpa, starting out his career as a *motokar*⁷⁸ driver. The foreign tourists he worked with were

⁷⁷ Name changed

⁷⁸ *Motokar* is the name for the style of motor-rickshaw that is the most common form of transportation in Pucallpa

primarily visiting Pucallpa to participate in ayahuasca ceremonies with various Shipibo healers, an industry that has a growing presence in the Pucallpa area. The six 90-liter stainless steel pots (difficult to acquire in Pucallpa—most pots are aluminum), and the house, had been bought with money a man from California had given him, in order to set up the operation. Arnal now cooks around 30-40 liters of ayahuasca each month and regularly sends a concentrated ayahuasca paste to California to supply a group of facilitators who host a weekly community ceremony. However, he also now ships to other locations worldwide, as well as providing medicine to several local well-known and respected healers, including Yoshan, and sometimes Papa Meni—my two teachers.

Cooking ayahuasca is the step in which the two plants are blended together and the compounds in each plant combine in a way that has inspired several religions, miraculous healing experiences, sensationalized media hype, and the booming ayahuasca tourism economy in Peru. Without this value-added step, the plants remain medicinal plants with humble healing benefits, like hundreds or thousands of other forest plants. The cooking of these two plants is necessary for the consumer to derive special use value from the plants. There are dozens of people in the Pucallpa area who cook ayahuasca for regular export or sale (domestically or foreign), and many dozens more Shipibo and mestizo healers who cook it for their own ceremonial use, with or without tourists. While some centers cook their own ayahuasca, they do not often export their brews, as most countries outside of South America have restrictions on ayahuasca, and it is not a legal export. Some of the ayahuasca cookers in Pucallpa do so primarily for specific centers (in Pucallpa, Iquitos, or Cusco) that have a high monthly demand for the medicine. This demand is increasingly dominated by centers in Iquitos. However, there are many cookers that export their brew internationally, as well as supply to local healers or tourists who are in need. Although some of the people who cook also drink or serve ayahuasca themselves, there are many others who do not have that sort of relationship with the plant, and in that case it is primarily an economic opportunity.

Cooking ayahuasca is a laborious process. An entire roll of vines must be used to make just one or two liters of ayahuasca. For reference, one serving is generally between 15 and 45 ml. Each vine, before cooking, must be macerated to make the plant compounds more easily extractable. The vine, however, is a very hard material. When accompanying some of my interlocutors through the process of making ayahuasca, I quickly tired from the work. Jorge, however, spent an entire afternoon pounding the length of each vine segment with a mallet or sledgehammer, bracing the vine underneath with a stone, until the fused and entwined segments begin to loosen and separate from one another. Once the vines have been prepared, they are added to a large pot in alternating layers with the chakruna leaves (Figure 3.2). The mixture then must be cooked and refined over a fire for a day, constantly tending and stirring the pot so it does not burn or boil over. On the second day, the plant material is removed, the liquid added to a smaller pot with new water, and the mixture is again refined down to a variably thick brownish liquid with a sharp, sweet, bitter, unmistakable smell.

and many other cities in the region.



Figure 3.2. A small pot of ayahuasca cooking on a fire. Most pots are much larger, but this batch was cooked for me as an example of the cooking process. Photo by Laura Dev.

CIRCULATION

Because it can take anywhere between 15 and 50 kilograms of caapi vines, and 4 to 24 kilograms of chakruna leaves to make a liter of ayahuasca medicine (depending on the ratio and strength),⁷⁹ there is little international export of the raw plant materials. More commonly, already cooked medicine is imported to the United States through either traveler's luggage, or the postal service. From Peru, due to postal regulations restricting the shipment of liquids, ayahuasca is commonly cooked down to a tar-like or brick-like consistency in order to mail it. It is then later reconstituted to a thinner liquid by the people who eventually serve the medicine. There are plenty of legal plant products exported from the Amazon region, so ayahuasca is not so difficult to disguise as something more legitimate with simple packaging cues. However, it is not uncommon for packages to be confiscated and never reach their destinations. For professional ayahuasca cooks, the charge to send the medicine to the U.S. from Peru is in the range of \$150-\$300 USD for a (reconstituted) liter; to buy it within Ucayali itself would cost only \$30-\$120 USD. Incidentally, this is also about how much a tourist would expect to pay for an ayahuasca ceremony. For those selling locally, the amount of work put in does not generate much profit; just enough to make a simple living. However, those who mail it abroad are able to generate a greater profit margin, and those who have trained as shamans or healers (trained by the plants, as discussed more in Chapter 4) derive significant profits from the brew by converting their expertise into a commodity in the form of the ceremony.

One of the people who benefits the most, financially speaking, from this commodity network is the importer of ayahuasca to the U.S. (or elsewhere in the Global North)—the buyer.

⁷⁹ This is based on Shipibo style recipes for cooking ayahuasca, from my own interviews with 6 different people about their recipes, and cross-checked with (Kilham 2018).

For example, the man from California, Nick,⁸⁰ who funded Arnal's operation receives concentrated shipments of ayahuasca from Peru, and in turn reconstitutes the medicine and sells it to healers and facilitators in California for a premium. Selling ayahuasca is not Nick's primary livelihood. He and his partner make enough from this business to fund their regular travel to Peru to continue dieting plants, taking a few months off from their regular jobs each year. In the interview I conducted with him, in my room in Pucallpa, Nick claimed that his primary interests in his involvement in the trade are sharing the medicine with others and continuing his own training with the plants:

The primary reason I do this work is to help communities in California, but also so I can study here [in Peru] and train, and learn this path in a very slow way through diets and experience. Because I've been sitting [in ceremonies] for almost 10 years now, and I've seen ceremonies in some of the communities I support in California; it's really watered down—the ceremonies, I mean—where it's focused on music, less of a curative experience, and more focused on performance. The *curación*,⁸¹ the spiritual dimension is very important to me. And the diet is really important, so I'm going to be sure I diet for a least a year. They say you need at least a year, to have permission to serve and work with the medicine [as a healer]. I've probably dieted about seven months now, but I plan to diet at least a year with Noya Rao, and then see where I'm at.

Nick is confident that he could be selling the ayahuasca he imports for much higher rates in the United States than he currently does, but he emphasized that his focus was not on economic benefits. He also spoke of a specific kind of valuation related to the sustainability of the vines and the maintenance of cultural relations between the people and the plants—according to him, it was less about the economic benefits. Speaking of Arnal, the man who cooks medicine for him, he said:

I've always been interested in Arnal's sources, and that they come from places where the communities were involved in replanting. That was the stipulation, and it's important to my clients also that there is sustainability. But I trust [Arnal] with his sources, that he is doing it with awareness of where the plants come from and with an eye toward sustainability. I am aware that a lot of people are exporting who have more of an eye toward the economic benefits than I do. But I only work with [Arnal] because I see he has a deep respect for the plants and for the sources, and you can see this all the way through the product...And his product is really superior to a lot of the products out there. Not just because of the origin of the plants, but because the continuous connection Arnal has with the Indigenous practices associated with where these plants come from.

I did ask Arnal about where his caapi vines were coming from, and he mentioned the area along the Rio Tamaya near Junin Pablo, as well as another place south of there. He does not harvest them himself, but people he hires harvest for him. They used to replant vines for him after harvesting. A year or two prior to the interview I did with him in 2017, Arnal would grow caapi cuttings at his house with pieces from the harvested vines, and send them to be replanted by the harvesters—two in each place where the vines were being cut, with hopes that at least some of them would survive. He was no longer doing this, as it had been too difficult to keep up and its utility was dubious if other harvesters were not doing the same. However, he intimated that perhaps they would continue doing it at some point in the future. Arnal told me that he was interested in

⁸⁰ Name changed.

⁸¹ Curación refers to the curing process.

sustainability issues, and personally invested in the supply of the vine being around far into the future, but he felt that his prior efforts at replanting had likely been futile.

This indicates that on the Peru side of the ayahuasca supply chain, even for those who are interested in sustainability, or believe they are importing a sustainably sourced product, for wild-harvested ayahuasca there is very little guarantee or even possibility of sourcing sustainably-harvested vines. Nonetheless, the imaginary of a sustainably-sourced product continues to prevail throughout the community of ayahuasca consumers in California, and this narrative benefits the sellers throughout ayahuasca's commodity network. Far away from the material realities of the forest, there are major assumptions about how the plants are being managed. For example, a friend of mine who had recently come back from a center in Iquitos seemed surprised that there were concerns about sustainability and scarcity, and said emphatically to me, "but there are healers and Indigenous people in the forest that are caring for these vines and making sure that they aren't overharvested!" Such narratives represent the mythologies, described by many scholars, that are produced by consumers who are alienated from the processes of production (Appadurai 1986a; Taussig 1987; Peluso 2012).

This challenge is one reason why the two Californian men from Caapi Drops were trying to set up the collaboration with the community in Junin Pablo to source their caapi vines "sustainably and ethically." In conversations with them, their views on the project did not seem to be motivated by a desire for economic gain either. Gregory, who was working as the community liaison for Caapi Drops (and at this point was not getting paid), had worked in the past with development NGOs. He spoke about the Caapi Drops business plan as primarily a development project to help the community achieve sustainable livelihood opportunities:

We want to be able to have a model of inclusive, sustainable development. You know, where the Indigenous people are getting a benefit, the world is getting a benefit of having an ethical, sustainable, restorative product, and then be able to use this as a model and approach other communities. Because we really don't wanna go outside whatever the sustainability management plan is. If that's what it is, then that's what it is. If the demand grows, we want to be able to go to other communities and enter into the same kind of direct, formal business arrangement. And then, like ideally, we're talking five, ten years down the road, have this model be an avenue for getting resources for sustainable development projects, while at the same time improving the socioeconomic status of Indigenous groups in a way that doesn't dilute their cultural integrity or identity. You know, it's not like, "oh, you're gonna have to change how you do things." It's like, "your ethnobotanical knowledge and your practices are something that needs to be shared with the world, but without destroying your cultural identity." Without harming that relation, you know, between the forest and the plants and the people.

Both Nick and Gregory, two of the people in this particular commodity network positioned to gain the most from the export of ayahuasca, seem to have other motivations than capital accumulation driving their business endeavors. In contrast to other extractive industries from Ucayali in the past (Chapter 2), most people from the Global North who are buying and importing ayahuasca from Ucayali to their home countries also have personal relationships with the plants, the healers, and the communities in which they work. These relationships have been developed through their participation in ayahuasca ceremonies and practices of dieting. In other words, they did not initially come to Ucayali with the intent to begin an importing business, they came to relate with the plants. In Gregory's case, he came to work with an NGO. Then, their ventures into distributing ayahuasca to the Global North came from their desire to either help the communities, to share the medicine with other people, or to make enough money to continue their relationships

with the plants. For Gregory, his relation with ayahuasca was also important for guiding his business:

I see [ayahuasca] as a living being, I see it as a powerful medicine spirit; that it helps alleviate suffering and raise consciousness. And, it has the potential to help a lot of people and has been for a really long time. I also see it as, from a business standpoint, as an avenue to have a different model of Indigenous knowledge working relations. Right? Like, to me, personally, this is more about the reforestation, the improvement of livelihoods, and the protection of sacred cultural knowledge. Right? It's not about, you know, having this huge market and waking a lot of people up.

While the motivations of these two exporters vary, these cases provide a view into certain types of logic, alongside the drive to profit, that are driving the circulation of ayahuasca globally. These logics exemplify what Gibson-Graham (2006) called *more-than-capitalist*, in that the accumulation of capital and resources is not the only or even the primary interest. Some of this is based in the relatively privileged positions that these importers from the Global North occupy. Nonetheless, these two examples were similar to the other three other importers I interviewed in how they framed their motivations and interests in relation to their ongoing relationships with plants and communities.

The relations these business people have with the ayahuasca complex leads me to suggest that the brew enables relations between the plants and a variety of actors that differ from most extractive industries as it carves out of new socionatural pathways of circulation. In some ways, these routes of circulation are similar to those I have described in other extractive industries—plant vitality is extracted from the forests of Ucayali, transported to downriver to the cities, and then exported abroad (Bunker 1990). What differs here, I have learned, is that new types of articulations are emerging between outsiders and Shipibo communities, and between outsiders and plants, suggesting that the flows of resources are not simply a one-way extractive process out of the Amazon.

BODILY RELATIONS & PHYSIOLOGICAL RESISTANCES

As mentioned earlier, the cooking step probably generates the most added value in terms of plant vitality. Though exchange value only really accounts for the addition of human labor, the chemical expressions of the plants can also be interpreted as a product of plant labor. In this section I will discuss how these chemical plant expressions relate with human bodies, leading to the ceremonial practices around ayahuasca. The intense relationship that ayahuasca has with the human body gives ayahuasca another type of resistance to commodification. Chemical expressions are one of the ways that plants communicate—with other plants (e.g. plant pheromones), as well as with pollinators they wish to attract (smells), or seed dispersers that they want to eat their fruits (taste). Humans usually interpret these chemical cues sensually. Bitterness, for example, is a flavor that indicates the presence of alkaloids or other chemicals, which are often those that interact with the human body in healing ways. Many epistemologies associate bitter flavors with medicines, though in Amazonian epistemologies, the sensory cues are often more complex (Shepard Jr. 2004). When humans ingest plants, the chemical expressions of the plants are able to be directly received and interpreted by the human body, whether as nutrition or as medicine. The resulting physiological and psychoactive effects, therefore, can be seen as a direct material relationship between the plant and the human body as mediated through these chemicals.

Only by combining caapi and chakruna to make ayahuasca do either of these plants have vision-inducing relations with human bodies. The compounds in each plant combine in a way that make them strongly psychoactive and psychedelic—the plants together become ayahuasca. Papa Meni and other healers say that ayahuasca has its own spirit that is different from the spirits of either caapi or chakruna on its own. The psychedelic and visionary effects of ayahuasca are attributed primarily to the action of the molecule N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT),⁸² also famously called “the spirit molecule” (Strassman 2001) due to its strong visionary effects, during which people frequently report meeting entities, or spirits. DMT is found in chakruna,⁸³ whereas caapi contains chemicals (MAOis)⁸⁴ that inhibit the enzymes in the stomach that would otherwise breakdown the DMT as soon as it enters. The combination of the two plants thus makes the DMT active (when taken orally) for several hours of altered-consciousness, sometimes involving visions or synesthesia. Many of those who contribute to the psychedelic science debates view ayahuasca as purely a preparation of DMT. However, plants have hundreds of chemical components encoded in their flesh that human bodies can respond to, and as demonstrated by ayahuasca itself, these chemicals elicit different responses when combined rather than isolated as a single chemical.

Plant spirits (*ibo*) on the other hand, communicate through dreams, visions, and songs. These spirit beings, I am told, are responsible for tending and creating the plants that are in their care in the forest; they also guide humans toward them. Therefore the material plants and its associated chemical expressions can be regarded as messengers of the plant’s mother that interact directly with material human bodies. This was explained to me by one elderly healer, Maestra Wano, a bit more ambiguously:

The plants teach me in dreams. When you drink and bathe in them they make you dream of their mother, who says, *do this and this*, and tells you what not to eat... They let you know, they tell you, and you have to obey. If you don’t obey it cuts you off.⁸⁵

By “cutting off” she meant that the plant spirits would no longer communicate with her if she did not follow the regulations they gave her. Obeying the regulations that plant spirits communicate is one component of the practice of *dieting* (*samati* in Shipibo), the primary way by which healers attain the expertise that is necessary to conduct ceremonies and enact healing.

What makes a substance a *medicine* differs across cultures; I argue that this assessment is also connected to regimes of value. Popular international discourses around ayahuasca tend to be preoccupied with personal transformation through visions, whereas Shipibo healers view the visionary effects of ayahuasca as primarily a tool for seeing and communicating with the more-than-material reality of plants and people; in other words, with the spirit world. From there it is possible to diagnose illnesses or afflictions (Chapter 4). Ayahuasca has recently received attention from mainstream medicine for its ability to heal depression, psychological trauma, and addiction (Domínguez-Clavé et al. 2016; Coe and McKenna 2017; Maté 2014; Talin and Sanabria 2017; Argento et al. 2019). There have been anecdotal reports of ayahuasca as a miracle cure for various diseases, including, from people I interviewed, cancer, AIDS, rheumatoid arthritis, Fanconi anemia, and herpes.

⁸² Although DMT is actually produced as a neurotransmitter in the human body, there is no consensus about what function it serves, despite speculation about its role in producing dreams, as well as being released during birth and death, a theory popularized by Rick Strassman (see below).

⁸³ *Psychotria viridis*

⁸⁴ Mono-amine oxidase inhibitors (MAOi)—such as harmaline, among others.

⁸⁵ Maestra Wano, interview by Paul Roberts and Laura Dev, 2015

The physical effects of ayahuasca frequently cause intense vomiting and/or diarrhea, along with any number of physical sensations that move through the body. These physical and purgative reactions are seen by Shipibo healers to generate many of the important healing effects. *Vomitivos* (a practice of inducing vomiting through drinking plant preparations) are a class of Amazonian medicinal treatments for cleansing, though in “Western” conceptions of health vomiting is often seen negatively and is associated with being caused by toxicity.⁸⁶ The effects of ayahuasca are often referred to as *mareación*, or seasickness, which comes from its sometimes disorienting or dizzying effects on the human body, when visions and synesthesia are combined with nausea and other strange sensations, which can make it difficult to navigate the material world. These effects have also led it to be put in the general category of *drug*, particularly by legal definitions.

Aside from the physiological effects of ayahuasca, it is also quite well known for transforming the humans that consume it. Of the outsiders I interviewed, I met several who had changed their life course after their ayahuasca experiences — quitting their job, deciding to pursue a new career, letting go of alcohol or other addictions, changing their diet, leaving a relationship, or having a “spiritual awakening.” Others note a sense of reclaiming lost parts of themselves. One person I interviewed mentioned that after his first ayahuasca session, the next time his mother saw him several months later, without knowing what caused the change, commented: “my boy is back.” Another said that he felt “more like himself” after just a single experience.

Part of the resistance that ayahuasca presents to commodification is based in the physiological effects of the plant, which deters many people (Shipibo and outsiders alike) from trying it. For those who do partake in the experience, it can be an ordeal, and not one that bears repeating day in and day out, unless one is training to be a healer. Further, its effects are unpredictable. From one person to the next the experience can be quite different, even with the same dose of the same ayahuasca. Even for the same person, their experience can be different day to day — one night having a complete ego loss, and the next feeling only subtle bodily effects. The experience itself cannot be mass-produced, and carries with it substantial psychological risk. Ayahuasca itself has no addictive properties. However, the risks include contraindications with other substances and pharmaceuticals (dos Santos et al. 2016), as well as psychotic breaks and retraumatization (Freckska 2011).

Ayahuasca has a different type of relationship with the human body than do other psychoactive plants. Coca (*Erythroxylum coca*), another sacred psychoactive Peruvian plant, acts on neuroreceptors that stimulate the central nervous system, and suppress the appetite. It can be used continually with little adverse effect on a person’s ability to function in the material world, and may even enhance a person’s ability to work and overcome fatigue. Coca leaves are not addictive, but when extracted to produce cocaine, one of its chemical constituents, it becomes highly addictive. The cultivation, processing, and sale of coca has in-turn fueled entire shadow economies in Latin America, and is linked with political violence and environmental destruction, including in Ucayali. Opium poppies and tobacco are examples of other plants whose physiological effects engender more mass consumption, and have structured their own very specific economies around their production and distribution. Peyote is perhaps the most similar to ayahuasca, and also has retained ceremony as an important part of its consumption.

Caapi Drops, as a pure caapi extract, does not contain DMT. This is how they are able to import the extract and sell the product legally in the United States. Therefore, the effects of Caapi

⁸⁶ Interestingly, ipecac syrup, the most common purgative used by Western medicine, is derived from another Amazonian plant of the same genus as chakruna.

Drops on the body are not the same as the effects of ayahuasca, and therefore may open the product to more mass-consumption. As Carl, Caapi Drops' investor described it, "from my personal experience using the caapi product itself, it is a tool that quiets the mind, slows down the thought process, and the caapi medicine stays in the system." However, because caapi's effects are quite subtle in the absence of chakruna, this also takes away some of the draw that gives the ayahuasca experience such a high value for those who consume it.

Scholars have speculated that it must be in part because of the intense physical relationship that ayahuasca has with the human body that it has not become a "street drug" or "party drug" and much of the discourse around it has been centered on "healing" and "ceremony" (e.g. Tupper 2017; Coe and McKenna 2017). The nature and gravity of the effects of ayahuasca, and the particular ways it entwines itself with different bodies and cultural imaginaries, seems to demand that be taken within a ceremonial context, which helps to mediate the intense and often uncomfortable experience. Because of this, ayahuasca ceremonies, too have become commoditized and adapted (Chapter 4). However, the transformative effects of ayahuasca on the humans that consume it is what has made ayahuasca such an object of desire and value for outsiders. These transformations occur through direct plant-human communication. I suggest that these plant-human relations shape the way economies are formed through those human bodies. In the following section I show how the cultural embeddedness of the ceremonial context offers its own resistance to the commodification of ayahuasca.

3 | 3 CULTURAL EMBEDDEDNESS & COMMODIFICATION OF CEREMONIES

This section discusses how the ayahuasca tourism industry and the commodification of ceremonies affect Shipibo livelihoods. Because of ayahuasca's local importance, cultural embeddedness, and ceremonial context, Shipibo healers have become important figures in ayahuasca's commodification. The significance of healers and ceremonies in ayahuasca's commodification represents a departure from the way that other socionatural products are valued, and the role of Indigenous labor within local economies. The expertise of the healer has become valuable, though its significance may be different across intercultural regimes of value. I show that structural barriers prevent Shipibo healers from benefitting from their expertise as much as the mestizos or foreigners who learn Shipibo healing practices. I see ayahuasca ceremonies as plant-human practices that co-constitute the relationship between the plant spirit and the healer, thereby mediating the healing experience. The ceremonial element presents a complicated resistance to commodification, as ceremonial practices are linked to Shipibo knowledge and onto-epistemologies that are difficult to acquire and transport, both geographically and culturally.

AYAHUASCA TOURISM AND SHIPIBO LIVELIHOODS IN UCAYALI

Before there was no Western medicine. There was no hospital. Well, there was a hospital, but it was very, very, far away, way out in Iquitos, Requeña, Pucallpa. We would cure with only *ikaros*. When a person was in pain, we would suck out the pain and use plant remedies to heal. That was how we used to heal the sick. That is shamanism. That is a *médico*. A *médico* heals people (Papa Meni).

Since the first time I visited Paoyhan, Papa Meni has expanded his house considerably (Figure 3.3). Ayahuasca ceremonies are no longer held under the gigantic mosquito net in the open porch area they were previously. Instead, Papa Meni has built a new elevated round building with a clay-shingled roof and screened-in windows, a *maloka*, where he holds ceremonies every other night for the now many outsiders that come to stay with him and his family. Papa Meni has installed new bathrooms with flush toilets, sinks, and showers with running water. He had a long bridge built off the back side of the house leading to the new *maloka* because during certain times of year the ground can be quite muddy, or even completely flooded, requiring rubber boots or a canoe to traverse between the elevated buildings. These luxuries are particularly for the comfort of the foreign clients who stay with Papa Meni. Across the soccer field, Papa Bari, Papa Meni's elder brother, has similarly expanded his property over the last five years, and the two of them currently have the only flush toilets in town. The toilets are rarely if ever used by anyone other than outsiders who come to diet and participate in ayahuasca ceremonies.



Figure 3.3. Papa Meni's house before the expansions. It was a traditional longhouse. Photo by Laura Dev.

The room Papa Meni and his wife used to share is now just another domicile for his outsider visitors. He has instead built another house off the side of the old house, made of similar local materials and thatched roof. He, his wife Tita, her daughter, and her two children all sleep on thin padded mats in their mosquito nets in this new house. A kitchen has been built on the backside of that house, where Tita, cooks over an open fire and where her family members gather during the daytime. The dining area for the visitors has also been expanded, and has its own more modern kitchen with an electric stove. Papa Meni's daughter cooks meals for the visitors according to the specifications of the special diet that must be followed when dieting plants, but also according to the customs and preferences of the visitors—serving things like pancakes, lentils, and salad that are not typically eaten as part of the Shipibo diet.

For Papa Meni, improving lodging and the comfort of the visitors were priorities. Within the four years I conducted my field work, he had built around twelve new cabins (*tambos*) for hosting his patients. As seen with the addition of flushable toilets and showers with running water, the amenities are also consistently being improved—he has also upgraded to actual bed mattresses (instead of pads), and has improved the mosquito screens throughout the visitors' quarters. Although Papa Meni had long been a well-known reputable healer, the significant improvements at Papa Meni's place began after a few of his longer-term students began bringing large groups from their home countries (Australia, the United States, and Russia, most prominently), and charging higher fees. Part of the extra fees went to making improvements to Papa Meni's facilities; some went to various projects in the town (like securing running water for the village); and some paid the facilitators (the long-term students who organized the group). I call them *facilitators* because the long-term students facilitated the experiences for first-timers traveling to Shipibo villages, who often do not speak Spanish—coordinating travel, transportation, and accommodations. They also provided the visitors who came as part of these coordinated groups with more integration opportunities (sharing circles, counseling, advice), than they would otherwise receive at Papa Meni's center.

It is evident in his village that Papa Meni is one of the wealthy few, though by Western standards he lives simply—still sleeping on a thin mat and sharing a room with his extended family. Many people in Paoyhan are poor by both regional and international standards, and have severe chronic health issues—including people in Papa Meni's own family. He employs many townspeople (*comuneros*) for construction work, to cook ayahuasca, or to cut the grass in his yard. He knows who in the community is in need, and often hires those who need extra financial help. Papa Meni's sons are paid a salary for helping to coordinate the transport of the visitors, while his daughter is paid to prepare meals. Other family members also work preparing rooms and cleaning the maloka. Papa Meni sometimes hosts a large meal for his other extended family members in the community, serving grilled chicken and seasoned rice to dozens of guests. In Shipibo culture it is customary for those who have more resources to host parties or meals for family members who may have less. The ability to host is also indicative of one's status. When someone in his family is sick, he will treat them as a patient without charge, but not in the ceremonial space reserved for his outsider clients. After singing for hours in his nice wooden maloka to a group of fifteen or twenty clients, he will leave the ceremony to go to his house to sing, he announces, for "*la viejita*"—the little old lady—his wife's mother, or another family member who is ill. From the maloka space, the driving cadence of his voice can be heard for another hour or so of singing, before he returns.

As ayahuasca has gained international popularity over the last decade, the traditional healing profession in Ucayali has been revitalized and injected with foreign capital. Now, money is accumulating in villages with well-known healers that otherwise have little industry. This generates economic opportunities while also creating local patterns of inequality and uneven development. Cultural relations between people and plants are also shifting: ceremonial contexts are altered to be more marketable to outsiders, which also mediates how Shipibo people relate with the plants (see Chapter 4). Papa Meni says he holds ceremonies in the way he has always done. "No, it has not changed," he told me when I asked whether the ceremonies are different for outsiders.

Papa Meni learned his practice from his father and brother, as well as the plants themselves, the trees he dieted.

Yes, they teach! The tree comes, the tree spirit or its mother, it teaches you. Songs come out in

your *mareación*. You have to follow them. That is how you learn.

Ayahuasca ceremonies, *ikaros*, and dieting are the key practices for healers to develop relationships with the plant spirits they work with. The ceremonies provide a venue for plant-human communication, through the consumption of ayahuasca. The ceremonial elements are generally improvised by the healer by following the guidance of the plant spirits through the singing of *ikaros*, as Papa Meni explains:

The plant spirits make you see, or they might tell you, *that person has disease in this part of the body*. ... They explain how you need to sing to heal the sick person. That's how it is. This is what trees make you learn, the tree spirits. But you have to diet a long time to learn medicine; it is very long. Look how much time—fifty something years ago I started drinking ayahuasca. A lot of time! That is why a *médico* has to learn everything. You do not learn fast.

Because ayahuasca is so tightly linked to ceremonial context, the healer is a key figure mediating ayahuasca's commodification. The expertise of the healer in commanding plant spirits is recognized by Shipibo and outsiders alike. However, the meaning granted to this expertise, and the criteria by which it is evaluated, shifts as it traverses regimes of value. For example, outsiders may evaluate healers based not simply on their abilities or experience as a healer, but on their international reputation, on the cleanliness of their facilities, on their ability to speak Spanish (or English in rare cases), or in their trustworthiness with money. Furthermore, because of a large number of cases of sexual harassment or assault by healers against foreign women, many foreigners prefer to work only with women healers or those who have been vetted by others as safe (Herbert 2010). For this reason, the healing profession has become a viable livelihood for many women, like Yoshan,⁸⁷ though in the past, Shipibo healers were more commonly men.

In 2015, Maestra Yoshan, around 65 years old at the time, charged 100 soles (around \$30 USD) for a ceremony in her living room in Yarinacocha. Due to her increasing popularity with foreigners, however, as of 2019, she charges twice that amount and now holds her ceremonies at various local lodges. Her living room has since been filled with furniture—three couches and a TV. The rest of the house has been sectioned off into rooms, and the front porch has been tiled with shiny terra-cotta colored tiles with white floral designs. A new-looking motorbike belonging to her grandson can often be found parked outside. It is difficult to schedule a ceremony with her, as she travels to Cuzco or Europe several times a year to perform ceremonies abroad, and often has her time at home booked for private diet groups at locations around Pucallpa.

Partly because she lives in the suburbs of Pucallpa, and not in a rural community, and partly because she is a woman, Yoshan does not have the same access to land as healers like Papa Meni in Paoyhan. In Paoyhan, for example, community land is allocated via a petition process that goes through the community assembly and local authorities. Once granted, is usually controlled by the men of the family. This gives men and rural healers in general an advantage in their ability to expand their living quarters to host clients in their own homes. Yoshan, on the other hand, has been wanting to buy more land for many years, in an area near Pucallpa. As a widow, she is dependent on the money she earns from her foreign clients to support her family. Furthermore, since Yoshan speaks very little Spanish (older women typically speak less Spanish than men of the same generation), she is also dependent on others to help her navigate the Spanish-dominated

⁸⁷ Yoshan means “grandmother” in Shipibo—I do not use the maestra's proper name, though many just call her Yoshan anyway.

financial institutions of Ucayali.⁸⁸ This dynamic has also made it common for male family members of women healers to dominate the flow of financial resources in their own favor.

In Ucayali, the average resident does not consume ayahuasca. Yet everyone knows its economic potential. Many people seek to take advantage of the opportunities presented by global interest in ayahuasca, whether it is through participating in the tourism industry or through selling the plants or brew. As ayahuasca becomes commoditized for consumers from the Global North, it has become associated with other Shipibo cultural forms in a way that is divorced from its existence in Ucayali. For example, many outsiders have the mistaken assumption that all Shipibo people drink ayahuasca regularly, and that the distinctive Shipibo embroidery work is a result of ayahuasca visions. This is partly due to the prevalence of common narratives repeated by outsiders selling and promoting ayahuasca ceremonies, and partly due to Shipibo artisans, who have often taken advantage of those narratives in order to sell their embroidery work (Brabec de Mori 2012b). Women artisans, when asked what their designs mean will often say “ayahuasca visions,” although most Shipibo women—even artisans—never drink ayahuasca. On the other hand, plant visions *are* important sources of inspiration for these artisans—just not in the same way as outsiders generally interpret this. Indeed, artisans nowadays commonly embroider ayahuasca vines and flowers on their tapestries in order to market their work to tourists. These designs are a departure from the more traditional geometric designs, but have now become standard. Thus, both artisans and those selling ayahuasca ceremonies have found a synergy in marketing to outsider consumers.

The sale of *artesanía*, embroidered handicrafts made by nearly all Shipibo women, can be an important source of income. The Jefe of Paoyhan in 2017 estimated that about 80% of household income in Paoyhan came from selling *artesanía* to outsiders. Thus, the presence of tourists is important for local incomes, even apart from those in the healing industry. However, these benefits are unevenly distributed. The community of Paoyhan during high tourist times will hold an *artesanía* fair for the tourists periodically. At these fairs, there may be close to two hundred women who sit on the soccer field under the hot afternoon sun, with intricate embroidery work spread on the grass in front of them, hoping to sell their wares. Although there may be up to twenty or thirty tourists in the village, even if each tourist buys several pieces of *artesanía*, the majority of women do not sell anything.

The tourists who opt to visit Papa Meni’s center over the more expensive Western-run centers are often not rich by their own country’s standards. Some of them have spent all of their savings to travel to Peru to diet for an extended period of time, and most had to leave their jobs or sources of income in order to travel. Therefore, the *artesanía* fair for some outsiders is a dreaded experience. Most that I spoke with generally purchase as much as their budget allows, or more, but they are inevitably confronted with the neediness that many of the women exhibit as they implore each person who walks by to help them. Each family seems to be hungry, sick, or needs to pay for their children’s education. Many outsiders are not prepared for this aspect of visiting the community. Those that *are* rich sometimes spend a great deal of money on *artesanía* and on otherwise supporting community members. The contradictory effect of this circumstance is that the wealth that some foreigners display then contributes to the common perception of all foreigners as being wealthy.

In Pucallpa, healing centers run by foreigners are increasingly common. Foreigners are able to easily afford land because of the exchange rate value. They tend to understand and

⁸⁸ In addition, financial, government, and legal institutions in Peru are known for being racist toward Indigenous people, who, even if they do speak Spanish, speak it as a second language and are marked as second-class citizens.

anticipate the values and expectations of their foreign clients more easily than Shipibo healers do, and have the capital to accommodate those needs. In these centers, Shipibo healers are hired as wage laborers, and the ceremonies function as commodities—consumers are buying a service or an experience. The positionalities of Shipibo healers when working at centers is quite different from when they are running their own ceremonies, where they control the operations of the ceremony and the care of their clients. Often, the ceremonies in foreign-owned centers are tailored more toward the expected desires of the foreigners, rather than considerations of the healer’s expertise and assessment of what is best for healing. Although healers I interviewed commonly had a sense of gratitude for the work and income opportunities provided by working at a center, many did not particularly enjoy the work because they did not have control over the ceremonial proceedings (more in Chapter 4). Maestro Bene, an elderly healer who had worked at The Center,⁸⁹ reflected that:

We are workers when we go there, and we have no say. We cannot give orders, because there are people who give us orders, no?

Maestro Bene thought that the way ceremonies were held at The Center were sometimes not what was needed for certain patients with more serious problems. Those, he thought needed a different ceremonial format, in which the patients could learn and receive more individual attention. Some healers, like Maestro Bene, have started their own small healing centers after working at foreign-run centers, intending to stay in their own communities, remain in control of the healing process, and keep more of the income earned themselves. Indigenous-run centers often charge significantly less than foreign-run centers, but also do not offer as comfortable amenities. This type of entrepreneurship does not get much support from the foreign-run centers who employ them — they lose the healer as an employee and it also potentially diverts their clientele. Maestro Bene describes his interaction with one of the owners (an Englishman) of The Center:

I let him know that I have this small center that I am starting — I have a very special place, and patients who are a little more difficult have come here, because here it is very different. But Mr. Thomas didn’t believe me and he didn’t allow me. He said “don’t speak to me about this.” I was a gentleman. “Ok, Thomas, thank you.” I wanted them to come [to my center] with their bigger problems and then once they were improved go to Thomas’ center with better energy. That was my intention to help. But they didn’t allow me. It was such a pity. Wow, because they come from so far... (Maestro Bene).⁹⁰

Although Maestro Bene now receives his own clientele at his humble center, Thomas did not allow Maestro Bene to advertise at The Center or to talk about it with The Center’s clientele.

Many Shipibo healers in more rural parts of Ucayali, like Papa Meni and Maestro Bene have created healing centers from the ground-up, starting from their living rooms, and continually reinvesting their profits into creating more infrastructure. The success of Papa Meni, however, in many ways is an exception. Most healers, despite sometimes having work, and sometimes having many *amigos* (outsider friends), like most others in their communities, are still living in poverty. For example, although Maestra Beka (from Chapter 1) was one of the more renowned healers in the Pucallpa area, and at times had a steady clientele, she remained poor until she died, especially as her health declined and she was unable to work as often. Maestra Beka’s daughter, Biri, complained about this:

Many [outsiders] come to her and say: “teach me! I’m going to support you. When I learn, I am

⁸⁹The Center is a popular ayahuasca center near Iquitos (pseudonym).

⁹⁰ Interview by Dena Sharrock and Paul Roberts, 2014

going to support you. You are going to have a surprise.” Where are they? They don’t send anything. Neither the male nor the women *amigos*. That is why she is like this. Nobody sends anything, not even 100 or 200 soles⁹¹ to support with our food. Nothing. But her teaching, what she has taught is [worth] *so much*. And they work in Lima, Puerto Maldonado, Cuzco, in their country [as healers]. ... Some new ones that arrive, they support us. They help us. Buying *artesanias*⁹². ... She is now old, but her medicine is strong. But she is now getting very old (Biri)⁹³.

Among many healers, there is a common sense of resentment toward foreigners, who in some cases come for several months or even a year of study with a single healer, are taught how to relate with the plants, how to sing and hold ceremony, and then fail to ever return. Oftentimes, this type of story was accompanied by rumors that those people were now rich and famous shamans in their home country, and were holding Shipibo-style ceremonies there, using songs they had been taught by their maestro or maestra in Pucallpa. I now recognize that these stories were often told to me by various healers I interviewed because they were warning me, and trying to teach me about the type of reciprocity they expected from the relationship. However, it is a different type of reciprocity than is learned or practiced by most outsiders, in which goods or services are exchanged for a given price and the transaction is then complete. Instead, although there is a commitment to sharing knowledge, the expectation is that the relationship will continue to be maintained with the teacher. As one young healer told me:

Here in the rainforest, we do not hoard [*mesquinar*] what we have learned. Everything is open for learning, in terms of what comes from plants.

Outsider interest in Shipibo healing practices has led to a resurgence in interest in the healing profession and ayahuasca by Shipibo youth and young adults. I know several Shipibo men in their twenties and thirties, who previously had other careers, but more recently as adults have taken up the mantle of their parents who are traditional healers. When I asked one such man why he did not learn from his father at a younger age, he replied:

Because I wasn’t interested. And then...when *amigos* would come they demanded that I do. Because seeing that my dad is a good maestro, a very good one—seeing this, they wondered...when he dies, who will replace him? My amigos would say, “Diet! So that you can be like your father.” They demanded that I do it. I thought about dieting for two years. To diet is not easy. It’s not easy. That is why I thought and thought.

Several decades ago, when Papa Meni and Yoshan were young, apprentices began training at a younger age — around twelve or fifteen. While some healers like Rawa are still learning and dieting when they are young, now many are entering the healing profession later, once they see that it is a viable livelihood. This is heartening for many, who are proud that their traditional practices and expertise are being recognized as valuable globally, and they are enthusiastic to be able to learn these practices from their elders, even though they were not necessarily taught them as children. However, this is a big commitment. Indeed, as Papa Meni says, learning the plant knowledges and learning to become a healer takes many years or even decades of dieting plants.

The amount of time and training it takes to become a healer can be a difficult reality for young Shipibo people who must go to school and work in order to make a living and do not have the time to dedicate to dieting in order to learn plant knowledges. In contrast, the knowledge of the plants and the expertise therein are increasingly being learned by outsiders who have the time

⁹¹ 100 soles is around \$30 USD

⁹² Artesania refers to handicrafts—mostly embroidery work—that are made by most Shipibo women.

⁹³ Interview by Laura Dev and Paul Roberts 2015

and economic resources to spend months in the Amazon without working. I argue that through ayahuasca's economic networks, certain key products of ayahuasca's vitality — power, knowledge, and healing — are being transferred unevenly to outsiders from the Global North. Particularly in foreign-run centers with profit-driven business models, power is shifted from those who are skilled in wielding plant power (the healers) to those who wield economic power in the form of capital (foreigners). This represents a shift in the way these ceremonies are valued, and the meaning that is ascribed to healers (more in the following chapter). Traditional healers, and therefore healing services are transferred out of their community context, and to places like Iquitos or abroad that focus on treating outsiders.

CEREMONIES AS GLOBAL COMMODITIES

As the sun sets on a large rural property in Northern California, a dozen or two humans arrange themselves in a circle in a large semi-finished garage with an aged white carpet, and Shipibo embroidered tapestries hung on several of the walls (these are for sale). Most of the humans have set themselves up in cozy nests with layers of padding, pillows, and plush blankets, one couple have brought out sheepskin mats to lay on and are both dressed in loose white clothing, a style common among the Brazilian ayahuasca religions.⁹⁴ Several of the people have set up small altars in front of their nests with objects they consider to be important or sacred, which include different types of stones, plant artifacts, feathers, perfumes and essential oils, small figures of deities or geometric shapes. Several others in the circle have more simple setups—a camping pad and sleeping bag, with nothing more than perhaps a journal and headlamp adorning the space in front of their padding. Each person has a bucket at their spot in the circle, for the likely event that they will need to vomit.

The group appears to be in a meditative state, many with eyes closed, sitting cross-legged, or laying down resting, and most look like they are dressed for sleep, though some are wearing more elaborate clothes or jewelry—ornamental beads of South American origin. The facilitators of the gathering have set up a larger altar on one side, near where they are sitting, upon which they have placed an intricate beaded jaguar head, and a plumed fan, with what looks to be several grey feathers of a bird of prey in a wooden handle, wrapped with leather twine and embedded with a blue stone. Also on the altar are several different types of plant artifacts, including beaded strands of red and black *huairuru* seeds common to Ucayali, a stick of palo santo, some rolled mapacho, and a glass bottle of ayahuasca, with a small ceramic tea cup at its side. The participants in the circle have all gathered around this Amazonian brew, feeling they have been called to sit with the plants in that bottle.

For most people present, the decision to participate has not been made lightly. Many have traveled several hours from the San Francisco Bay Area, Silicon Valley, or even from southern California or further to participate in the ceremony here. For several, this will be their first time drinking ayahuasca. The facilitators sent out instructions to the participants several weeks earlier, with instructions for how to prepare the body. Strict diets were to be followed: abstain from pork, drugs, cannabis, alcohol, and sexual activity including masturbation for at least a week in advance. Salt, oil, spices, processed foods, red meat, refined sugar, caffeine, cold foods, and strong stimulation like television and movies (and too much screen-time in general) should also be avoided for at least three days prior to and following the ceremonies. Participants were encouraged

⁹⁴ There are several Brazilian ayahuasca religions that incorporate ayahuasca as a sacrament—most notably Santo Daime and União do Vegetal (UDV).

to set and meditate on an “intention” in advance of the ceremony as well, in order to get the most out of their experiences.

The high costs of the ceremonies—financially, as well as energetically, physically, and potentially emotionally—make participation an obviously privileged affair. The ceremony itself costs \$200-\$300 per night, and some people, though not all, will sit for two nights in a row. Though the participants at this weekend retreat spanned a wide variety of ages—including an 18 year old woman just out of high school, her mother, and an older woman in her seventies—most were in their 30s and presented as white. One of the first-timers, Aziz,⁹⁵ a clean shaven man with short dark hair and expensive sporty sunglasses, who had told me earlier that he was a programmer working at a tech company in silicon valley, expressed that he had been waiting years for this experience, and hinted with a mix of what I took to be both anxiety and excitement, that everything might be different afterwards. Another colleague of his had carpooled with him from the Bay Area. Though for the individual participants their reasons for participating might be extremely varied, they have all come to experience ayahuasca.

The participants had gathered earlier in the afternoon, prior to the evening ceremony, to get to know one another, set up their ceremonial space, and prepare light food that would be shared the following morning. The air of the group was one of anticipation. Sitting on picnic benches and camp chairs in the host’s backyard beneath the soft red cedars, sipping ginger or chamomile tea, several more seasoned participants shared their prior experiences, and the first-timers gathered around to listen and ask questions. Tobacco smoke, strangely aromatic and floral, wafted over the scene from the facilitators, who were constantly smoking rolled mapacho cigarettes and formed the focal point of the group. The man was wearing a white linen shirt embroidered with Shipibo designs, while the woman wore a simple cotton dress. The couple were both from Europe, and had been trained at The Center in Iquitos. Therefore, they have trained in the Shipibo way, through several diets with teacher plants over several years, and their ceremony has the key features that all Shipibo maestros use, including the singing of Shipibo ikaros, without much embellishment. They had brought along a helper, who had also trained at the same center in Peru, who was assisting with the ceremony in case anyone needed help navigating their experience. This helper has now begun to lead her own ceremonies in California and elsewhere.

Participants in such ayahuasca ceremonies do not only pay for the medicine itself, but for the entire experience associated with it. When the ceremony takes place in California, it is often an amalgamation of traditional Indigenous elements with “new age” practices and symbols, which serve to translate the ayahuasca experience into a form that is more familiar and legible to outsiders (see Chapter 4). The task of the facilitator is two-fold: to provide a healing experience and to translate an Indigenous healing practice into something digestible by outsiders. When ceremonies are conducted in places like the United States, the facilitators also assume primary responsibility for the legal risk in importing and serving this illicit substance.⁹⁶ Many outsiders, but not all, who facilitate ceremonies in the Global North give financial support back to the healers and the communities with whom they have trained in Ucayali. Unsurprisingly, however, of the thousands

⁹⁵ Name changed

⁹⁶ According to U.S. law, ayahuasca (once prepared), aside from ambiguous clauses for religious use, is considered to be a preparation of DMT (N,N-Dimethyl Tryptamine), which is a Schedule I substance, indicating that “(a) The drug or other substance has a high potential for abuse. (b) The drug or other substance has no currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States. (c) There is a lack of accepted safety for use of the drug or other substance under medical supervision.” From (“21 U.S. Code § 812 - Schedules of Controlled Substances” n.d.).

of dollars that are collected for a single night of ceremony, most of it remains in the North to support the travel and lifestyles of the facilitators.

As ayahuasca moves into more-than-capitalist frameworks in the Global North, it has further become entwined with cultural symbolism as it travels. Ceremonies for outsiders (either at centers or abroad) are often accompanied by much more ceremonial regalia—sacred objects from several different cultural orientations, especially Shipibo. Although the ceremonies are sometimes similar in form, the focus on ceremonial objects, pre-ceremony preparation, and post-ceremony processing events make them unlike any ceremony I have seen in Ucayali. Some of the new age symbolism, rules, and ceremonial regalia may be understood as an attempt by the facilitators to make the ceremony legible to these uninitiated audiences. Dawson (2017) has described this as a “retraditionalization” of the ceremonies in the Western context. Some outsiders prefer healers who use more ritual symbolism and practice stricter ceremonies—dressing in traditional clothes, creating more rules and structure, etc.—even though this is not necessarily how the healer would conduct ceremonies in the absence of outsiders. The preparation for the body dictated by the facilitators in this case is more than a Shipibo healer would typically ask, particularly for participants who are not dieting (explained in the next chapter), but only participating in ceremonies. However, the facilitators in the above scenario have trained with healers as well as with plants in Peru and elsewhere, so their knowledge on the issue also comes from both plants and the healers.

The consumption and valuation of ayahuasca by outsiders in some ways is tied up in recontextualized Indigenous cultural forms and a romanticized version of ecological relations, and the realities in Ucayali forests and communities often do not match the Western cultural imaginaries. It is common for non-Indigenous people to appropriate and distort Indigenous cultural forms to serve their own purposes (Meyer and Royer 2001). Meyer and Royer argue that this type of “cultural imperialism” could eventually lead to Indigenous people becoming displaced and replaced within their own cultural and ceremonial spaces. To some extent, this is happening in the case of the commodification of ayahuasca ceremonies, with the role of healer increasingly being performed by outsiders.

Ayahuasca’s social and cultural relations mediated by healers dictate that ayahuasca should be taken in a ceremonial context. The ceremonial structure offers a type of resistance to becoming disembedded from its Amazonian life-world. The ceremony is important for maintaining proper relations with the plants, and allows the voices of the plants to command the ceremonial space through the bodies of the healers. As described above, the power, knowledge, and healing that result from the plant-human practice of singing *ikaros* (healing songs) are lent to the healer by the vitality of the plants as a result of their commitment to their relationship with the plants in general, in part through dieting (more in Chapter 4). Thus, the healer’s expertise is attained through certain sacrifices that are requested by the plant spirits themselves. This is knowledge and expertise is not easily transferred or replicated for the market, and the difficulty of acquiring such knowledge maintains the healers’ place as central in the ayahuasca economy.

Alienation is defined by Anna Tsing (drawing on Marx’s (1976) definition) as what often happens to other-than-humans as they are “torn from their life-worlds to become objects of exchange” (Tsing 2015, 121). In the encounters between humans and these plants in more-than-Shipibo contexts, often the coming together, the actual meeting of plant and animal (human) chemistry, may seem more like a tool toward the goal of some transformational experience for the human, rather than an encounter between two beings from very different worlds. Despite the layers of New Age mysticism and psychedelia that surround ayahuasca’s use in the United States and

elsewhere in the Global North, its Indigenous and vegetal origins are also difficult to ignore, precisely because of the additional ceremonial regalia and restrictions it has acquired around its use. In addition, ayahuasca's branding as something exotic and sacred contributes to its value as a luxury commodity for international consumers. These transformations not only arise from capitalist desires to market the ceremony, but, I argue, also reflect the plants own resistances to commodification and mass production. In this way, the plants, like the healers (outsiders or Shipibo) also mediate the consumer's experience of ayahuasca. For example, extra restrictions dictating how one must prepare the body before taking ayahuasca originate in Shipibo dieting practices to follow the regulations of the plants to be able to appease the spirits; they also increase the sensitivity of the body to the plant's chemical expressions. The focus on ritual symbolism indicates to outsiders that the ceremony and practices must be taken seriously, and differentiate ayahuasca from other types of "drugs." Thus, as the ceremonial forms around the use of ayahuasca change and become enhanced, ayahuasca's regulations are also translated into a form that outsiders can understand and experience themselves.

3 | 4 CONCLUSION

I have argued here that socionatural practices aimed to appease plant spirits also increase the human body's sensitivity to the plant's chemical and spiritual expression, leading to an entwinement of plant-human agencies evident throughout ayahuasca's economy. Particular human-plant partnerships emerge from the ayahuasca assemblage through the practices surrounding harvesting and cultivation, cooking and transporting, and consuming the plant materials. The ayahuasca economy that is emerging both locally in Ucayali and globally is not only more-than-human, but is also a more-than-capitalist economy (Henderson 2013, 201), which is structured by both the tensions generated as ayahuasca and its plants are pulled into commodity relationships, and ayahuasca's own particular resistance to those types of relationships. My approach views both humans and other-than-human subjects as agents of economic change. Plants are not just commodified inputs into capitalism, but also subjects of human-plant relationships (Barron 2015), through which their agency reveals itself. This chapter is an attempt to understand how plant agencies interact with more-than-human economies to help determine the trajectories and structure of their own commodification. In order to show this I have followed plants through multiple overlapping worldviews and multiple systems of valuation. I claim that unlike certain other plants that have economies structured around human desires (e.g. opium poppies, coca, tobacco), ayahuasca's economy is not based in purely capitalist or consumer motives, and rather has thickly entangled itself with various regimes of cultural value and plant regulations. In contrast to other similar-seeming plants and plant-derived commodities, ayahuasca travels along different routes, with different patterns of accumulation.

In this chapter I explored economic difference and diversity in thinking through how ayahuasca participates in global circulations, how it is valued, the extent to which it is commodified, and the resistances that have made it difficult for capitalisms to fully engulf ayahuasca. In the case of the ayahuasca complex, it is not just the plants and brew that have been commodified, but the rituals, cultural expertise, and spirit. Ayahuasca's resistance to commodification originates in the plants' own *tendencies* (Marder 2013)—that is, their properties, expressions, and relationships. First, the particular ecology of caapi, making it difficult to domesticate and only able to grow near trees, presents a challenge to produce ayahuasca *en masse*.

Second, the physiological relationship between ayahuasca and human bodies—namely, the tendency for ayahuasca’s chemical expressions to cause an intense psychological and physical experience for the human—makes it resistant to recreational or mass consumption. Lastly, ayahuasca’s social and cultural relations require ceremonial settings with the expertise of healers and certain restrictions on its use, based in part on communications that healers have received directly from plants. Thus, ayahuasca’s resistance, I argue, can be viewed as regulatory structures (mediated by healers) that the plants themselves have imposed on the way that people relate with them, and which co-constitute the structure and trajectory of ayahuasca’s commodification. This trajectory is shaped by these moments of resistance and commodification that help determine ayahuasca’s production, exchange, circulation, and consumption.

The various ways that ayahuasca resists commodification have helped to shape the type of commodity that ayahuasca has become. Its ceremonial consumption gives ayahuasca a different character than most plant commodities that came previously from the tropical forests of Peru (e.g. cinchona, rubber, timber, coca, and cat’s claw). Ayahuasca’s cultural embeddedness and usage has made its commodity and labor relations different for the Shipibo than the other extractive industries that are ongoing in Shipibo territories. For the earlier waves of extraction described in Chapter 2, the Shipibo served as exploited laborers whose expertise was only used locate and extract forest plants. Their Indigenous identities rendered their labor less valued. For the harvest and transport of ayahuasca’s raw materials, these relations and renderings still hold. However, the healing and ceremonial expertise that Shipibo healers possess derives in part from their Indigenous identity and practices, which enhance the value of the commoditized ceremonial offerings and education. Their knowledge and practices for relating with plants and spirits, are thus central to ayahuasca’s value as a culturally-dense commodity (Appadurai 1986a), also making it more-than-capitalist. Because Indigenous identities and knowledges are difficult to appropriate and transport, some Shipibo healers actually accumulate capital based on their expertise in situ. Thus, the plants in ayahuasca have served to mediate new types of colonial relations between outsiders and Indigenous Amazonian peoples. However, structural racism in Peru, including the history of exploitation (Chapters 1 and 2), and the ongoing lack of services and education in rural Ucayali, continue to make it difficult for Shipibo healers to get ahead in capitalist economies (more in the following chapter).

The specifics of the ecologies, political-economic context, and social relations by which commodification unfolds make a difference for both humans and other-than-humans (Nevins and Peluso 2008). By attending to diversities and resistance in the process of commodification, I have shown inconsistencies in the ability for capitalist expropriation to adequately explain the way that human and non-human actors participate in the production and reproduction of their lifeworlds. While ayahuasca may exemplify resistance to commodification more than other plants or other socio-natural commodities, this case also serves to demonstrate forms of other-than-human resistance that are *not* unique to ayahuasca, and reveals that most plants and socionatural beings do not easily or naturally become commodities. As J.K. Gibson-Graham has said, there is a danger in overemphasizing the solidity of capitalist power to remake the world in its own image (Gibson-Graham 2006).

CHAPTER 4 | TRANSLATIONS

PLANT PRACTICES ACROSS TERRAINS OF POWER

4 | 0 INTRODUCTION

Four thin mats and four buckets are set up on a concrete floor in Maestra Yoshan's⁹⁷ living room. Three against the wall, where we, the patients are seated, with the maestra's mat in the center of the room facing us. The room is otherwise devoid of furniture. In the adjoining room, the maestra's children and grandchildren are sleeping in three or four different beds, each with its own mosquito net; every so often a baby cries and is then hushed. Next door, quite close, I can hear another voice, a man, singing *ikaros*.⁹⁸ I wonder who it is. Several sound systems in the neighborhood are playing loud *reggaetón* and *cumbia* music. Yoshan lies on her side on a tattered mat, resting with her typical Shipibo shirt pulled up above her bra due to the heat in the air that night. In front of the maestra's mat, she has a carved wooden pipe and a bag of loose *mapacho* (a species of South American tobacco, *Nicotiana rustica*, that always accompanies ayahuasca in Shipibo ceremonies). She also has a lighter, a flashlight, a bottle of *agua florida* (a ceremonial perfume), a bucket, and a reused plastic water bottle that has been filled with a brown liquid—ayahuasca. These are the tools of her practice.

Around 8pm, Yoshan rises and begins whispering melodic *ikaros* into her tobacco pipe, and into the ayahuasca bottle. As the bottle opens, it makes a hissing sound, indicating that the ayahuasca has fermented in the heat, and an acrid, unmistakable smell fills the room sickeningly for just a few seconds. "*Cerveza*⁹⁹ *Shipibo*" says Yoshan (a classic joke), and we all laugh. After she finishes her *ikaros*, she stokes her pipe for a few minutes before calling us over one by one, and blows tobacco smoke over each of our heads and hands. She serves the liquid in a small glass, using a flashlight to see in the dark room, and scrutinizing the liquid before handing me the cup. I try not to gag even before I can swallow the bitter, sweet, sour fermented liquid. The maestra laughs sympathetically (almost gleefully), as we each drink, carefully watching our faces, though I know her eyesight is not as good as it once was. She does not bother to use the cup herself, and rather takes a small swig of the liquid directly from the bottle, accompanied by gagging and retching noises as she swallows it, then spits into her bucket and takes out her pipe. The light is extinguished, and we wait.

Yoshan has been drinking ayahuasca and dieting plants (*samá*) since she was twelve years old. Her fifty years of practice working with plant beings gives her a powerful connection to the

⁹⁷ Yoshan means "grandmother" in Shipibo—I do not use the maestra's proper name, though many just call her Yoshan anyway.

⁹⁸ Songs associated with the use of ayahuasca

⁹⁹ Cerveza = Beer

world of the plant spirits, whose power she draws from to sing *ikaros* and perform healing. Over recent years, Yoshan drinks ayahuasca ceremonially several times every week, singing into the early hours of the morning as she performs healing ceremonies for her clientele of primarily foreigners. The three of us on this occasion are from various places in North America and have been sitting in ceremony together every other night over the last few weeks. We each have a bucket next to our mats. I have laid a sheet over my mat, and have also brought my own blanket and pillow. In a bag woven and embroidered with Shipibo designs, I have my headlamp, hand sanitizer, water bottle, and roll of toilet paper. In front of my mat I have set out a small embroidered cloth on which I place a quartz crystal, my *agua florida*, and two *mapacho* cigarettes.

Sometimes as long as an hour after drinking, Yoshan begins to feel the effects and she begins her opening *ikaro*. Yoshan singing is variably strong, shrill, sweet, driving, and soothing. After the opening *ikaro*, she sings to each of her patients in turn, crawling on the cement floor to the front of the mat upon which each of us is seated. As she sings to me, I open my mouth and sing along as well as my voice can take me, at times joining with a familiar melody or phrasing. I recognize some of the words of her *ikaros*. She sings to the cold in my body, she sings for love, she sings to various plants, and for music, to help me with *my* song. Her voice brings upon me a feeling as though my body is unwinding; I see myself as a coiled snake loosening from the husk of skin I have worn for so long. Snake-like imagery writhes across the blackness of my vision in colors with no names. The tension in my muscles and tendons and organs, even, seems to be drawn out of my body and concentrated into a heavy feeling in the center of my being, in my stomach. Then, as Yoshan's voice reaches a crescendo, I am vomiting that tension into a plastic bucket. One purge and I feel as though I have let something go that I really did not need, that was actually probably poisoning me. It seems like she has been singing to me for hours, though perhaps it has been only twenty minutes. At the close of her *ikaro*, she seals it in with another *sopla*. I lean my head toward her. She takes a swig of *agua florida*¹⁰⁰ from her bottle, and blows it onto the top of my head once or twice. Then I give her my hands, palms together. She blows the perfumed liquid into my folded hands, and because of its high alcohol content it immediately vaporizes. “*Ya. Listo*” she says. *You're ready*. As she crawls away, she says “*Canta, ya*”—*sing already*.

Once she has finished her singing, she implores us all to sing. *You need to sing. Sing in your own language, it doesn't matter*, she says, *if you don't sing, you won't learn*. She has told me, “you should start singing as soon as you feel the *mareación* (effects of the ayahuasca) in order to guide it and command (*dominar*) the plant spirits.” In this case, her use of the word *dominar* could mean *manage, dominate, master, or subdue* the plant spirits. I am translating it as *command*, though I am sure that there is not a proper word in either Spanish or English to explain the ways in which plant and human agency entwine to perform *ikaros* and healing. Through *ponté shinanya*, a Shipibo phrase meaning having straightness of mind or a focused intention perhaps (Best 2019, 130), she is able to direct the energy of the plant spirits, through her voice, channeled through her body (the *kano*), into *non nete* (our world) to enact healing. These plant-human practices co-constitute a constellation of subjectivities—the onanya (healer), the ibo (plant spirit), and the patient/participant. Sometimes there are other spirits, energies, or entities involved as well. These can be the cause of various types of disease.

These concepts are difficult to explain in a language other than Shipibo, evidenced by the series of qualifications I gave for the basic words I used above. This points to the ways that as these plant-human practices move through more-than-Shipibo worlds, there are subtle shifts in

¹⁰⁰ *Agua florida* is a commercial cologne used for shamanic purposes throughout South America

meanings that occur as a result of translation and recontextualization. This divergence of meanings can be generative, but shifts in meanings and therefore practices also have consequences for the configurations of power that emerge through these practices and the ways subjectivities are formed in relation to one another.

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

In the previous chapters, I showed that ayahuasca has followed a particular socio-natural trajectory of commodification that has enabled new forms of livelihoods and economic power for Shipibo healers. However, these healers are also limited by the hierarchical relations of extraction and exploitation that define Ucayali's colonial history. In this chapter, I explore the consequences of ayahuasca's commodification on the plant-human practices surrounding the ceremonial consumption of ayahuasca as they are translated into globalized contexts. As the plants, ceremonies, practices, and symbolism associated with ayahuasca (the ayahuasca complex) are taken up internationally, they come into profound relation with bodies that contain various ways of knowing and worlds of being. The relational significance of plants and ceremonies changes as they are translated and transplanted across more-than-human worlds. Meanwhile, the healing and knowledge associated with these powerful plants is increasingly transferred toward the Global North. I argue that as the ayahuasca complex is transplanted across *more-than-Shipibo* ontologies (including capitalist, colonial, materialist, reductionist frameworks) and its components are made exchangeable, the relational power and agency of plants is constricted. At the same time, ayahuasca's newfound relationships in the Global North also co-constitute new types of subjectivities in those worlds, with transformative and healing effects.

Ayahuasca and other teacher plants are recognized as powerful healing agents by Indigenous healers, their clients, and scientists alike (Domínguez-Clavé et al. 2016; Coe and McKenna 2017; Andritzky 1989). Even among non-Indigenous consumers from the Global North, ayahuasca is often viewed as inspirited or agentive (Harris 2017). The curiosity of “psychonauts”—those interested in the psychedelic experience in general—have brought these plants into the public eye and fueled international desire. This has happened in conjunction with a “psychedelic renaissance” that has been happening over the last decade or so in the United States and beyond (Pollan 2018). The ceremonial practices surrounding ayahuasca have been adopted and adapted earnestly by vast numbers of people who consume the brew; even in clinical biomedical settings, the ceremonial and spiritual context is seen as important.¹⁰¹ The phenomenon of ayahuasca tourism in South America, and the export and practice of ayahuasca shamanism to the Global North has been increasing dramatically. Scholars have suggested that tourism itself is a type of ritual that allows the tourist to escape their everyday lives and return transformed by their experience (Graburn 2018). On the other hand, when ritual becomes a type of cultural tourism (even when it does not involve foreign travel), this type of commodification alters the ritual practices themselves, and shift the values and meanings associated with them. As ayahuasca ceremonies are recontextualized and commodified, certain pieces are taken from other contexts, others are transformed or translated, and meanings and relationships change. This does not necessarily replace or erase the original meanings and practices, but these multiple meanings can operate simultaneously or in parallel across more-than-human worlds.

¹⁰¹ E.g. Draulio de Araujo, AYA 2016

Indigenous understandings and practices are constantly evolving; I do not view them as fixed or homogeneous. Shipibo healing practices have shifted throughout colonial history, as mentioned in Chapter 1, and they continue to evolve. Since there are significant urban Shipibo populations in Pucallpa, Lima, and abroad, many who have attended university, married outsiders, or have otherwise assimilated into the mainstream mestizo culture of Peru, the Shipibo healing diaspora has been taken up in myriad more-than-Shipibo contexts both in Peru and globally. The people using and disseminating these practices are Indigenous, mestizo, and foreign; old and young. Shipibo healing practices are performed differently in urban contexts, by youth practitioners, in centers aimed at foreign tourists, and in foreign countries with foreign healers. Rather than try to parse differences between these categories, I focus on the relationships between people and plants as the primary analytic unit to track the consequences of shifting practices as the ayahuasca complex transits different worlds.

In this chapter I examine ayahuasca ceremonies (visionary experience), master plant dieting (acquisition of plant spirit allies), and shamanic singing (acquisition of songs) as three interrelated practices that constitute shamanic power (Langdon 1992) and define the relationships between people and plants in Shipibo healing contexts. These practices have all been taken up in varying degrees by outsiders—foreigners and non-Indigenous Peruvians. I show how commodification and recontextualization of these practices alters the configurations of plant-human relating. As seen in the above story of a ceremony in which I participated, ceremonies are events where ayahuasca is consumed to produce visions and healing is practiced as a collaboration among healers, plants beings, and patients. This healing is performed through the act of shamanic singing, during which it is said that the agency and voice of both the healer and the plant spirit generate the song together. Dieting, called *samá* in Shipibo, is an essential practice for attaining knowledge from plants and establishing relationships with spirit allies. These practices are essential for acquiring shamanic power, which emerges from the relationship between the healer and the plant spirits. As these practices are translated into capitalist, materialist, reductionist frameworks, the resulting relationships are configured in subtly, but sometimes fundamentally, different ways than they are in Shipibo worlds. Namely, plants are constructed as *instrumental* to human purposes in a way that tends to cut off or constrict the agency of plant beings and shifts the locus of power toward the human.

I focus on specific moments in the recontextualization of Shipibo healing practices in order to trace how configurations of power, knowledge, and healing shift as the ayahuasca complex travels. The resulting reconfigurations as these practices move into more-than-Shipibo worlds, I argue, have two broadly-defined and interrelated consequences: the individualization of healing and the humanization of power. I make the case that as Shipibo healing practices are recontextualized into ontologies characterized by materialism and reductionism, there is a shifting of meaning and relations between plants and people that humanizes power, knowledge, and healing while de-animating plant beings. Whereas these qualities are attributed directly to the plants themselves in Shipibo worlds, as Shipibo plants and practices spread within and beyond Peru, they cross into worlds in which healing is increasingly seen as an individual and primarily psychological and material process; and the value of plants is seen more instrumentally, based on their capacity to serve human needs (either for healing or profit). The relational agency of plant spirits (the ability to act in the world as emergent through their relations) is then constricted. Plant-human relations are routed through capitalist and colonial mechanisms of power that have come to define what John Law (2015) calls a *one-world world*. Fitz-Henry has described this constriction of agency as a “flattening” of nonhuman life-worlds: “The result of these processes of translation

is a substantial conceptual narrowing that diminishes sensitivity to culturally diverse notions about how best to relate to the plethora of nonhuman agencies with which we are surrounded” (Fitz-Henry 2017, 5).

Working with outsiders can also constrain the relational power of Shipibo healers in the ceremonial context. However, this is not a one-way process; as outsiders take up Shipibo practices and learn to relate with plants, there is a productive ontological opening that also shifts their understanding of plants, in turn granting plants greater agency within Western contexts, and creating different types of social power for Shipibo healers. While economic power may nominally increase for Shipibo healers, their metadiscursive authority, derived from their unique ability to translate between the world of the plant spirits and the human world (e.g. Briggs 1996), is compromised as outsiders learn these practices and meanings associated with them shift across culturally-defined regimes of value (Appadurai 1986b). Thus, I argue that the nature of these changes is such that even as Shipibo plant-human practices become valued globally, the worlds from which they came are put at risk.

The introduction of this chapter will proceed with a discussion of my conceptualization of translation. The remainder of the chapter is divided into three sections. Section one is about the translation of plant-human healing practices. First, I give some background on Amazonian forms of power. Second, I detail how the role of the healer shifts as ceremonies are commodified and healers become providers of a standardized service. This is related to the fetishization of Indigeneity and authenticity. The standardization that takes place as ceremonies are translated, I argue, limits the agency of both healers and plants in the ceremonial proceedings, and bolsters the power of the consumer socially (but not “shamanically”). The second section is about the individualization of healing. I show that reductionist and materialist frameworks reduce the shamanic authority of the healer in the ceremonial context. Because of Western emphases on the individual with regard to healing, the healer becomes valued primarily as a representative of culture and a provider of a certain setting; they are less valued for their ability to heal or command plant spirits. The third section focuses on the humanization of power and instrumentalization of plants as it pertains to the practice of plant dieting. This section explores how these different systems of power interact with each other. I argue that as Shipibo practices are taken up by outsiders operating from more extractive approaches of relating, plant spirits are constituted as resources. As such, even when plants are acknowledged as agentive, that agency is made to conform to materialist and economic conceptions of power. I describe this as a constriction of plant’s social agency as it becomes routed through capitalist mechanisms.

TRANSLATION ACROSS WORLDS

The influx of outsiders into Shipibo ritual spaces has ushered healing concepts into new languages and worlds. Words associated with healing are appropriated from many languages. Healers are often referred to as *shamans*, or in Spanish, *chamánes*, a word derived from the Sami language and imported from Europe (Eliade 1964). Even Shipibo speakers borrow important words from Quechua, like *ikaro*, referring to the songs associated with ayahuasca. *Ayahuasca* itself is another Quechua word; it is called *oni* in Shipibo. Other Shipibo concepts are translated into Spanish (Castellano), such as *dieta*, a poor substitute for the Shipibo *samá*, which in turn is translated into the English *diet*, with its own fraught connotations completely unrelated to *samá*. The introduction of plants and rituals into outsider’s psyches and bodies gives rise to new songs in new languages, as well as novel pathways of transport for old songs, which are now sung or

played globally, in both ritual and non-ritual contexts. In this chapter, I trace the translation of language and practices to address the transformations of meaning, relations, and identities that occur in transits across worlds.

Translation is happening all the time. Speech is a translational act in which the meaning intended by the speaker of an utterance undergoes a translational step as the words pass through the filter of the listener's lived experience and worldview and map onto a perhaps slightly different set of meanings and values. According to this framework, the meaning from speaker to listener can never be *directly* conferred or confirmed, as language does not always map precisely onto the same concepts, objects, understandings, and relations for any two given people (Benjamin 1996). However, meanings within the same culture or discourse are able to be more or less shared in a way that enables communication mediated through language. Conversely, when the speaker and listener draw from differing discourses, ontologies, or native languages, the translations that occur may be divergent between speaker and listener. This leads some scholars to suggest that languages themselves are constitutive of worlds (Leavitt 2014; Sapir 1921). Framed by Claudia de Lima Costa (2016), these acts of translation occur in the borders or contact zones between worlds:

...when we speak we are always already engaged in translation, both for ourselves as for the other. If speaking already implies translating, and if the translation is an activity of openness to the other (a displacement from one's location), then in such a transaction identity and alterity are inevitably intertwined, making the act of translating a process of continuous dislocation. To translate, therefore, means to be always in transit ('*world*'-travelling, for Lugones) to live in the *entrelugar* (Santiago 1978) in the contact zone (Pratt 1992) or in the border (Anzaldúa 1987). In other words, it means to reside in exile (49).

These worlds generally share certain attributes, but diverge or diffract in others. Marilyn Strathern has described these worlds as partially connected—there is more than one world, but less than two (Strathern 2005; de la Cadena 2015). Marisol de la Cadena argues that meanings or translations across worlds are sometimes incommensurable, and that each meaning is connected to, but also exceeds, the other (2015). An outsider (ethnographer or otherwise), therefore does not have access to the same internal meanings, values, and connections. Partially-connected worlds also continuously make and unmake each other through these connections. Ontological translations across partially connected worlds are laden with power differentials, which help define the terms of an individual's existence (Stengers 2010). Thus, power relations may shift as a result of ontological tensions that occur during transits between worlds.

My approach centers on the translation of practices and meanings. From such a perspective, differences in meanings are not simply different cultural understandings of a singular world, but rather as different worlds that are generated through language and other world-making practice (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018; Escobar 2018). An infinite array of interspecies discursive practices constitute or enact worlds. "Discursive practices" were conceptualized by Foucault to represent a set of practices that bridge the material and symbolic to construct "reality," including language, stories, artwork, media, and ritual (Foucault 1982; Bacchi and Bonham 2014). These practices, which bring a certain world into being, are infused with power-relations that determine the interrelations among worlds, including ontological struggles as worlds vie for their own existence (Escobar 2018).

In positioning herself in relation to "earth beings" (mountains/*tirakuna*), de la Cadena (2015) focused on language and dialogue between her human interlocutors and herself; the practices enacted between her interlocutors and earth beings; and her ethnographic practice in relation to *writing* about earth beings and practices. In my case, I attempt to understand how

relations between plant beings and non-Indigenous outsiders are constructed when outsiders form their own direct relations with these plant beings through practices. I participate in these practices and relations not only as an ethnographer and writer, but also through my own attempt to learn and relate through Indigenous practices. Thus, while I make no claims to understanding the worlds of my interlocutors, I do have my own relationships with plant beings that have been constituted through Shipibo practices and mediated by healers. When outsiders engage in Shipibo practices, I argue, it forms a transformational bridge between worlds, or an ontological opening that enables new connections, tensions, and equivocations. Attending to how these practices are translated across worlds is generative for understanding how power is reconfigured as a result.

Shipibo healing practices derive their social meanings from a variety of discourses that must be attended to in order to understand how certain individuals attain the power to transport these practices into more-than-Shipibo contexts. Viewing Shipibo ritual practices as performances, reveals how the formal and functional elements of the ritual practice take shape in a dialectic relationship with their sociocultural and political-economic contexts. Contextualization is a framework offered by Bauman and Briggs (1990a) for speaking about the construction of meaning and reality as negotiated in a social process between a performer and their audience. The process of decontextualization is important for understanding how discourse is extracted from one community, context, or place, and recontextualized in another (Bauman and Briggs 2003). Before a performance is able to be *decontextualized*, it must first be *entextualized* or made extractable, effectively by turning it into a unit, or “text,” that can be removed from its situated context. The ability to mobilize metadiscursive practices, Bauman and Briggs claim, is central to the entextualization of a performance. The questions of interest are then “what the recontextualized text brings with it from its earlier context(s) and what emergent form, function, and meaning it is given as it is recentered.” (1990a, 75). Sometimes, the emergent forms, stripped of their particularities that link them back to a specific gender, race, place, and time, are then hybridized and reframed as universal, allowing them to be consumed by outsiders and subsumed into European ideologies (Bauman and Briggs 2003, 68).

According to Briggs (1996), relative social power can also be established through differences in access to an array of metadiscursive practices. These are “discursive practices that establish relationships with other discourses, such as those involved in typification, translation, criticism, historicization, and the like” (Briggs 1996, 5). I extend this framing into a political ontology lens that views discursive practices as world-making activities, and metadiscursive practices as capable of drawing connections between worlds. Thus, those who have the ability to link different worlds and world-making practices (e.g. through meta-discursive practices such as hybridization, critique, translation, etc.) are able to wield more metadiscursive power. Shipibo healers occupy such a position as they translate between the worlds of plant spirits and human worlds. Ethnographers occupy such a position when they translate between Indigenous worlds and academic and Western worlds. Such metadiscursive practices, in some way, enable those from a more dominant world to unwittingly reinscribe a totalizing worldview that would subsume other worlds into its fold. People with such authority often occupy privileged positions that enable them to integrate across multiple worlds, and could be considered more “cosmopolitan,” or natives of the hegemonic and globalized one-world world, often less constrained by geopolitical borders.

Part of the project of the ontological turn, and specifically political ontology, has been to recognize, rather than try to smooth over, erase, or explain away differences in ontological understandings. In early anthropology, the prevailing way of understanding difference was to ascribe it to cultural “beliefs,” maintaining the ethnographer’s conviction in a one-world world

(Law 2015). However, this practice reinforced an assumption that the ethnographer, generally maintaining an academic, scientific, Eurocentric, and “objective” position, could understand other cultures better than they could understand themselves. Part of this ethnographic authority was based in their privileged access to other discourses. Ethnographic authority as such has long been troubled by anthropologists (Clifford 1983), though still provides a “catch-22” for ethnographers who aim to ally themselves with other worlds—to “enhance the pluriverse” through making other relational worlds visible (Escobar 2018). Ethnographers who have followed the ontological turn have strived to accomplish several things. On the one hand, they have tried to “provincialize” and turn the gaze back upon the Eurocentric and European assumptions inherent in academic writing (Chakrabarty 2000). On the other hand, they seek to validate and valorize Indigenous worlds, epistemologies, and cultural difference, and respect the right for Indigenous peoples to represent those worlds on their own terms. Choosing to recognize the existence of multiple, overlapping worlds, is as much a political act as it is a moral act.

One way of making other worlds visible is by attending to equivocations (Viveiros de Castro 2004b)—the moments of difference that arise due to divergence between worlds. For instance, when it becomes apparent that there the use of a single word or representation has different referents. For Viveiros de Castro, equivocation is a central aspect of translation. Examining these moments can be especially productive for generating understanding across worlds (de la Cadena 2015). Equivocations can take the form of divergence, when the two referents for a term are entirely different, but in other cases can be diffractive—that is, when the meanings imposed by a singular concept or word are slightly shifted, but may resemble the first more or less (Blaser 2018). Marisol de la Cadena offers a method of controlling equivocations as important for understanding the translation process and the ways meanings become transformed. “Controlling the equivocation means probing the translation process itself to make its onto-epistemic terms explicit, inquiring into how the requirements of these terms may leave behind that which the terms cannot contain, that which does not meet those requirements or exceeds them” (de la Cadena 2015, 4). Thus, equivocations and imperfect translations can provide insight into the ways that meanings and relations are transformed.

By incorporating a multispecies or interspecies perspective, I aim to show how communication and translation happen across species lines, and how more-than-human beings involve themselves in ontological politics. The ontological and multispecies turn have both received criticisms from Indigenous scholars for the exclusion of Indigenous voices and scholarship in favor of Euro-American academics who draw from Indigenous concepts, sometimes without mention (Todd 2016; Watts 2013). Indigenous standpoints are important in understanding more-than-human agencies. As Indigenous scholars including Kim Tallbear (2011) and Zoe Todd (2016) have pointed out, Indigenous ontologies already recognize the animacy and agency of other-than-human actors, including animals, plants, mountains, and climate. Much of the literature in the multispecies turn has focused on Indigenous and other “non-Western” worlds as exemplary of new animisms, providing a contrast to the Western hegemonic paradigm. As a case in point, Shipibo ontologies already recognize the existence of multiple worlds and the animacy of plants and animals. The role of healers or shamans is to mediate between those worlds by enlisting the aid of plant spirits (Favaron and Gonzales 2019). This will be elaborated in the following sections. However, the Shipibo understanding of the multiple worlds is not an exact fit with the academic political ontology conception of multiple worlds and the pluriverse. In some ways, academic frameworks again create a totalizing vision of the pluriverse by subsuming these multiple ontologies under Eurocentric thought (Sundberg 2014; Todd 2016).

4 | 1 TRANSLATIONS OF HEALING PRACTICES

Amazonian forms of power inhere in the spirit world(s). Shipibo healers' shamanic authority is derived from their ability to direct this power through ritual singing. Certain key aspects of the ceremonial proceedings tend to be changed as they are performed for outsiders. Ceremonial proceedings and singing tend to be more regulated. The expectations of outsiders regarding the provision of a service and cultural experience tend to value certain markers of ritual authenticity and standardization that are not reflective of how ceremonies are practiced among the Shipibo when treating community members. These changes reduce the authority of the healer to command the ceremonial space according to the dictates of the plant spirits.

AMAZONIAN FORMS OF POWER & SHAMANIC AUTHORITY

Yoshan¹⁰² is a well-known healer in her sixties at the time of my field work, one of my teachers, and the niece of Papa Bari, Papa Beso, and Papa Meni, though around the same age as the latter. During the interview at her home in Bena Jema, we were positioned again on thin mats on the concrete floor of the larger of the two rooms in the house. The beds in the room were crowded with family members. Neighbors, children, and grandchildren of Yoshan appeared in the doorway to listen for a while to her stories.¹⁰³ I do not know if these were stories she tells often or whether this was the first time they had heard her speak of these things. In the following excerpt I had asked Yoshan how *ikaros* work, the songs used specifically for healing:

Their spirits sing to me. When the plants themselves sing, they do it so I can follow the lyrics. They sing here, close to me, and I have to imitate, to produce the same music. The same spirits say, "sing like this," and I listen and begin to sing. And the same ones decorate me, they put their crowns on me. They adorn me so that I can begin to sing. If you don't have the crown, you are not able to sing. You have to have the crown to sing.¹⁰⁴

Yoshan describes this mimetic process as one way in which to *become* something else. "The ability to mime, and mime well... is the capacity to Other," says Taussig (1993, 19). According to Viveiros de Castro's Amazonian perspectivism¹⁰⁵, this ability is valued as the highest form of understanding, and to occupy the point of view of another (to become the other in a way) also animates this other subjectivity, or gives them "capacities of conscious intentionality and social agency" (Viveiros de Castro 2004a, 267). In this case, by singing with the voices of the plant, Yoshan is able to animate the plant through her own material body. This concept has been described by Viveiros de Castro as an "abduction of agency" (Viveiros de Castro 2004a), by which the human body abducts the agency of the plant to perform healing or harm. The human and plant agencies become entwined to the extent to which it is unclear whose agency is appropriating whose, or whose ends are being served, but most skillfully, it is an appropriation of the plant spirit's power.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Yoshan means 'grandmother' in Shipibo, and is what she is frequently called.

¹⁰³ She is not entirely comfortable speaking in Spanish, so the interview was primarily conducted in Shipibo, with an assistant interpreting from Shipibo into Spanish, which means that this narration event has undergone two sets of translation to appear here, and the words are being passed through multiple voices.

¹⁰⁴ Interview conducted by Laura Dev, Edith Maynas Bardales, and Lucy O'Leary in 2016.

¹⁰⁵ A pan-Amazonian ontology described by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.

¹⁰⁶ The term 'plant spirit' or 'plant spirit master' is often used to refer to the Shipibo *ibo*, which in Spanish is sometimes called the *dueño*, *espíritu*, or *madre* of the plant, translated as its owner/master, spirit, or mother (whether

Plant spirits are said to live in an unchanging spirit realm, and have the capacity to influence the material world and communicate with and occupy the form and perspective of humans. The distinction between the material and spiritual is not cut and dry. Rather, physical, material things, according to Favaron and Gonzales, are manifestations of an underlying spiritual reality (Favaron and Gonzales 2019). Each type of teacher plant has a distinct *ibo* (spirit), though not all plants have the power to heal or teach (Jauregui et al. 2011). This quality has been described to me as distinct from a plant as an individual specimen. The material plant specimens are an expression of, and under the care of the plant's *ibo*, who cares for the entire species. According to Favaron and Gonzalez¹⁰⁷, the medicinal plants act as antennae, transmitting the energy of the spirit world (Favaron and Gonzales 2019).

Likewise, certain types of illnesses may be physical manifestations of a spiritual issue. Health was described to me by one of my interlocutors as encompassing the whole ecosystem, and not limited to physiological concerns.¹⁰⁸ For example, illness or bad luck could be a result of angering the forest spirits for taking too much meat and leaving some to waste. My understanding is that chronic illness can be a result of *susto*, or fright, a spiritual condition that happens when a child experiences a trauma—spiritual or otherwise—and the child's spirit leaves the body slightly. *Mal aire* (Spanish for *bad air* or *evil wind*), on the other hand, can be caused from an encounter with a negative energy, which finds its home in the body—this can lead to illness, often in places where *susto* caused the spirit to retreat. Healing, then, is a process of righting relations with the spirits who are implicated in the cause of the illness, and dispelling the accumulated negative energy. According to Favaron and Gonzalez, “only an Onanya doctor can cure them; speaking, through their medicinal songs, with the owner¹⁰⁹ of the plant, so that it will forgive the human and release their soul” (Favaron and Gonzales 2019, 23 my translation).

Within the healing context, power is a feature that inheres within the spirit realm, and is accessible through intimate knowledge and embodiment of the spirit forms that are made available through the relationship with plants. Voice and song, dieting, and the ingestion of plant medicines, are ways of intentionally coming into relation with plant spirits. Healers are then able to use that knowledge and power for healing. Maestro Metsa described this power as belonging not to the human, but to the plants themselves: “The medicines don't belong to oneself. We, the healers, are only intermediaries. The powers we have, the energetic powers or the knowledge we have about medicine belongs to the medicines, to all kind of plants that we do *dieta* with.” These concepts of power are intricately linked with sound and the performance of song (J. D. Hill 1993). The body is a site for transmission, composition, and performance of song, and voice and the breath are seen as capable of imbuing the material body with the power from the spirit realm. Sung words in ceremonial contexts have ritual power—the ability to effect spiritual outcomes, which in turn have material consequences. The onanya is ideally, then, a conduit of the plant spirit's energy through their song. This conduit or channel is called the *kano* in Shipibo (Favaron and Gonzales 2019).

Plant spirits each hold their own knowledges and powers. If a human properly prepares the body through dieting (*samá*—explained more in section two) and develops a relationship with the plant spirits, the plant spirits can be enlisted as teachers that share their knowledge and power with

male or female).

¹⁰⁷ Astrith Gonzalez is a Shipibo academic and artist from Ucayali, married to Pedro Favaron, an academic from Lima. The two of them have insider perspective on Shipibo worldviews that I refer to frequently in elaborating Shipibo concepts.

¹⁰⁸ Ranin, a member of Maestro Metsa's family described it this way.

¹⁰⁹ 'Owner' here refers to the 'ibo' or 'plant spirit'.

the dieter. Such knowledge is often described as having the form of physical objects that are only visible while in an altered state. Yoshan, for example, referred to a crown, which plant spirits placed on her head during ceremony (in visions), conferring the knowledge and songs contained within the plant that are necessary to cure illnesses. The bodily ornaments Yoshan described can be seen as manifestations or representations of knowledge, which are incorporated into the body through adornment.

Cecilia McCallum similarly describes Cashinaua¹¹⁰ identification with the body as the accumulation and representation of both material and spiritual knowledge (McCallum 1996). According to McCallum, all knowledge is viewed as embodied, and the body is seen as constructed by others (both human and non-human) in a social process, through the transfer of knowledge. The full “Cashinaua body,” is thus a web of connections between exterior matter, speech, and knowledge in the body, as well as the manifestation of that knowledge expressed externally as action (i.e. singing). This is similar to how Yoshan, Papa Meni, and others describe the knowledge gained from dieting; a diet and associated plant knowledges become a more or less permanent part of the dieter’s body and identity, manifested in a physical representation during visions (i.e. the crown). For example, Papa Bari’s son, an onanya who specializes in massage, told me that the plant spirits had come during diets and placed rings on his fingers that gave him the knowledge of how to perform massage.

Shipibo onanya use plants for both their spiritual and material aspects (Tournon 1990). Certain plants, the *rao* plants, are the master plants with their own ibo (spirits), as well as material or physiological effects. Plants with stronger physiological effects (toxicity, psychoactivity, or behavior modification), or physical presence (e.g. large trees) are generally considered to have more powerful ibo (Tournon 1990). The *rao* plants and their ibo are neither inherently good nor inherently bad. Rather, they are their own beings and can be a source of power and knowledge for either healing or causing harm (*daño*) (Favaron and Gonzales 2019). Onanya can ally themselves with the spirits of certain plants and animals to aid them with healing, but this requires strength of character, and purity of thought (*ponté shinanya*) on the part of the healer. Using plants without observing the proper restrictions can result in illness or even death (Favaron and Gonzales 2019). However, onanya also learn to protect themselves from shamanic attacks and to reciprocate such attacks. Without such knowledge, some say that an onanya is considered weak and vulnerable (Freedman 2014). Thus, both healing and harm must be considered part of the onanya’s repertoire.

Accordingly, the locus of power is within the spirit world(s). When an onanya attempts to appropriate such power for themselves, they run the risk of becoming “crooked” or *brujos*. In such cases, they are said to have become dominated (*dominado*) by the negative energy of the plants (*shitana*), instead of dominating the plants through having straightness of mind (*ponté shinanya*). The purpose of the dieting period is to establish a straight mind in order to seduce, domesticate, or dominate the plant spirit in order to borrow or channel that energy through the human body for healing. There are different types of power in operation in this relational practice. The onanya dominates through their intention, but the power comes from the spirit world through the *kano* (channel).¹¹¹ A young mestizo healer explained the *kano* to me using a metaphor of a pipe. The healer is like the water pipe, or hose, she said, and the water comes from the spirit world. “When you sing *ikaros*, you open your mouth and focus your thoughts, and the songs just come out.”

¹¹⁰ Also called Kaxinaua or Huni Kuin, another Panoan group (same language group as the Shipibo).

¹¹¹ Kano refers to the connection or channel with the spirit world, but also sometimes to small river channels or streams.

RITUAL RIGIDITY & THE PERFORMANCE OF TRADITION

Walking around the streets of Iquitos, Peru can be exhausting. It is not just the cloying heat of the river town, where the Amazon, Ucayali, and Napo Rivers converge, but the steady stream of locals that approach me. A typical scenario: a young mestizo man, eyeing me, rises from his seated position as I approach, and synchronizes his pace with mine to walk next to me. “You like ayahuasca?” he asks me in English—my whiteness an indication that I am not from here, that I am a foreigner, and that I am likely here because of these plants that have become objects of desire. I already know how the interaction will play out: if I outright ignore him or ask him to leave me alone, he will act offended and likely keep following me. If I tell him that I already have a shaman, he will try to take me somewhere better. If I tell him I am going to the Center, he will exclaim in a surprised voice: “You’re going there? So expensive! I’ll take you to a better place that’s cheaper,” and then will try to sell me other things—T-shirts, pipes, jewelry, or trips to “the jungle.” This strategy must be effective—the many foreigners that flock to the central areas of Iquitos only stay there for a few days at a time before they are whisked off to a forest retreat with a local “shaman” or to one of the 100 or so ayahuasca centers in the area. Many foreigners—particularly backpackers in the South American circuit—come to Iquitos without a particular retreat center in mind, but have heard of ayahuasca and are interested in trying it.

Dan,¹¹² a tall white man in his thirties who I interviewed at his apartment in California, told me of his first ayahuasca experience that had played out in such a way:

I spent a month enjoying Peru—went to Machu Picchu and all, and then found myself in the jungle—in Iquitos. People were talking about ayahuasca. I felt interested but ambivalent. I was afraid of being robbed on the medicine or something like that. I asked for a female shaman from some of the locals. They brought me to a woman a few hours downriver in a smaller *pueblo*.¹¹³

Dan, who now facilitates his own ceremonies in California, at the time was an ayahuasca tourist. However, many people do not like to think of themselves as ayahuasca tourists. The Center’s website, for example, specifies explicitly that their guests are not tourists, but rather are seeking deep healing from a traditional healing system and a sacred medicine. “The word ‘tourism’ stigmatizes both the healing work we carry out and our guests, who certainly do not come to the [Center] for recreation or a holiday.”¹¹⁴ Yet most foreigners have traveled a great distance to have a transformative and cultural experience that is outside of their usual norms. This is precisely how Graburn defines tourism, as its own type of secular ritual that offers a transformative cultural experience (2018, 17).

Dan’s statement also points to an interesting gender dynamic. Female healers tend to be seen as “safer” by foreigners, particularly women, as there have been a large number of reported cases of sexual assault by male healers in South America. Because of this, there has been an increasing demand for women healers (Herbert 2010). While not uncommon or taboo for women to act as healers of some sort, male healers are far more common among the Shipibo. Indeed, the Center’s owner told me that they also prefer to employ female healers; he found them to be more trustworthy, as well as reducing the risk of sexual assault incidences. However, they now employ

¹¹² Name changed

¹¹³ Interview by Laura Dev in 2019

¹¹⁴ 2019—Name changed

both men and women as healers because they are otherwise not able to fill their demand. The greater value placed on female healers has encouraged many women in shamanic families to learn healing practices. In Yoshan's case, this has enabled her to become the primary provider for her extended family, even after the death of her husband.

The Center is located in a forested area an hour-long boat ride away from Iquitos. Locals from the tiny nearby village work for the center as guards, and are posted in watchtowers around the property. The grounds were designed by permaculture specialists, and there is a compound of simple but sturdy wooden buildings connected by forested paths, which houses upwards of thirty foreigners from around the world at any given time: Australian, Canadian, Italian, Spanish, Danish, English, and by far the greatest number from the United States. Every few days, as the sun sets, the visitors gather in a large, round wooden maloka (ceremonial building) with mesh screens and a thatched roof. On this day, I have come early to the maloka before the ceremony to participate in a relaxing yoga class taught by a young English woman. Afterwards, we each take our designated places in the circle, sitting or lying on thick padded mattresses that line the perimeter of the open room. Two white Americans, a man and woman in their thirties, are the facilitators of the group. The man wears a brimmed hat and smokes a pipe of mapacho outside the door of the maloka as the participants file in. The woman wears a necklace made from a large, lacquered cross-section of an ayahuasca vine. A bucket, a bottle of perfume, and a roll of toilet paper have been placed at the head of each mat.

The ceremony begins with one of the facilitators announcing in English that the maestros are entering. Several Shipibo healers, men and women, file in and take their places on mattresses in the center of the room—they are far from their home communities further south along the Ucayali river, closer to Pucallpa, but stay in residence at the Center for months at a time, performing healing for the steady stream of visitors that come to the place to receive treatments. None of them speak English, and Spanish is their second language. Therefore, most interactions between the healers and the foreign participants are mediated and translated through the facilitators. Over our twelve-day stay, the whole group will participate in seven ceremonies. One of the healers whispers a melodic *ikaro*¹¹⁵ into the bottle of ayahuasca before the participants are called up one by one to drink the brew served by the facilitators in a small glass. Then each of the maestros and facilitators drink a small amount of the bitter liquid themselves and the candles are snuffed.

After a period of rest, the healers sing a short opening *ikaro* before each of them are led to different parts of the circle to sit in front of a foreigner and sing. Because there are twenty-five participants in the room, each of the healers must sing twenty-five *ikaros* that night to each person in turn. Each *ikaro* lasts between five and fifteen minutes and is followed by a *sopla* from the healer with a custom blend of perfume that the Center prepares. Participants are required to sit up while the healers sing to them (if they are able), but then often lie back down with their eyes closed during the rest of the ceremony. Sounds of retching, belching, moaning, and crying can be heard intermittently from the participants, punctuating the interwoven sounds of the healers' *ikaros*. A young American man who is a work-trade volunteer at the Center is stationed in a chair by the door, and is there to guide participants to the rest room and back to their mats, and also to empty the buckets after people vomit. This part of the ceremony can last between three and five hours, before the healers return to their mattresses in the center of the circle and the room becomes quiet apart from the human noises of the participants. At this time of night, from the darkness, sometimes

¹¹⁵ Also called a *sopla* - to blow

snoring can be heard, sometimes weeping, or eruptions of contagious laughter that spreads among the group. Eventually, one of the facilitators announces the end of the ceremony. Over time, each of the participants will gather their things and walk back to their private huts, sometimes meeting up with a friend to chat about their evening's experience before retiring, or sometimes sleeping in the maloka until breakfast time.

During their stay at the Center, participants are treated to healthy gourmet food not contraindicated in the use of ayahuasca, as well as consultation with the healers, treatments with Shipibo plant remedies, massages, flower baths, steam baths, and regular integration circles where they are able to talk about their experiences with the facilitators and the other participants. The Center's website claims that their retreats offer participants acceleration of their "learning, personal growth, healing, spiritual awakening, and integrative process" by complementing traditional Shipibo healing with "progressive therapeutic and Eastern psycho-spiritual practices to ensure effective and long-lasting integration. These healing retreats are intense," the website warns, "typically with deep insights and profound restoration taking place in a short amount of time." This mixing of spiritual traditions (Eastern, Western, Amazonian) is what I describe as "new age" practices that use elements from various lineages or traditions, (e.g. yoga and therapy along with Shipibo healing practices) to offer a ritual experience for the outsiders that is both familiar and exotic, recognizable as spiritual by the Western consumer. Dawson describes this phenomenon as the retraditionalization of ayahuasca, which takes place as ceremonial forms and traditional practices are reconfigured and recast with new meanings and values (Dawson 2017). Furthermore, he argues that new traditions and meanings are also invented that serve to make such practices more legible or commensurable with contemporary Western worldviews and values, such as the opening and closing announcements to mark the beginning and end of the ceremony. These can happen through hybridizations (e.g. Chapter 1) or through other emergent forms.

Both Yoshan's ceremony, described in the opening vignette, and the ceremony at the Center are contemporary manifestations of the Shipibo healing diaspora that has spread throughout the world. They each rely on Shipibo ritual forms to carry out the ceremony. However, the performance of Shipibo practices take on a different character in each case. It would be inaccurate to contrast the two under the assumption that one was more "traditional," just as it would be unfair to view the Shipibo healing tradition as singular or homogeneous. Shipibo healing practices vary among different healers, giving each a distinct personal style. The ritual form and structure are highly fluid, able to adapt to the needs of a given situation or audience. Shipibo healing rituals are continually being revised in collaboration with new patients. However, the types of shifts in practices that often take place as ceremonies are marketed and accommodated for more-than-Shipibo contexts are more dramatic in Western-run retreat centers than they typically are in communities. This illustrates the way that outsiders are increasingly defining the frame of operation of Shipibo healing practices (Freedman 2014), as I discussed in Chapter 1.

"Shipibo ceremonies are not a very ritualistic style," Papa Pete¹¹⁶ said to me once, "they are functional—about doing what needs to be done, not about fulfilling certain ritual rules." Outsiders who initially come to Ucayali to drink ayahuasca are often surprised about this aspect of the Shipibo style and I have heard people remark of certain healers that they "didn't even close the ceremony," and they take the healer's casual approach to ceremony as an indication that he or she is not serious. Perhaps such expectations arise from their experiences at places like the Center. From what I understand, the ritual elements of the Shipibo practice are almost entirely inside the

¹¹⁶ A Canadian healer who studied with Papa Beso for many years and now has his own international clientele.

ikaros and are based on the relationship between the healer and the plant spirits—two elements that are difficult to translate for those that do not speak Shipibo or know how to relate with plant beings.

Individuals who participate in ayahuasca ceremonies at places like the Center have certain expectations that each person in attendance will receive approximately the same services. Thus, the Center over the years has developed their ceremonial structure such that each participant should be sung to by each of the maestros. According to the Center's owner, Thomas,¹¹⁷ when the ceremonies were held in a less structured way, the maestros would sing to participants according to where they felt called to go by the plant spirits and who needed healing in that moment. However, this became a problem because it incited a sense of unfairness among the participants—they felt that if they were all paying the same amount, they should each get the same amount of attention from the healers.

The order imposed on the ceremony by the Center's administrators emphasizes certain aspects of the ritual form and de-emphasizes others. It also constrains the actions of the healers and participants alike to ensure that each participant receives equal treatment and is not disruptive to others' experiences. However, I argue that these constraints limit the entwined agency of the plant spirits and healers in their authority to command the ceremonial proceedings. Furthermore, it also limits the participants from engaging in important relation-forming practices with plants, like singing. Maestro Bene, an elder healer who worked at the Center, described this as a matter of liberty. He was not able to do his job as well, "because there is no freedom, everything is very disciplined, we don't have the liberty to sing and give opportunity to sing. When the ceremony is over there is silence and no one has freedom to sing."¹¹⁸ Maestro Bene was speaking of both the healers and the patients' freedom to sing. This ordering and control of singing goes against what healers like Yoshan have told me, that one *must* sing when drinking ayahuasca in order to take control of the *mareación* (the effects of ayahuasca). Similarly, before I started singing, on my first trip to Peru when I sat in ceremony with Maestra Beka and Biri (Chapter 1), Biri stressed to me that it was *urgent* that I start singing. Otherwise the experience of the ayahuasca can overcome a person.

In ceremonies with Yoshan or Papa Meni, there are often many people singing different ikaros at once. When the energies of the plants are properly directed, these ikaros weave together in a tapestry of sound that is not disharmonious. However, in places like the Center, the participants are not encouraged to sing themselves because it could disrupt the experiences of the other participants, and there are already six healers or so singing at the same time. In places like Papa Meni's house, one person's singing sometimes *does* disrupt the other participants, or even Papa Meni. Badly-performed singing (i.e. not connected with the plant energies), no matter how lovely by Western values, can lead to *choques* (clashes of energy)¹¹⁹ when one is extra sensitive under the effects of the plants. Never, though, have I witnessed Papa Meni or Yoshan tell someone to stop singing. It is usually another participant that will intervene if at all. Emma, my Dutch friend who lives at Papa Meni's house, has told me that this is part of the learning process.

¹¹⁷ Name changed.

¹¹⁸ The interview with Maestro Bene was conducted in Spanish in 2015 by Dena Sharrock and Paul Roberts, and was translated by Lilly Hollister.

¹¹⁹ *Choque*, a Spanish word, translates to *clash*—used to describe when something does not mix well with the energy of ayahuasca or other plant spirits, and can instead cause difficulties.

On the other hand, long periods of silence are also not tolerated well by foreigners. When speaking with Dan about how the ceremonies he facilitates in California with Shipibo healers were different compared with the Shipibo ceremonies in Ucayali, he emphasized that the ceremonies had to be more rigid in the United States:

They are less concerned about upholding certain things in Peru. Here [in California] people wanted to have intention circles and sharing circles, certain things. We needed to do that. They didn't grow up with a certain tradition and we needed to be fastidious about certain details of the ceremony. In Shipibo tribes, they don't mind long periods of silence. It can be that we drink medicine and no one sings in an hour and a half. Here, people had better be singing after half an hour—here [the participants] can't deal with that. After only a 5 minute silent period you can feel the energy in the room filled with anxiety. ... Ceremonies had to be more orchestrated.¹²⁰

For Dan, expectations from his American clients created tensions with the Shipibo healer he worked with, Maestro Sani, who did not change his usual practices to accommodate these expectations:

Sani did what he always did. If a long period went by, I would encourage him to sing, or I would sing or a guest musician would. For the maestro to be laying down, and not seated, was a problem—if he wasn't seen as aware or awake. *I* needed to be alert—I had to wake him up if he was snoring too much. He didn't care, so I had to care *extra* about it. I talked to him about it, and he denied that he was sleeping and just didn't care.

While Dan's opinion of Sani's care may or may not represent Sani's experience, it seems to reflect the exercise of a certain type of authority among the older generation of Shipibo healers that I have also witnessed (especially among male healers). Apart from the *ikaros* and essential functional elements (like the *sopla*), healers do not “put on a show” for the benefit of the *experience* of the participants; they are orchestrating a ceremony that is meant to appease the spirits in order to *heal* the patients. Furthermore, the ceremonies are performed late at night, and healers may sing for between two and six hours. Most of them like to lie down when they are not actively singing, and have periods of rest during the ceremony. As seen in Dan's quotes, this may conflict with Western participants' conceptions of the service they are paying for—a meaningful equivocation.

Some Shipibo healers do more translational work to appease the concerns of outsiders, acquiring certain performative gestures. This can sometimes involve donning a traditional Shipibo style of dress, making announcements, or working with an English-speaking person to help facilitate, guide, and manage the outsiders' experiences and expectations. When Maestro Bene, for example, was asked if he had adopted practices he learned while employed at the Center, he said:

Always...well, the reality of the customs of foreigners has always been interesting for me to learn at the Center. ... Because there are many maestros who, like me—we know how to drink ayahuasca, but we have never worked in that kind of center—so I have always had special interest in looking at things, how they are operating. Always I am trying to understand the reality of the customs of the countries that the foreigners come from. So, I have to do things just the same way as they do in the Center. But, in other ways it is very different [laughs].

The healers I write about rely on performing ceremonies for foreigners as their livelihood. Although healing is ostensibly the main function of these rituals, for Shipibo healers the function has often become to generate income or reputation by performing culture and tradition for outsiders. In ritual performances, the audience's evaluations of the healer's competency can be an important aspect of the performance's meaning (Bauman 1975), particularly when livelihoods are

¹²⁰ Interview conducted in 2019 by Laura Dev in California.

at stake. Therefore, healers may shift their practices or performances to suit the needs of the participants by drawing from Western discourses that signal “tradition.” The evaluative criteria for Western participants, for example, may include the healer’s ability to offer a particular kind of psychedelic experience in addition to a cultural or traditional experience.

The Center is able to produce a higher-value commodity according to market standards than many Shipibo healers could produce on their own (see Chapter 3). Since it is run by foreigners, the Center has cultural, geographic, social, and monetary capital that enable them to hire English-speaking facilitators from the Global North and accommodate “first world” expectations for food, cleanliness, and comfort. This is enhanced by their social and metadiscursive power to translate across worlds and discourses, bringing together elements from Shipibo healing traditions, Eastern spiritual practices, and Western psychology. Such hybridizations are part of the decontextualization and recontextualization of Shipibo practices that render them more universally consumable. The ceremony at the Center exemplifies subtle and yet important shifts in practices, meanings, and relations, as plants and plant spirits are recontextualized. These shifts, I argue, serve to reduce the power of both plant spirits and healers to command the ceremonial proceedings, and shift power toward foreign consumers.

TROUBLING IDEAS OF TRADITION & AUTHENTICITY

Maestro Metsa is a charismatic man who has embraced an urban lifestyle, living in a Shipibo area of Lima and working as a private investigator. He wears a large watch, leather shoes, and a polo shirt, his thick black hair cut short on the sides. He rides a motorcycle and has a wife and an eight-year old son. In Lima, he also works part time as a traditional healer— his business card says he specializes in “*sanación tradicional*.” His clients include other Shipibos, Limeñan mestizos, and foreigners. For foreigners wishing for more intensive healing, he brings them to his mother’s home in a suburb of Pucallpa, where he and other members of family have been building a maloka. Many of his immediate family members also work as healers, including his father, stepfather, uncle, and brother. The expansions of the family’s compound were in part made possible by the groups of foreigners that Dan used to bring down to Pucallpa from California before he stopped working with Metsa in favor of his uncle, Sani. According to Dan, this rupture was in part because:

I really connected with Sani, but liked Metsa’s power and voice a lot more. After time I started to see that Sani seemed more authentic, had more humility, less shiny businessman shoes and cologne and such. Sani was more sporty, going to the jungle and getting plants.

In Dan’s quote we can see the way that outsider images of authenticity have material impacts on Shipibo practices and livelihoods.

Authenticity itself is a questionable distinction, even though the perception of Indigenous authenticity is part of the appeal of these ceremonies for outsiders (Peruvians and foreigners alike). Some scholars have argued that the idea of authenticity itself is born out of modern desire (Bendix 1997). Narratives of authenticity circulate among participants, facilitators, and Shipibo healers themselves, and are often perpetuated as marketing tools by ayahuasca centers and retreat facilitators. One such advertisement from an Australian facilitator’s Instagram post reads: “This tribe ...will teach you a tradition that is thousands of years old. Sitting in these ceremonies...is like going back in time.” She and her partner facilitate groups from Australia to do diets with a Shipibo healer outside of Pucallpa, and also now hold their own retreats in Australia.

In contrast, there is some evidence that ayahuasca rituals (at least in their present form) have only been adopted more recently among the Shipibo because of demand from outsiders for healing services (see Chapter 1) (Brabec de Mori 2011a; Gow 1996). Ethnomusicologist Bernd Brabec de Mori (2011a), for example, claims that many pervasive ideas about Shipibo culture and tradition, particularly dealing with healing ceremonies, were constructed only recently, in response to questions by ethnographers and the desires of tourists. “Everybody wins if the ‘tradition’ is as modern as possible,” says Brabec de Mori (2012b, 275). This is in line with Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1983) claim that many so-called traditions are actually recent inventions, often occurring during periods of social change to establish social cohesion of communities. Tradition is defined by Paul Ricoeur as “the communal act of repetition, which is at the same time a new founding act and a recommencement of what has already been inaugurated” (Ricoeur 1980, 185). Shipibo healing traditions are continually coming into being through repetition, contextualization, and recontextualization of practices. Aparecida Vilaça (2007) proposes that for Amerindians, tradition inheres more in flexible material and bodily practices, rather than as a set of beliefs or values. This is in contrast to notions of tradition that see it as fixed or invariant throughout time (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Indigenous scholars such as Haunani-Kay Trask (1991b) take exception to the idea that non-Indigenous anthropologists should declare Indigenous cultural forms as “invented” and therefore not “traditional”, critiquing white scholars who do so as exercising cultural imperialism and reinforcing hegemony. This can be done either by imposing meaning and value onto Indigenous cultural forms or by taking it away (Briggs 1996). The idea that Indigenous practices and traditions should be static in order to be considered “traditional” constitutes what Anishinaabe scholar John Borrows calls “false tradition” (Borrows 2016, 3), which serves to disempower Indigenous peoples by excluding them from cultural self-determination. Market values of Indigenous goods and practices are often based on their fulfillment of non-Indigenous expectations of cultural purity and Indigenous authenticity (Meyer and Royer 2001). These expectations depend on their distance from European likenesses, due to the romanticized and essentializing ideals that these cultures exist in a form untouched by European influence. However, they also must not seem repugnant to Western aesthetic and moral sensibilities (Povinelli 2002). This phenomenon has been termed *imperialist nostalgia*—a longing and desire for a past that has already been destroyed by European imperialism, that is often projected onto Indigenous peoples (Rosaldo 1989).

Imperialist nostalgia manifests in myriad ways, and is implicit in many aspects of Indigenous-outsider relations, including the sale of Indigenous healing ceremonies to outsiders (Taussig 1987). These external valuations mediate the Indigenous person or group’s ability to access capital and aid based on their cultural identity, which also result in what various scholars have described as “performances” of indigeneity (Tsing 2007). Unconsciously or consciously playing into these roles on either side can serve to reinscribe hierarchies of coloniality and position the outsiders as “saviors” of the needy Indigenous person or group, essentially reenacting colonial missionary relationships. Indigenous scholars have spoken out against such cultural commodification. For example, Haunani-Kay Trask’s (1991a) article on tourism in her homeland of Hawaii likens the commodification of the hula and other Hawaiian cultural forms to prostitution. The epigraph reads: “Burdened with commodification of our culture and exploitation of our people, Hawaiians exist in an occupied country whose hostage people are forced to witness—and, for many, to participate in—our own collective humiliation as tourist artifacts for the First World” (Trask 1991a, 22). However, this perspective often exists alongside more welcoming perspectives on tourism, often even within the same person or community. For many Shipibo healers and others

that I spoke to about the issue seemed to believe that outsider interest in their healing practices was positive for Shipibo people, as the elevated value of their skills and practices provided by the international community gave them increased opportunities and recognition.

The invocation of “tradition” must be seen as political, whether it is used by Indigenous practitioners to legitimate their cultural and territorial claims, scholars and anthropologists to assert their academic authority, or outsiders practicing Indigenous ceremonial forms to assert the legitimacy and value of their practices. I sidestep the debate about the legitimacy and historicity of Shipibo tradition by showing how different claims to “tradition” and “authenticity” are *used* politically, and how they are entangled in colonial histories. Shipibo healing ceremonies are simultaneously part of the social reproduction of Shipibo tradition, and also of the production of ritual as a global commodity. These practices are imbued with tradition, while also representing an emergence of new cultural forms (Bauman 1975) and new types of relations between plants and people as they are decontextualized and recontextualized in novel settings. The contextualization of Shipibo ceremonies is negotiated among the healer, the plant spirits, and the patient-participants, and I suggest that the apparent fabrication of tradition can be viewed as a transformation of a living cultural form that inevitably takes place during the process of decontextualization and recontextualization. I further argue that outsiders’ expectations regarding authenticity can serve to limit the ability of the onanya to hybridize or modernize their practices, but can also create emergent practices and traditions (Dawson 2017).

4 | 2 THE INDIVIDUALIZATION OF HEALING

In this section I describe the ways in which Shipibo ayahuasca ceremonies are translated for outsiders in a way that results in a shifting of power away from plant spirits and onanya and toward the consumers of ayahuasca. First, there is a reification of healers and plant spirits that diminishes the complexity of the relational practices that healers must negotiate. Second, ceremonies performed for outsiders involve the patients also consuming ayahuasca, not just the healer. I broadly define these changes as reflective of the individualization of healing. Materialist and reductionist notions of healing shift the locus of healing from being negotiated between the healer and the spirit world toward something that occurs as a result of the individual consumer’s psycho-somatic and physiological healing experience.

MATERIALISM & THE SUBVERSION OF SHAMANIC AUTHORITY

Maestro Metsa was one of the first healers I met when beginning my field work. A friend from California had put me in contact with him on Facebook, and I have become close with his family as well. On that first visit, he spoke eloquently to me about Shipibo healing practices.

The songs, the *ikaros*, are not an invention of the Maestro; the songs are the medicine’s channels. Whatever comes to mind, one does; I can perceive some aspects of your inner being. Then, I start to do the job. ...The *ikaros* come. The *ikaros* present themselves from one moment to the next...Based on that, one sings and sings, because there are many types of *ikaros* for different kinds of diseases; there is not one *ikaro* only. An *ikaro* to cheer up the person ... an *ikaro* to clean the negative energies in the stomach, an *ikaro* to clean the negative energy that generally accumulates...as people are sensitive, they receive the good and the bad [energies], because the world is full of energies, a lot of energies. Then [the Maestro] channels the spirits, and depending

on how one sees the visions, the treatment is performed.

In an ayahuasca ceremony, when a Shipibo onanya uses their relationship with plant spirits (ibo) to sing *ikaros*, he or she draws on past performances of healing ceremonies to substantiate the power and existence of the ibo. Thus, the subjectivities and power of the ibo and the onanya (specialists in communicating with ibo) are co-constituted. These ibo pertain not primarily to ayahuasca, but to a suite of teacher plants and animals that onanya draw on for healing—each onanya has their own group of ibo that they are able to channel and control based on the plants they have dieted. *Ikaros* performed by a skilled onanya draw on the healing power and knowledge of the ibo to heal the patient's spirit from whatever they are suffering. Thus, at the same time, the healer and patient subjectivities also co-arise. The healing is enacted by both the onanya and the ibo in collaboration with the body/spirit of their patient through the *ikaros*. The authority of the onanya is derived from their ability to personify the ibo, translating their voices through song to enact transformation of the spiritual and material world—healing.

Outsiders are often limited in their understanding of the spiritual aspects of the healing process. According to Favaron and Gonzales:

Many of the foreign scholars who come to investigate the traditional medicine of the Amazonian peoples do so with a materialistic vision that prevents them from accessing these suprasensible dimensions. Their understanding of the phenomena studied is thus very partial and peripheral. Failing to go deeper, they understand little and come to wrong conclusions (2019, 22).

Although the average outsider participating in a Shipibo-style ayahuasca ceremony likely understands very little of the healing process, the Center tries to teach their participants some of the Shipibo cosmology. Their website's educational content about *ikaros* translates Shipibo concepts into new age rhetoric about energy work and vibrational sound healing:

The main approach of the Onanya to remove negative energies is energy medicine that comes in the form of song—*ikaros*. Sound is a form of energy frequency (vibration) through which communication and healing can take place....The Onanya explain that all plants have their own songs and these songs, the *ikaros*, are taught to the healer during *dietas* ... to receive the healing energy and teachings of the plants. Each different master/teacher plant possesses songs that are given to the apprentice [dieter]. ...These healing *ikaros*—*puro sonido* (pure sound) from the plants—form the backbone of the energy work during ceremonies.

While this content is fairly high-quality educational material, I would like to draw attention to one part of this translation of Shipibo healing practices: the function of *ikaros* in the above description is justified by a reference to sound vibrations. This appears to be an effort to explain the healing effects of *ikaros* from a materialist perspective. While this description may not be wrong, it also reveals an equivocation. I have never heard a Shipibo healer mention sound vibrations in this way, nor used it to describe how the *ikaros* work to heal. They nearly always describe sound as powerful because it connects to the spirit world and the energies of the spirits, not because it has a vibrational frequency and thus a material basis. Though these two conceptions overlap, they also both mutually exceed the other in what Blaser (2018) calls a diffractive equivocation—the two meanings do not directly superimpose upon each other.

Singling out a materialist phrasing in a paragraph that references plant spirits may seem to be minor. However, this points to another equivocation based on how materialist frameworks tend to treat the plant-human connection as a material connection achieved by consuming ayahuasca.¹²¹

¹²¹ I myself made a similar materialist argument in Chapter 3, when I talked about physiological resistances.

From this materialist perspective, the healing received from Shipibo ceremonies is seen as arising primarily from an individual's physiological response to the chemical properties in ayahuasca.¹²² Thus, it has become standard practice for outsiders to drink ayahuasca during the ceremonies. In Shipibo contexts, however, it is rare for anyone other than an onanya or apprentice to drink ayahuasca—the world of plant spirits is considered dangerous, and the purview of the onanya only. This is still how healing ceremonies are performed on Shipibo patients, as we saw with Rawa's ceremony in the opening scene of the Introduction of this dissertation.

Despite the fairly high-quality educational content available to participants at places like the Center, most of what circulates about Shipibo culture and cosmology travels among participants and facilitators in fragmented and romanticized versions of Shipibo culture, which imagine ayahuasca to be a central feature of a spiritually content traditional society (Sharrock 2018).

Maestro Bene, the elder healer who used to work at the Center, when asked whether local people ever drink ayahuasca as patients, said: "No. They don't drink...never. It is not our custom. The *maestro* always drinks, not the patient. The ayahuasca tells us what remedies they need, and then the next day we give them those medicines to take." In this context, patients generally sit in the ceremony without drinking ayahuasca, and may take home extracts of plant barks, for example, to drink or bathe in, which often require a type of diet as well—possibly fasting part of the day or avoiding certain foods when taking the remedy. These types of remedies can be administered also by a *raomis*, another type of healing professional who specializes in plant remedies, similar to an herbalist. There is a large suite of healing plants used by the raomis. On the other hand, healing involving *ibo*, with ceremonies, ayahuasca, and *ikaros*, are only done by an onanya because average people do not have the proper training/relations to control such powerful plants or heal using *ikaros*.

When further pressed as to why foreigners always drink ayahuasca, Maestro Bene, perplexed, exclaimed:

I don't know! The first time I saw it was at the Center. They drink a lot [of ayahuasca]. And sometimes with their sickness the *mareación* hits them very strongly and causes a *choque*. Here [in the community], we don't give the patients [ayahuasca] to drink. It causes a strong *choque*. As the maestro we can see what [the illness] is, where it comes from, and why. And based on this we give the treatment.

Maestro Bene maintains that in his professional opinion it is not always appropriate, and can actually be harmful for an unprepared patient to drink ayahuasca. Other healers I interviewed, like Maestro Sani, differed on this issue, saying that the patient drinking actually made it easier to perform healing on them because the patient could then be more attuned to the process. However, he cautioned that any plant has both its light and dark sides, and that it takes skill and intention to dominate the dark sides of the plants.

When the patient also drinks ayahuasca and learns certain aspects of Shipibo healing practices, the distinct roles of the healer and patient are blurred. However, these effects manifest differently in Western-run centers compared with Indigenous-run centers in Shipibo communities. In the former context, one outcome of this is that the healer's role can be reconfigured as provisioning a service instead of as commanding spirits. At the Center, for example, the healers

¹²² These are often reduced to the chemical effects of the N,N-dimethyl-tryptamine (DMT) in the chakruna vine, activated by the caapi's inhibition of the mono-amine-oxidase enzymes (MAOi), thus making the DMT bio-available.

are paid employees that conform to the ceremonial structure dictated by the Center's protocols. In Shipibo communities, on the other hand, outsiders who drink ayahuasca are treated as a combination between apprentice/student and patient. The onanya performs healing on them while also teaching them about how to navigate the ayahuasca experience and the plant worlds through diets and singing. This is because there are certain things that one must learn in order to safely navigate the ayahuasca experience. These relationships are addressed further later in this chapter.

In Shipibo contexts the distance upheld between the Shipibo patient and the world of the plant spirits allows the onanya to occupy a place of power because the onanya is necessary to connect the two worlds. This position is seen as quite dangerous—for both the onanya and those who cross them. The onanya is able to translate between the world(s) of plant spirits and the human world (*non nete*), and to wield the unruly and dangerous power that lies in that connection. The consumption of ayahuasca by the patient subverts some of the healer's role in bridging the spirit world with the human world, and therefore the social power held by the healer as serving a particular role in relation to the patient is weakened.

REDUCTIONISM & THE INDIVIDUALIZATION OF HEALING

Dominating the plants, according to Papa Meni, is part of the Maestro's job in the ceremonial space: "All maestros must sing to the ayahuasca. *Sopla*. To open visions. For some, the *mareación* gets crossed. They can scream and run. That is why you have to sing to clean the ayahuasca *mareación*." As Papa Meni explained it to me, dominating the plant spirits is so difficult because the plant has both a positive and a negative aspect. As mentioned, healers can learn how to both heal *and* do harm from the power of the plants:

Yes, you can desire to learn [in a diet]. On the other hand, it makes you want to learn how to do bad things to people. That is what they call *shitana*. It is black. On the other side it is medicine, to cure. You must refuse the other part. That's how it is. That is why some people do harm to other people. Because all trees have *yoshin* [demons/negative spirits].¹²³

Despite the materialist tendencies that dominate popular discourse around ayahuasca healing, plant spirits are now discussed with increasing frequency. However, within these discourses, the negative side of ayahuasca is not often mentioned. Western narratives construct plant spirits, especially ayahuasca, as purely benevolent. I have heard dieters at Papa Meni's say that the plants "only want good things for us." Dena Sharrock, an Australian anthropologist, conducted her dissertation research at the Center on participants' experiences with ayahuasca healing—I met her there during my stay. According to Sharrock, "Many pasajeros¹²⁴ [participants] shared their belief that the spirit of Ayahuasca, through Her own agency, is increasingly reaching out from Her home in the Amazon, calling them to Her as a matter of urgency" (Sharrock 2018, 151). This idea is also echoed on the Center's website and in popular literature about ayahuasca. The circulation of these narratives among outsiders contributes to a type of reification of the plants that is quite different from the power and danger attributed to the plants in Shipibo narratives.

¹²³ The dark side of the plants is called *shitana*, and the *yoshin* is a type of spirit that is different from that of the *ibo*. I don't understand this fully. Many healers I interviewed seemed to conflate *ibo* with *yoshin*.

¹²⁴ The visitors who drink ayahuasca are sometimes referred to in ayahuasca centers as *pasajeros*—passengers. This reflects the idea that these outsiders are often seeking a psychedelic journey, transformative experience, or self-growth, more than they are seeking healing, *per se*.

In a related type of narrative, the healer can be reified and seen as almost a holy person or a “guru.” When the person later learns that their healer suffers from all-too-human problems, they may be quite disappointed. As Dan expressed: “What’s the deal, how can people that are so fucked up be such good healers?” Among the Shipibo, there is not a hard dividing line between a healer (onanya, one who knows) and a sorcerer (*yobe*, or *brujo* in Spanish). Further, if one enters relations with plants motivated by egoism and personal gain, they can unwittingly become *yobe* or *brujos* (sorcerers). According to Maestro Metsa, this is why healers must be very careful, as it is quite easy to cause harm:

How can we healers cure a sick person by singing *ikaros*? Because the plant’s power channels through us. The words and expressions of a healer are very powerful; very powerful expressions. That is why we, the healers, have to handle the medicine carefully—no talking for the sake of talking, because sometimes, without wanting to, without thinking, you might hurt somebody else by talking badly or using a bad word against that person.

In stories I have heard from healers, as well as in many anthropological descriptions of Amazonian shamanism (e.g. Gow 1996; Favaron and Gonzales 2019; Fotiou 2010; Descola 1998), spiritual battles among healers are commonplace, and said to be centered around envy and revenge. Rumors and suspicions that certain healers are *brujos* circulate regularly among the Shipibo, as well as the outsiders who frequent Pucallpa and Iquitos. Maestro Metsa’s family, for example, say that they are under attack by another onanya in the family who has turned “crooked” with envy because of their success working with foreigners, and is now using the dark side of the plants’ power (*shitana*) to cause harm. They attribute several illnesses that have befallen members of their family to these shamanic attacks.

Narratives that circulate in Western discourses often situate ayahuasca and Indigenous peoples as possessing a cure for modernity (Taussig 1987). Taussig has shown that these same narratives also reinforce and depend on colonial orders of power. Ultimately, they ensure that Indigenous peoples are subordinate to the desires of privileged foreigners from the Global North and play into well-defined roles (Taussig 1987). These narratives construct both plant beings and healers as having power. However, the relations of power are constrained, ultimately valued only to the extent to which that power serves the healing of foreigners. Plants are benevolent protectors; healers are wise saints. Indigenous peoples live traditional and simple lives in the forest away from the influence of modernity.

The dangers of working with plants are often not viewed in to be more than a psychological issue caused by fear and lack of a properly prepared and held “container.” In popular Western culture, ayahuasca use has become synonymous with the psychedelic experience. Proponents of psychedelics-assisted therapy in the U.S. and elsewhere emphasize “set and setting”¹²⁵ as paramount to ensuring a healing experience as opposed to one that may activate or reproduce existing traumas. The set and setting hypothesis basically holds that the effects of psychedelic drugs are dependent first and foremost upon set (personality, preparation, expectation, and intention of the person having the experience) and setting (the physical, social, and cultural environment in which the experience takes place) (Hartogsohn 2017, 1).

In this framework, the ceremonial context, the healer, the facilitators, and the *ikaros*, all form part of the setting that ensure that the individual will be relaxed and safe enough to have a healing experience. The role of the Shipibo onanya is then conflated as a “space-holder” and

¹²⁵ First credited to a presentation by Timothy Leary at a meeting of the American Psychological Association in 1961.

facilitator more than a healer. In many Western-run ayahuasca circles, this is indeed the function the facilitator serves. However, when foreigners hold this same expectation for onanya, this represents a fundamental equivocation about the relationship between the healer and the patient. The function of an onanya is to sing and command the spirits. They do not usually seem to have an impetus to explain their practices, provide psychological support, or even to stay awake after their role in the ceremony is fulfilled.

Whenever I have sought personal health or spiritual advice from Papa Meni, no matter how clearly I explain my problem and try to solicit his thoughts, I am unlikely to get more than a one-word response (either “sí,” “no,” or “ha”). However, the following ceremony he will usually sing me an *ikaro* to address whatever issue I had come to him about. It is difficult for outsider participants in Shipibo ceremonies to understand or fully believe in the power of the *ikaros* the way that Shipibo healers use them, though many try, and some eventually do. Susana Bustos’ (2008) dissertation on the phenomenological experience of ayahuasca healing describes this misunderstanding about the role of *ikaros* in greater detail:

While *curanderos*¹²⁶ assert the *ikaros* have a significant healing role, Western authors tend to assign them a more supportive role in experience than a direct healing one. This supportive role tends to be attributed to the aural to visual synesthetic effects of the *ikaros*, and to their influence on physically informed emotional experiences. *Curanderos* attribute the healing role to aspects of the *ikaros* that express the quality of the relationship between the healer and the spiritual world. In addition, the visionary experience of the client is not necessarily conceived of as the primary sign of a successful healing process. These differences in emphasis and interpretation between Western researchers and *curanderos* may be based on deeper paradigmatic differences than a mere assumption of an emic or etic approach (Bustos 2008, 33–34).

Whether or not participants view healing as spiritual or as a psychosomatic matter, the process is often construed as their own individual healing “work”—a term commonly used within wider ayahuasca discourses to describe the healing process—rather than as a result of the *ikaros* sung by the healer. Sharrock tells the story of one participant at the Center, “Big Matt,” who embodies the biomedical view that healing is due to the chemical effects of ayahuasca on the human body, along with the individual’s psychological and emotional labor. In her interview with him, Big Matt said:

You’re the only one going to do the work and you’re the only one that’s ever going to heal you. Actually, I’m opposed to the whole maestro-shaman aspect of it because I think it creates this idea that someone else is going to do the work for you or someone else is going to heal you ... I don’t think that’s helpful. I think if anything it prevents healing in a lot of ways. ... I have a real problem with the way the [Center] tells people that this stuff is real ... you know, the plant spirit is going to tell the shaman what to do and, you know, before you go into town we’re going to protect you, keep you from being attacked by spirits. To me it’s just a huge disservice ... it’s Shipibo mythology that’s being told as fact and these people are being indoctrinated by it ‘cause they don’t know... To say that this is how it is ... goes against the whole healing (Quoted in Sharrock 2018, 227–28).

Matt’s statement echoes a specific understanding among some (but not all) Westerners in which healing is seen as an individual process, and less about the actions of healers and plants. Benny Shanon, an Israeli psychologist, who conducted one of the canonical studies on the phenomenological experiences of ayahuasca, recognizes that the biological reductionist view is

¹²⁶ Spanish word for ‘healers’.

problematic, and he is also not satisfied with psychological explanations that attribute the effects to the consumer's unconscious projection and processing of hallucinogenic stimuli (Shanon 2002). Shanon, instead, sees the ayahuasca effects as mirror of the soul, in which "...what happens is the product of a joint intimate interaction between the drinker and the brew, between brain and mind. A fundamental feature of this enterprise is that whatever happens with it is a perfect reflection of who one is" (Shanon 2002, 377). In this view, while ayahuasca is seen as possessing a "special energy," it is the drinker's individual processing through which the experience manifests. According to Shanon's nuanced view, however, the individual is seen as a prism or a flute, upon which the music of ayahuasca is played.

This can be situated within a broader discourse of healing and psychedelic-use that has become increasingly individualistic since the 1960s, focusing on individual healing rather than on shared group experiences (e.g. Pollan 2018). Sharrock (2018), via Quinlan (2002), suggests that the focus on individual healing arises in response to the "medical gaze" posited by Foucault, that separates the individual's identity from their body, that is then worked upon by a professional (Foucault 1994). Thus, individuals that seek healing from alternative medical systems or traditions are often seeking empowerment over their bodies and healing process. However, even these individuals still tend to view their body as the locus of disease and the responsibility for both the illness and the healing as belonging to the individual. "Instead of laying blame for ill health on the environment or on pathogens in this new paradigm, the responsibility has instead fallen steadfastly on the individual" (Sharrock 2018, 14). Quinlan argues that the persistent belief in the separation of the individual thus distorts healing practices that rely on more transpersonal and I would add, interspecies, modes of healing (Quinlan 2002).

These characterizations of how the conception of healing has changed in Western discourse are useful in understanding how some of the equivocations I have mentioned arise. Whereas Western concepts of healing emphasize the body as the site of illness and healing, Shipibo conceptions of illness are relational, based on physical manifestations of spiritual, interpersonal, or interspecies problems, that must be remedied through relations with spirits. I suggest that the individualization of healing reduces the power and authority of the healers by viewing the healer's work as ambient and replaceable within the context of the healing, and removing the relational elements that act through the entwined agency of healers and plant spirits.

ANIMATING PLANTS IN MORE-THAN-SHIPIBO WORLDS

The performance of an ayahuasca ceremony co-constitutes the healer, the plant spirit, and the patient. Thus, the plants and healer also act on and transform the patient's subjectivity. Ayahuasca facilitates recognition of the agency and animacy of plants and the existence of spirits through these types of relational encounters (e.g. Gagliano 2018). This has led many non-Indigenous people to embrace animistic worldviews about spirits and healing, perhaps because neither mechanistic nor monotheistic frameworks sufficiently explain their lived experiences under the effects of ayahuasca. Relational interspecies healing practices have the dual effect of animating plant beings (co-constituting worlds in which plants are animate) and transforming individual subjectivities into relational individual subjects.

Shanon describes the "naturalistic" perspective as a belief that things experienced under the influence of the ayahuasca brew were objective truths that originated from outside of the person's own mind (Shanon 2002). Notably, he attributes this perspective to the Indigenous groups who originally used the brew, as well as to *nearly all the Western people he interviewed* about this

who had substantive experiences: “Indeed, on the basis of the interviews I have conducted, my assessment is that, at least to some extent, practically all who have had more than rudimentary experiences with the brew hold similar beliefs” (Shanon 2002, 362). For Sharrock, too, Big Matt’s case was an exception—of the hundreds of participants that she interviewed, there were only three who left the Center with more of a scientific, reductionist view than when they came. It was common for the participants in the ceremonies to experience highly transformative effects, which both she and her interviewees linked to the connection with plant spirits and the dissolution of the boundaries around conceptions of the self and individual:

Through their navigation of alternative states of consciousness in ayahuasca ceremonies, pasajeros simultaneously encounter alternative experiences that can act to challenge cultural and social ontologies, epistemologies, and aetiologies, often requiring them to “borrow” novel conceptualisations from cultures outside of their own in order to make meaning of anomaly. The notion of the Self as a strictly discrete, bounded, conceptually relatively “solid” entity is often quickly challenged in the altered states of consciousness induced by ayahuasca (Sharrock 2018, 163)

This type of phenomenological experience of the dissolution of the self and belief in spirits, has been observed by many who study ayahuasca. Similarly, Harris and Gurel (2012) found that 74% of their informants in a study on ayahuasca use in the United States reported relationships with the spirit of ayahuasca. When asked about their spiritual and religious beliefs after their experiences with ayahuasca, the informants generally reported:

... a greater awareness of nature and a belief in the sentience in plants and in spirit entities from other realities. ... The spirit of ayahuasca was most often described as a wise teacher, grandmother or healer from a higher spiritual dimension and intelligence who provides guidance and loving, comforting, protective support... Subjects described their style of communication with the spirit of ayahuasca as intuitive or psychic, through thoughts, feelings and visions. Some connected with ayahuasca in meditation or prayer while others asked spiritual questions to receive answers and guidance in making life decisions (Harris and Gurel 2012, 213).

Thus, although this section has been about the individualization of healing and the Western ideals that are projected onto the healing process, it is evident that the consumption of ayahuasca and the participation in Shipibo healing ceremonies tends to alter those ideals. The spread of ayahuasca to the Global North has facilitated an increasing number of Westerners who see plants as animate beings. Among many, the act of drinking ayahuasca is disruptive to a separate sense of self in favor of what anthropologists call *dividuation*—a concept common among relational Indigenous ontologies that views the individual more as a construct based on their relationships, and not as a discreet individual (Strathern 2015; Vilaça 2007). However, despite a (perhaps surprising) willingness to adopt animistic worldviews about the animacy of plants, outsiders from the Global North still bring ontological baggage from the capitalist, individualist, and materialist frameworks of the one-world world that tends to restrict the agency of plants and reduce the social power of healers.

4 | 3 THE HUMANIZATION OF POWER

This section focuses on the various terrains of power that are drawn on by Shipibo onanya and the outsiders that wish to learn from them. Shipibo forms of power, as described in the previous section, rely on plant diets to draw their strength from the spirit world. However, they have also

hybridized and appropriated other logics of power, including Christian and capitalist symbols of power (Chapter 1). As I showed in Chapter 1, forming associations with outsiders (gringos or foreigners) can be seen as a means of gaining social power. Outsiders, on the other hand, may be able to mobilize capitalist forms of power to appropriate shamanic power and knowledge. Some of these outsiders are unprepared to follow the rules of the plants that are required to learn to wield that power, though these are perhaps not the usual cases (recall the Swiss man in Chapter 1).

Recontextualizing practices such as dieting into materialist and reductionist frameworks, I argue, can lead to a humanization of power that in the Shipibo context is attributed to plant spirits. By this, I mean that the locus of power is shifted toward humans. These frameworks lack shared understandings of the meanings and values associated with spiritual power and plant agency in the Shipibo context. Therefore, as Shipibo healing practices are adopted by outsiders (particularly foreigners), certain parts of the relationship between plant spirits and humans shift, tending to enact worlds in which plant power is diminished in the relationship. Part of this, I claim, is due to the tendency for outsider apprentices to understand plant beings as instrumental—as tools to accomplish human goals—rather than as teachers, healers, and beings of power in their own right. Nonetheless, there is a simultaneous transformation of the meanings and values associated with plants for outsiders who adopt Shipibo healing practices, which increases the agency of plant beings in their own worlds. When practices like dieting are commodified and taken up by outsider value systems in which the primary form of power is capitalist, the agency of plant beings can articulate with capitalist forms of power, forming more-than-capitalist economies (e.g. Chapter 3) but at the same time is constricted by being routed through economic mechanisms.

MASTER PLANT DIETS

In the early and middle part of the 20th century, many of the foreigners who came to Ucayali were missionaries of some sort (e.g. Chapter 1)—Swiss, Italian, German, or American. Missionaries were highly involved in reforming the rural education system in Peru. Indeed, most of the Indigenous communities were settled around missionary camps precisely because they had both schools and health posts¹²⁷. Puerto Consuelo is a small village upriver from Pucallpa, where they still remember a European missionary who lived there and was one of the first outsiders to learn the Shipibo language so well.

I was told the story from Maestro Metsa's father, also a healer, whose family had been taught Christianity by this evangelical missionary. The missionary had many close friends that were Shipibo, and they welcomed him into their community. In this time, there were still *merayas*, the highest class of healer, that were known for traveling into other dimensions, using special plants, and smoking mapacho (*romé*) the jungle tobacco. The missionary had learned of one of the plants the *merayas* used to gain their powers; it was a tall vine with large fruit that contained a watery liquid, the name of which no one can quite remember. The *merayas* would diet—fasting and bathing in the plant's juice to gain incredible powers—they were known to fly, disappear, or travel to other planets. Many elder Shipibo still recall the *merayas* that were capable of disappearing right from underneath a mosquito net, and would later reappear, still singing¹²⁸.

¹²⁷ Previously, family-based Shipibo settlements had been only semi-permanent, living in one area during the flooding season, and another during the dry season, depending on the whims of the river.

¹²⁸ This phenomenon was recounted for me by a few different people as a memory from childhood of a legendary *meraya* grandfather.

According to the story, this missionary one day decided to bathe in the liquid of the special plant. Without telling anyone from the village, he went to find it in the forest, sliced open the fruit, and poured the liquid over his head and body. Upon returning to the village he suddenly fell very ill. The village *meraya* was called in to heal him, and even though he tried to save the missionary, when he realized he had used the special plant without following the *samá*, the proper diet and restrictions, they knew that it would require spiritual intervention. However, they were not given the chance—he was taken to Pucallpa, where the doctors were unable to help him, and from there was taken to Lima. Doctors ran every test they could think of, but none could discover the cause of his deteriorating health. He was flown back to Europe, where his symptoms grew progressively worse, and he eventually died there with doctors still unable to provide an explanation for his condition. The people in Puerto Consuelo were devastated by the loss of this foreigner who had been special to many of the villagers.

Despite learning so much about the Shipibo culture, the missionary never fully believed the people who warned him that the plant spirits could be quite dangerous. Although the missionary had undoubtedly heard the stories, he was only partially able to understand the strange power of the plants—perhaps he was curious enough to see if the plant could really grant him amazing powers, but did not believe that it would actually be dangerous.

Cautionary tales like this are common among the Shipibo, or at least, are commonly told to me—warning hapless outsiders of the dangers of the plant spirits by recounting the fates of those who have gone crazy or died as a result of “crossing” their diets. Papa Meni, for instance, has told me several such stories over the years:

When you diet a plant—you can drink *chiric sanango*, *machinga*, *huayra caspi*, *ayahuma*, *bobinsana*—but when you cross the tree or ruin the diet, the tree itself can harm you, it can kill you. That is why you must diet, you must take care of yourself. People sometimes die like this. They do not comply with the diet when they drink a plant like *sanango*, or *toe*. They cross their diet and die. That is why you must comply and take care. If not, the plant, its own spirit, will go against you. Against your health. That is how it is. When the diet is crossed ... anything can happen. A wound in your nose can appear, an open wound can appear; this happens when you cross a plant diet. A man can go insane, because for instance, *ayahuma* is a bit dangerous. When you cross the diet, some stay insane. They will tear off their clothes, running around naked, yelling “ahhhhhh” ...¹²⁹

Dieting (*samá*) is the process by which healers ally themselves with and learn from certain plants through a period of fasting and sexual abstinence and obeying the dictates of the teacher plant with which they are dieting. During this process, they cultivate an intimate relationship with the plant’s *ibo*, so that in the future they are able to call on its powers for assistance in healing (Favaron and Gonzales 2019). This process is similar for other Amazonian groups, and mestizo healers and *vegetalistas* have also adopted such practices. Beyer¹³⁰ describes the dieting process as follows:

To learn the plants—the term used is *dominar*, master—means to create a relationship with the plant spirits, by taking them into the body, listening to them speak in the language of plants, and receiving their gifts of power and song. To win their love, to learn to sing to them in their own language, shamans must first show that they are strong and faithful, worthy of trust. To do this, they must go into the *monte*, the wilderness, away from other people, and follow *la dieta*, the

¹²⁹ Interview by Laura Dev 2017.

¹³⁰ Beyer studied Peruvian mestizo shamanism.

restricted diet. Indeed, some plants, such as *catahua* and *pucalupuna*, want to deal only with the strongest and most self-controlled of humans, those willing to undertake a *dieta fuerte*, a lengthy and rigorous diet. Other humans they kill (Beyer 2010, 52).

Dieting is a central practice for understanding how reciprocity is established between plant beings and onanyas. It is through dieting that onanyas establish the relationships that are necessary in order to perform healing, singing, and protection. Furthermore, dieting is a mark of a healer's expertise and knowledge of the plants. Once a diet is complete, the changes are permanent, and certain restrictions must be observed in order to avoid "crossing" the diet. As my god-sister, Edith, once told me, "now you are not just Laura, but you are Laura with *dietas*, and you must be careful." Over time, diets are bound to get "crooked," through everyday interactions that do not mix well, or *choque*, with the plant spirits. It is therefore necessary to sing to "straighten" the diet every so often. Furthermore, the energy from diets is meant to be used—particularly for healing. Otherwise the energy of the plants can be strong in the body and cause unrest.

The relationship between people and plants is delicate, and must be centered on reciprocity and devotion (Favaron and Gonzales 2019). Ideally, the guidelines of the diet are communicated by the plants themselves. In the past, this may have involved an initiate going to the forest to sit under a tree they wish to learn from, fasting from food and water until the plant's spirit comes. The spirit will then instruct the initiate on what is okay to eat or not and how to proceed with the diet. The relationship can also be initiated by bathing in water the plants have soaked in or drinking the resin or a decoction of the bark of the tree. Diets are usually, but not always, opened by a Maestro or Maestra (onanya) during an ayahuasca ceremony through singing a special arkana (a type of *ikaro*) that opens the dieter to the knowledge of the plants. Sometimes the maestro will also transfer a *corona* (crown) containing the plant's knowledge to the dieter (metaphysically). At the completion of the diet, the onanya will again sing an arkana to seal or close the diet and protect the dieter from the energies that would disturb their diet.

Rona, a relatively young healer in her forties, told me that even though her mother and several other family members were healers, she did not want to learn from a maestro. Because she was worried about a human maestro potentially stealing her knowledge, she learned only from plant teachers. She described her first diet, with plant baths and fasting, and her first encounter with a plant spirit in a dream:

When I started to bathe with plants, they didn't teach me right away. One bath, two, three, four, only in the fifth bath did it finally teach me. A pretty woman, very beautiful, sat down and taught me how to use [the plant]. "You are not going to do this, not going to eat that. Everything has to be like this, how I tell you." That was my first dream that it made me dream... So, because of what the plant told me and taught me, I followed this path. And I had respect. Because the plants, when you use them well, it's really great! When you diet, they will teach you lots and lots of information: how to cure, what sickness a patient has, with what plant will cure that sickness; whether it can be cured with a medicinal plant, or if it needs [Western] medicine, for example, like pills or injections. Those things I was taught. That was the first time I was taught by a bath. My first diet was baths and fasting.

When dieting, plant spirits communicate the regulations of the diet to the dieter through dreams and visions. When the dieter then follows the rules of the plant, a relationship and commitment is established, that constitutes the plant as a teacher. According to Jauregui and others, "knowledge is not transmitted orally by healers but through the mothers, spirits or entities that inhabit the natural world. Therefore, the knowledge transmission is of a trans-verbal nature as it occurs via dreams, visions and *icaros*" (Jauregui et al. 2011, 750).

I understand dieting in part to be a sensitization process, by which the human apprentice (dieter) develops the ability to listen and to see, in order to make contact with the world of the plant spirits (Jauregui et al. 2011). Because this process can be disrupted easily through intense sensations (particularly smell, touch, and taste), diets were formerly done in isolation with very little stimuli or interference. Papa Meni began dieting when he was 12 years old. His first diet was with mapacho (tobacco):

That is a very strong diet...my brother and I were secluded from other people at some distance. Only my mother was allowed to approach us. My father and brother and I would do ceremonies there. My mother could only bring us food when she was not menstruating. We ate very dried fish—no salt, no sugar. We drank tobacco juice. I almost could not stand it. I cried a lot. I was a child! I suffered a lot. Since then I have dieted many trees. I am still dieting. If you do not diet, you lose the ability to heal. Sometime when you try to heal, you won't be able to. Your cure might have no effect.

Now, says Papa Meni, people don't have to do diets in isolation because he has a very strong *arkana* (protection songs) that makes it so that you can walk around the village or be around menstruating women while on a diet. "Before, you couldn't do that," he says. Other healers have also told me about new arkanas that allow them to do their diets differently. Maestro Sani, for example, said that nowadays you do not have to diet as long, because there are arkanas that let you learn as much in one day as you would previously learn in one month of dieting.

Dieting can be a powerful practice for gaining a direct connection with plants. However, because many outsiders are not accustomed to relating with spirits or learning from plants, and because some diets are very short (as short as one week) the results can be that sometimes the dieting process does not result in a strong connection with the plant's spirit. In these cases, dieting restrictions are observed as a matter of protocol rather than as a reciprocal relationship that has been developed between the plant and the dieter, such as what Rona described. This shift in dieting practices is one way that plant-human relations are transforming in collaboration between Shipibo healers, plant beings, and outsider apprentices as these practices are recontextualized for an international clientele.

THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF PLANTS

Curious outsiders like myself are always wanting to know what certain plants are "for" before beginning a diet. "What is bobinsana for?"; "What is chirc sanango for?" Papa Meni, when pestered by such questions, is known for saying such unhelpful things as, "for everything. It's a teacher." Papa Meni, who runs a financially successful ayahuasca center out of his home in Paoyhan for outsiders (see Chapter 3), is one of the most knowledgeable people I know about the various uses of medicinal plants. Therefore, his cryptic answer hardly reflects a lack of knowledge, or even a lack of willingness to explain his knowledge. Rather, his answer highlights a fundamental equivocation in how plants are conceived by outsiders attempting to learn Shipibo dieting practices. Questions about a plant's purpose do not make sense within ontologies that see plants as powerful beings in their own right—neither benevolent nor malevolent—you must gain favor with the plant spirit through proper relating in order to be able to enlist its power and knowledge as a teacher, healer, or protector.

At Papa Meni's center between five and twenty-five visitors might be in residence at any given time. They are there to "learn the plants," which they do through the Shipibo practice of

dieting. Most stay for at least two weeks at a time, and many for several months. One Dutch woman, Emma,¹³¹ has even lived at his compound as her primary home for over three years. A friend of mine from the United States likened this setting to a monastery. Many of the dieters observe relative silence during their diets, and keep to themselves, meditating or singing in their rooms, writing, reading, listening to music, or simply lying in their hammocks. During meals the dieters might gather around a common table to chat or some take food back to their rooms. Some choose to fast for certain periods of time, depending on how their communication with their teacher plants are going. Simple food is prepared by Papa Meni's wife or daughter, without salt, sugar, oil, spices, or pork. Free-range chicken from the village and certain types of fish are considered okay to eat during the diet—usually grilled plain over the fire. Some dieters are there because of an illness they are trying to cure. Some out of curiosity and learning. Papa Meni has many long-term apprentices who come back each year or many times a year. Some of these outsiders are training to be healers and end up facilitating ceremonies themselves eventually. They also may bring groups from their home countries to diet in Paoyhan with Papa Meni.

For the most part, the outsiders that diet at Papa Meni's center follow the dietary restrictions quite seriously. However, it is not uncommon for someone to show up unannounced by boat from Pucallpa with little idea of what the process entails, what the restrictions should be, or the purpose of the diet and restrictions. Some of these people had perhaps arrived to Pucallpa asking around about where they could do an ayahuasca ceremony, and someone directed them toward Paoyhan to diet. Papa Meni has no website or printed materials; he does not know how to read or write. He speaks Spanish well enough, but outsiders who do not speak Spanish are reliant on other outsiders to communicate with Papa Meni or to get any information about the dieting process. My first visit to Papa Meni's was in a somewhat naive fashion at the start of my field work. Dr. Paul, the founder of Alianza Arkana, the NGO that was hosting me, had advised me that if I was to study plants I really needed to be dieting them, and thus Paul took me to Papa Meni's house.

My first diet was short, just under two weeks, with a plant commonly called *chiric sanango* (a Quechua name), or *moka pari* in Shipibo. It is a shrub with buttery, flat-faced flowers in hues of purple, white, or pink, in the nightshade family. Drinking an extraction of its roots produces a cool tingling sensation in the body, particularly the lips, and it also acts as a mild sedative. Chiric sanango is also a teacher plant, with its own world and knowledges. The first time I took chiric sanango was at night. There were only five dieters staying and dieting at Papa Meni's house at that time, including myself and Paul, along with two European women in their forties and an American man in his thirties who, like myself and many others from the Northeastern United States, was also suffering from chronic Lyme disease. We all gathered in the open area that was the living room to receive our various plant teachers or "diet plants" a few hours after dinner. Papa Meni poured me a strong shot of the brown-colored tincture from a large plastic water bottle that had been filled with roots and *aguardiente*, a strong sugarcane based alcohol. I woke up during the night in a cold sweat in my mosquito net, tossing restlessly for hours. The next day I felt I could hardly stay awake, and I moved in a euphoric daze with heavy limbs. At night, I would dream. I had so many dreams each night that I could not write them all down, and since that time my dreams have continued to be notably different.

On a particularly cold and rainy day in the village, a man once told me, *my teacher is chiric sanango, so I never get cold*. It can be used for fortification and to treat neurological and arthritic disorders. Chiric sanango's healing effects can be dramatic. I met a man in his late sixties who was

¹³¹ Pseudonym used.

a United States army veteran who had traveled to Peru several times to diet chiric sanango with Papa Meni, in order to cure his rheumatoid arthritis. He was a large man with pink skin, white hair, and a broad southern accent. When he had arrived at Papa's house, he leaned heavily on a cane, and his wife needed to support him in sitting down, standing up, or negotiating stairs—he appeared to be in great pain. Later that week, he told me that during the ayahuasca ceremonies he could feel the rheumatism leaving his joints, and then being purged from his body as he vomited. At the close of the two-week diet, he was not using his cane at all, and reported that his pain had almost completely vanished. This was the third time he had dieted this plant with the same results. According to his prior experience, the relief from his condition would last around two years before he needed to return.

Because the learning process in plant diets is premised on plants being the primary teachers, Papa Meni does not interfere by explaining much about his own views about the plants, except to make sure that his dieters are following the proper restrictions—hence, his stoic replies to questioning. As Emma says, “this is his style of teaching—he models the behavior, and waits for people to work it out themselves with the plants.” Because relating with plants is not a familiar concept to most of the outsiders who visit, each has their own interpretation of the dieting process, and narratives about dieting are circulated among them. However, many of those who stay at Papa Meni's have read extensively about Shipibo healing traditions, and have a great degree of understanding about dieting practices and plant teachers. Several of them have also begun to learn Shipibo in order to sing and understand *ikaros*.

Around dieting practices, there is a community of serious learners from the Global North. There is a private facebook group with around 7,000 members from around the world, devoted to discussion about practicing Shipibo master plant diets. A lot of information is shared in this group from experienced dieters and facilitators. Nonetheless, as narratives circulate among outsiders, rationales are slightly altered, and certain restrictions that makes sense according to mechanistic or even New Age frameworks are emphasized, whereas others are de-emphasized. Food restrictions are generally well-understood because they are in line with Western medicine's understandings of contra-indications and material effects on the body. The rationale behind these instructions are usually along the lines of what follows from the Center's website follow their list of foods not to eat:

By eliminating the above from your diet, you will prepare your body physically for the ayahuasca journey, and perhaps also reduce the amount of “purging” needed to clean your physical body. In addition to the physical aspects, by showing your commitment and determination to ayahuasca and the master plants, you are creating the foundations of your relationship with them and offering them the respect which is essential for this work.

Their description does emphasize the importance of the role of the relationship with plant spirits. However, the narratives presented are often slightly more tame than the frightening stories told by Shipibo Maestros about the consequences of crossing a diet—if one does not obey the plant's guidelines, the spirit may become angry or agitated, and can wreak havoc and illness in a person's life. These relationships were described by several healers that I interviewed as a matter of respect and obedience that otherwise warrants punishment. Rawa, my young healer friend whose ceremony I described in the introduction of this dissertation, compared the plant spirits to a stern father:

If [during a diet] I do things wrong, I can get sick. Like you are not obeying the plants. Just like your father.... Sometimes if you fail him, your father can get angry at you. That's how plants are, like a father. As if they were an older person. Like a master.

Certain plants are known to the Shipibo as being dangerous, while others do not have as strict requirements in terms of diet. For example, certain plants can be used as medicines, like the juice of green papaya to cure parasites, or *malva* (mallow) for colds. Although it is better to take these plants with a small diet—not eating until noon, for instance, or refraining from salt and oil for the day—the spirits of the plants are not considered to be dangerous or particularly powerful. Therefore, if one “breaks the diet” the only consequence is that the medicine will not work as well. Meanwhile, dieting trees can be quite dangerous, and one must follow a strict diet if one is to use those plants without displeasing their spirits. For this reason, dieting is considered to be a serious process. If a diet is crossed (*cruzado*) or broken, one risks the vengeful wrath and jealousy of the plant spirit (Favaron and Gonzales 2019). Maestro Metsa explained this commitment in strong terms:

It is not like other kinds of studies. Once you enter into the medicine world, you make a pact with your life, with yourself, because the plants have their own rules. One failure in one diet and you can die—there are many people who have not followed the dieta and have died. For that, one has to train psychologically too, to be able to follow the rules.

The concept of wrathful plant-spirit is adopted by outsiders with a large amount of variation. Some take these warnings quite seriously, arguably over-concerned that they may have somehow crossed their diets. Others seem to pay the plant’s desires little heed, and one person even confessed to me that he had had sex the day after ending his diet and “nothing bad happened.” One Ukrainian woman, as she ate a cookie during her diet told me that the plants don’t mind if she eats cookies. “I have a good relationship with them and they would tell me if they don’t want me to do that.” On the other hand, another woman attributed a severe urinary tract infection to crossing her diet by having sex with an ex-partner even though it was a month after her diet had ended. She was told by her Maestra that she “could have died.”

According to Dan, who facilitates ceremonies with people in California, sex is a difficult piece of translation for many foreigners:

A lot of people have questions and concerns about the sexual abstinence piece, and can’t see how it really relates to medicine. Santo Daime¹³² people don’t believe in that at all. They have sex before ceremony and it’s all good. There is a history of people trying to dim sexuality in our country, so people saying “no sex” or “don’t touch yourself,” is seen as bad or suspicious...or like it might be an influence of Christianity on Shipibo culture.

This concern reflects not only the narratives of authenticity that often constitute value for non-Indigenous outsiders, but also their unwillingness to believe restrictions that do not “make sense” to their more mechanistic worldviews. According to my understanding of dieting relations, restrictions on sex do not reflect much of a moral disinclination toward sex, but rather a preoccupation that plant spirits have with certain strong smells and energies that are associated with humans (Favaron and Gonzales 2019; Shepard Jr. 2004). These include the smells of menstruation, sex, pork, and newborn babies. Because of their dislike of such smells, the purification process involves heavy use of floral baths, tobacco smoke, and perfumes, which cleanse and mask human smells and encourage the plant spirits to come closer.

What are the consequences for outsiders disregarding certain types of restrictions and adopting others in earnest? In effect, this is a form of subverting the plants power and authority to dictate the terms of the exchange. In the dieting period, the method of mastering the plant spirit is

¹³² Santo Daime is a Brazilian ayahuasca religion.

through observing the restrictions and guidelines of the plants. When these are not observed, or when the image of the wrathful plant spirit is spurned, I suggest that the relational worlds that are co-constituted have less powerful and agentive plant spirits that are subject to the dieter's whims. Therefore, the connection with the spirit world is constricted, routed through mechanistic worldviews. According to Maestro Sani, if someone does not diet well, the response is not always a "crossing" of the diet, but it can be that the diet doesn't "stick", or that the person is "less unified with the plant."

Although many outsiders seem to have strong relations with their plant spirits and rely on them for wisdom and guidance, for others that connection remains tenuous and elusive. Even for Dan, though he sees results from his diets, he is not fully certain about how to understand plant spirits:

I'm a scientific person, very logical, no matter how much medicine I drink—I think that's a good thing. I think a large part of doing a dieta is psychosomatic. I think the plants do have energy...but also there are people who have done dietas and it doesn't *do* a whole lot. ...That said, the most powerful shamans are believers in diets and do dietas. You can hear the *ikaros* and there is a powerful presence, and there's *something* there.

Note, that in this relationship, Dan's expectation is based in the idea that the diet will *do* something for him. Sometimes outsiders approach shamanic practices with an air of entitlement—when frustrations arise, it can seem unfair—they followed the protocols but still did not see the visions or achieve the results that they were hoping for. However, in Shipibo communities, diets are not seen as something everyone should undertake—it is only for the most disciplined and dedicated, often limited to those from shamanic families. Among the Shipibo, diets with specific goals—to become a good hunter or fisher, or to cure a disease for example—are more accessible for the average person, but are not generally done in conjunction with ayahuasca, nor with particularly dangerous plants. Shamanic diets with the goal of learning from master plants are different. These diets require the initiate to follow the dictates of the plants in order to be able to establish strong relations with them and learn their *ikaros*.

EXTRACTION OF PLANT POWER

Although I have been dieting plants on and off throughout my time in Peru, I am still learning exactly what that means, and how to relate with plants as teachers. This is what I call my *plant education*, which according to Papa Meni is a much longer process than most outsiders realize at the outset:

It takes a long time to become a maestro. It is an education. It is like any young person going to school. First preschool, then elementary, then high school, then university. It is the same for shamanism in order to become a maestro. But now, there are people who drink ayahuasca for one or two years, then they think they are a maestro. They teach, they run diets. To be a proper maestro you have to diet for a long time, years and years. That is what it takes to learn shamanism, in order to be able to learn to heal.

The concern that people are offering ceremonies without proper training (and becoming rich from it) is not without ground (see Chapter 3). Many foreigners come to Peru for short periods of training, and then sell their services in leading ceremonies in the North for a significant sum of money. This perhaps is exacerbated by centers that offer "shaman training courses" in six or eight week programs. According to one such website for a center near Iquitos, "Ayahuasca courses are in depth training programs in the Shipibo healing tradition of plant spirit medicine known as

curanderismo. By teaching the core principles of the tradition, students can build a strong foundation to practice for the many years it takes to become a true maestro.”¹³³ While the website is now careful to add the last clause about the many years it takes to become a true maestro, the people that attend these programs are often encouraged to practice as facilitators after their eight week training course. This type of offering raises questions of integrity for some of the people I interviewed, including one man from California who has dieted with Papa Meni for several months:

It’s also really easily abused. There is a hype around it now, like in California, there is a woman there who trained at the Ayahuasca Foundation, offering weekend long *noya rao* diets. Two days for \$350 a night, I heard—in California, with someone who spent 6 weeks training—and it kind of misses the point all together. So there is a cultural appropriation of the plants as well.

One of the things that Papa Pete (the Canadian healer) told me was that when outsiders come to diet for only a few months or even less than a few years, “they never get past their preconceived ideas about what it means to be a shaman. They think they know.” The long training period required to become a healer is not a possibility for most people attempting to “get by” in the globalized world—spending years in semi-isolation in the forest is now a challenge even for young Shipibo (Favaron and Gonzales 2019). Although there is an increasing wave of foreigners with the time, interest, and resources to do lengthy *diets*, it is not uncommon for those with relatively little experience to take it upon themselves to bring the transformative effects they have experienced from the plants to their friends and families back home, and many make a living doing so. Most of those who *do* undergo lengthy trainings are less quick to fashion themselves as healers or shamans, however.

Some outsiders even get an inflated sense of self-importance after their early experiences taking ayahuasca. For instance, a woman in her forties from California initiated a conversation with me in the Lima airport because I was wearing a shirt with Shipibo embroidery on it. She leaned over pointedly while I was eating my salad at the table next to her to ask, “did you drink medicine?” She was returning from Iquitos after two months of hopping around to different ayahuasca centers; she told me this with a sense of pride and gravity. Her first ayahuasca experience had been three months prior. Now, she said, the plants had initiated her as a shaman. She was going to gather other women together to have a healing conference with hundreds or thousands of people so that they could bring the message of ayahuasca to the world. I do not claim to know the relations that others have with plants, but I am suspicious of these types of claims, and heed the warnings of my teachers that becoming a healer takes time and dedication.

Many outsiders and Shipibo alike believe that the knowledge of plants does not *just* belong to the Shipibo or local healers, but belongs to the plants themselves and therefore should be accessible to anyone. I suggest that when dieters approach plants as instrumental or view their power as extractable from the relations with the plant beings themselves, this constitutes worlds in which plant beings are *resources*. The agency of plant spirits is constricted as these relations are routed through capitalist mechanisms of power and human desires. Thus, my argument is that as dieting practices are taken up by outsiders from the Global North, often trained to see plant vitality as sources of extractable capital, and as capitalist relations hold increasing sway in Shipibo communities, the power relations between plant beings and people are also reconfigured. The plants may be instrumentalized or trivialized in order to serve human purposes and (even subconscious) desires for power or self-importance. The locus of power then emerges as pertaining

¹³³ Ayahuasca Foundation, 2019

to the person who has acquired the diets or fulfilled the practices, rather than as inhering in the spirit world itself, with the plant beings, who are not subject to the wills of humans.

Shipibo healers themselves play into such economic traps, and their desire for monetary gain can lead some healers to embellish their own shamanic power as a marketing strategy. Money and payment for services can be a source of entitlement. As one dieter from the Facebook Dieting Group wrote about one of his former shamans, “I see I was projecting that he had the power. I believe he was projecting that I had the money¹³⁴.” I have encountered plenty of difficulty between outsiders and the maestros they worked with. These difficulties most commonly arose from healers or their family members who were described by the outsider as greedy, manipulative, or untrustworthy with money. Healers sometimes ask for money that was not part of the original agreement, as a condition of continuing their services, or ask outsiders to lend them money to build a maloka or to build a well in the community, only to spend it on other things. This is perceived by the outsiders as greed, or being taken advantage of.

Stories of healers who have turned into *brujos*, made people sick, stolen peoples’ diets, attacked people shamanically, or sexually assaulted their patients are also common among outsiders who have spent time in Shipibo communities. The surge of global interest in ayahuasca has indeed made the healing profession an ever more popular occupation among the Shipibo, and certain places are known for having high concentrations of “fake shamans” and “*brujos*.” It is a common narrative among Shipibo healers that it is easier to learn how to use to plant power to harm than it is to learn how to heal.

For my own safety, I did not seek out interviews or ceremonies with anyone who was considered to be inexperienced, “fake,” or a practicing *brujo*. However, in the last year, there have been a few accusations from experienced foreigners that certain Shipibo healers that I know had attacked them by sorcery. These accusations are contentious. Some other foreigners I spoke with believe that the perceived sorcery attacks are actually a result of the foreigners crossing their diets and not being able to straighten the relations with the plant spirits. In this case, the responsibility for the negative outcomes is placed on the Shipibo healers, when the issue may have been that the foreigner did not fulfill their obligations to the plant spirit in some way.

There have even been recent cases of an attempted suicide and actual suicide by outsiders during and after diets, that were blamed by others on either sorcery or a crossing of the diet. In Paul’s case, his suicide was successful. Some Shipibo people are still concerned that Paul’s unrestful spirit may circulate and cause illness and dis-ease, *mal aire*. In these cases, the healers that these outsiders were working with were portrayed by other outsiders as “irresponsible.” Because of the difficulties for outsiders to understand plant power and agency, it may be more commensurate with their ontological understandings to blame healers, rather than give credence to the commitments made to the relationships with the plants. Furthermore, the tendency to blame Indigenous healers for the actions of privileged outsiders is reminiscent of the case of Maestra Beka, the prominent elder healer, who was shot and killed by a Canadian man when she supposedly refused to sing him an *ikaro*. When her killer was then killed by her neighbors and family members, the local authorities portrayed their actions as “barbaric,” and blamed the healing profession for being unregulated (see Chapter 1).

The conflicts that I describe here cannot be separated from the unequal power relations and histories of oppression that colonized peoples face, which shape their relations with outsiders.

¹³⁴ Post from October 28, 2019.

Nonetheless, such dynamics have deterred many outsiders, and some facilitators¹³⁵ have declared publicly that it is too risky for them to continue working with *any* Shipibo healers. Instead they are choosing to facilitate ceremonies independently in their own countries or at private retreat centers, where they perceive it to be safer and more controlled, without risks of spiritual attacks. This is one reason that facilitators who work with Shipibo healers and can mediate and translate between worlds are seen as increasingly important, and why Western-run healing centers like the Center are so popular. Although these decisions make sense for the foreign consumer, it also means that the benefits and economic opportunity offered by the commodification of Shipibo healing practices are being transferred to the Global North with increasing alienation from the cultures and forests from which they came, while Shipibo maestros and maestras often continue to live in poverty.

4 | 4 CONCLUSION

The practices that constitute Shamanic power for Shipibo onanya are meant to bridge the spirit world(s) with human worlds in order to enact healing or harm. Plant spirits are enlisted as allies in such projects by earning their confidence through observing strict rules dictated by the plant spirits themselves through dieting. The agency of such powerful plants may then be appropriated to use in shamanic singing as a method of healing or otherwise causing transformations within the human world. The ceremonial use of ayahuasca creates the conditions under which onanya can access the power in the spirit worlds to enact healing. Granting access to these worlds to outsiders through the spread of ayahuasca ceremonies globally has in some ways and in certain instances undermined the shamanic power that Shipibo onanya rely on, though many have been able to gain financial opportunity and social mobility through the sale of their services, knowledge, and cultural expertise.

As Shipibo practices for accessing the spirit world are recontextualized, they are increasingly used to connect the spirit world into systems dictated by capitalist and colonial relations. As they take shape within materialist and reductionist discourses, I argue that the agency of plants is constricted. Whereas power, knowledge, and healing, in more-than-Shipibo ontologies are seen as pertaining to the plant spirits, accessible through subtle reciprocal relations with the spirit world, these powers are humanized—seen as belonging to humans—as plant-human practices are recontextualized. Outsiders from the Global North are best able to leverage those attributes to gain power within capitalist systems, partly because of their ability to access and translate between various discourses and mobilize their social power in the production of ceremonies as a commodity (Bauman and Briggs 1990a; Briggs 1996). As ayahuasca is enrolled in capitalist systems of relations both plants and Shipibo healers lose power within those systems. Part of this is due to the need to portray themselves as *authentic* to an outsider audience.

On the other hand, as ayahuasca and other plant spirits are recontextualized into new cultural spaces, Shipibo practices are hybridized with other ceremonial forms—new age symbolism, Eastern spiritual practices, Western psychology, and Indigenous practices from other groups. However, and perhaps more importantly, these practices are also operating within and through a terrain of power that is defined by colonial and capitalist relations (see Chapter 1).

¹³⁵ By *facilitators*, I am referring to long-term apprentices who bring groups from their home countries to diet or do ceremonies with Shipibo healers.

Hybridization could be viewed as a metadiscursive and rhizomatic practice that has the ability to articulate different discursive worlds together through the mixing of material and symbolic elements. John Borrows maintains that a key part of Indigenous power is that they should be able to freely draw from their complex relationships and practices without restraint:

The intermingling of agreement and dissent makes living tradition a messy affair... traditions can be both competing and complementary—sometimes at the same time... When traditions are regarded as being relationally formed through contending and comparative interpretations, no one individual or institution can as effectively control their meaning (Borrows 2016, 12).

The one-world world, characterized by individuality, materialism, reductionism, and capitalism, alters the conditions under which healing practices occur, and constrains the relationships that are formed. Outsiders who use ayahuasca or who have dieted plants often report incredible transformation, but many still see the healing process as individual, and have trouble understanding the powers of plants and healers as deriving from the spirit world. Even among outsiders who adopt an animistic worldview and study Shipibo ontologies and practices, the relationships between plants and people tend to still be constrained by capitalist contexts and dominant forms of power. Plants are instrumentalized, used to fulfill a human purpose, and the plant's agency is routed through human desires. The humanization of power and the individualization of healing together serve to constrict the agency of plants to act within the one-world world. Still, they can have profound influence on human lives, and as these healing practices are spread globally, plants also gain power to act within the one-world world.

The more-than-Shipibo systems of relations and fields of power from which Shipibo healing practices originated are being stretched further away from the one-world world, even as relation-forming practices develop that create connections across worlds (i.e. through the network of outsiders learning Shipibo practices, and metadiscursive practices like hybridization and retraditionalization). At the same time, relations of capital are growing in importance in Shipibo communities, and increasingly entangled with Shipibo healing practices as they become commodified. These entanglements perhaps allow us to reveal the areas of cognitive dissonance and equivocation that point to how these worlds infuse and transform each other.

It is not only Indigenous peoples, but arguably all of us that find ourselves stretched in a liminal space under the pressures of late capitalism, where the one-world world is increasingly strange and hostile, and other worlds seem to make more sense. And yet, we cannot fully belong in any of them. The world I grew up in no longer exists, it must be somewhere in the past. I find myself stuck in a state of translating between worlds, neither of which I can fully comprehend. However, the more I learn how to relate with other types of beings, even when I feel truly *strange* to myself, the more comforted I am that other worlds are possible if I just keep learning to listen and to sing.

CHAPTER 5 | KNOWLEDGES

INDIGENOUS APPROACHES AND INTERSPECIES LISTENING TOWARD DECOLONIZING AYAHUASCA RESEARCH

5 | 0 INTRODUCTION

OPENING

*Caapi*¹³⁶ vines, characteristically serpentine, upon first encounter in their forest habitat, are difficult to distinguish from many of the other myriad vines that entwine themselves with any *others* they encounter—tree trunks and branches, other similarly searching ramets from the same “mother” vine. Larger vines climb their way up the trunks of trees until they reach the canopy, and oftentimes they only present their leaves at the level of several meters off the ground, so these are difficult to rely on as a distinguishing feature—though we crane our necks, it is unclear which leaves belong to the tree and which to the vine. Indeed, at the start of our caapi demography study, I naively thought that nearly every vine I saw in the forest was caapi—the vine that is one of the two constituent plants in ayahuasca. Our guide, Feliciano, a Shipibo man from the nearby village, has more reliable ways of identifying the vines, which is the same way he identifies any tree—slice obliquely into it with a machete and peel back a layer of bark to look at the inside. He does this in one casual motion, as if the machete is an extension of his curiosity, and hardly requires a forethought to execute the slice. When still uncertain, he might taste the inner bark, pressing his tongue flatly into the cut he has just made.

I am not sure how to interpret the signs that Feliciano senses in the bark of the vine, but I observe him carefully to try to gauge his reactions and sense of certainty—I trust his knowledge implicitly, and through the subtleties of interacting with the living vines more and more, and cross-checking with the knowledge of our Shipibo guides, I begin to form an increasingly nuanced ability to recognize caapi among the many other vines. Could the same be said in reverse? Is there a sense of mutual recognition? How do the vines understand my presence here?

Navigating the forest is a sensual experience—most prominent is the constant, unrelenting, maddening assault of the mosquitoes, which I cannot leave out of the story, for it is the tribute all of us mammals pay for entering the forest ecosystem—that our flesh and blood become potential sustenance to forest life. We are sucked into the ecology of the place despite our best efforts to remain separate. Keeping up as quickly as I can, careful not to trip, careful not to disturb the *isula*—bullet ants that carry on their business on the trees and forest floor—it is still easy to suddenly find

¹³⁶ *Banisteriopsis caapi*, which I refer to as caapi, (often called *ayahuasca*) is one of the two plants (along with *chakruna*) used to make ayahuasca.

myself without a trace of the trail, only the sounds of the machetes steadily cutting trail through the dense forest vaguely in the distance. There is a moment of panic at finding myself “alone” in the forest. I make a hooting sound like a lost animal and am returned with other human hoots; seconds later someone appears before me out of the brush. I resume following.

The sounds of the living beings that teem in the forest are pervasive—each sound, each tree filled with information for those who know how to read the forest—however, they are not only the passive bearers of information; each type of plant contains its own knowledges, its own relations and logics, and its own world-making practices. While having lunch among the trees and vines, a bird call rings out through the forest. Orestes becomes visibly agitated. I am smoking *mapacho* from the pipe I carved with Rawa’s help; *mapacho*, I have discovered, is the best mosquito repellent. *Laura, sopla the chikua to calm it down*, says Orestes. At first, I think he is joking. *Quick*, he says, *sopla the chikua*. I oblige by blowing tobacco smoke in the general direction of the canopy from where the bird call came. The sound the bird is making is “*chi-kua*”; a different call than normal. *It makes this call to announce dangers*, says Orestes. Later, in an interview, Orestes tells me that the *chikua* is, “always there in every forest looking over you. The spirit tells you when something bad is going to happen, but also when something good will happen. It is for good and bad for me.”

Later that day, after 8 hours of walking in the forest measuring and labeling caapi vines, we return to the tractor that had been our transportation from the village to the entrance of the forest we were working in several kilometers away. Our crew of seven piled into the bed of the tractor, relieved to be done walking for the day, just as the sun was beginning to get low in the sky. After traveling about 10 meters in the tractor, we hear a strange noise and the tractor grinds to a stop—it appears that the axle had come off the tractor, and we don’t have the parts necessary to repair it. Us three *gringos* immediately begin our now two-hour hike back to the village, while the others stayed back with the owner of the tractor to try to repair it. Michael and Karl quickly outpaced me, and I found myself quite alone as the trail descended into darkness, and I passed through the cut path through agricultural fields—the papaya trees silhouetted against the setting sun.

Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain—something was biting me below my right ribcage and I made a sound I had never heard from my own mouth—it was a throaty scream. I immediately slapped the thing, and my fingers erupted in pain as well. I screamed again. *Is it a snake? A spider? An ant? A wasp? A bat? Probably not a bat*, I ruled out. I imagine my body lifeless in the trail for my Shipibo friends to come across on their way back. I begin to run toward Karl, our research assistant, who I know is somewhere ahead of me. I am screaming his name, running, crying, and using my machete to continually scrape my side, which still feels as though something very sharp and burning is biting me. Eventually Karl had heard me and stopped. *Something is biting me*, I lament, still crying. He takes out his headlamp and helps me figure out what is afflicting me. The isula ant, about an inch long, still has its pincers embedded in my skin, from between the two layers of my shirts. Karl helps me extract it, and we continue walking together. The pain is now more dull but not less intense, as it seems to be spreading and causing cramping throughout my whole side.

The isula, or bullet ant, known for having the most painful sting of any insect, had bitten me five times. When Orestes and the others caught up to me, I told them that I had been bitten by the isula, and Orestes told me it was as the *chikua* had warned. When I asked him about it again later in an interview, he said, “and that *chikua* had announced that our tractor was going to be broken, and from that bad thing, it happened that the isula would bite you. That was announced,

and I told you, right? You already knew.” Favaron and Gonzales also mention the chikua bird as specifically associated with protecting caapi vines.

The Onanya also speak of the chicua bird, which, they say, takes care of the ayawaska. It is said that when someone does not respect the lianas of the ayawaska, relieving themselves close to them, the chicua throws a bolt at him and makes him sick. But it helps those who know how to behave legitimately and guides them through the spiritual worlds (Favaron and Gonzales 2019, 25, my translation).

To be in the forest, we depend on interspecies ways of knowing and practices that form relations of mutual recognition, trust, protection, care, or sustenance. Being an outsider in forest spaces, I do not recognize the same signs that Orestes and Feliciano, our guide, attend to. Their ways of knowing the forest extend to a web of interspecies relations that indicate not only how to navigate the forest, but how to behave properly according to the spiritual dictates of the forest guardians. These ways of knowing are more important for vital goals like surviving in forest spaces, identifying vines, and navigating the forest so as not to be lost. And yet, these ways of knowing are rendered invisible by the scientific methods and models that result from this type of field work. So what was the chikua trying to tell me by sending this bolt in the form of the isula to me?

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

In Shipibo communities themselves, although ayahuasca is special, and offers economic opportunities for many people, there are other medicinal plants that could be considered even more important and culturally relevant. The forests in the Amazon are a whole pharmacopoeia of medicinal plants that can be used to treat almost any type of ailment, physical or spiritual, sometimes with great success. “*Jatibi jiwí riki rao.*” *Every tree is medicine. If you don’t think so, it’s because you don’t know how to use it.* I heard Papa Meni, the elder healer in Paoyhan, saying this emphatically to young man from his village in reference to distinguishing which plants in the forest are medicinal. According to Papa Meni and other Shipibo *onanya* (healers), plants, and particularly plant spirits, are teachers and healers, with specific preferences for how they want to be approached and interact with humans. The best and most authoritative way to learn about the uses of plants is from the plant spirits themselves.

It was only after cultivating my own direct relationships with teacher plants and plant spirits through dieting (*samá*), that an understanding started to take root in the interspecies connection space between the plants and myself. In this space, I continually realize that plant beings have their own knowings, and produce their own worlds. However, the more I learn how to learn from plants, and am exposed to plant worlds, the less I am certain of anything at all. It seems that this form of plant education is more about unknowing than knowing. As Jacqui Alexander found when encountering “the sacred” in her practice as a Yoruba priest, “I had to begin to inhabit that unstable space of not knowing, of admitting that I did not even know how to begin to know” (Alexander 2005, 294). This presents a puzzling situation when one’s role as a researcher is ostensibly to produce some knowledge product. And yet, engaging and struggling with these types of unknowable and spirit-filled worlds is promising ground for the creation of new knowledges and epistemologies (Rowley 2007). We also must struggle with these worlds and concepts on a personal level in order to avoid epistemic harm to those to whom those worlds matter. This chapter is meant as a compassionate critique and methodological intervention for the field of ayahuasca research, to clear some ground for my future self, and fellow researchers who

may find themselves in a similar sort of existential crisis because of the cognitive dissonance we experience when our own knowings and unknowings do not seem to have a place in the research paradigms we use to produce consumable knowledge.

One of the ethnographic field sites I draw on to confront this puzzle is the II World Ayahuasca Conference (AYA2016, hereafter), which took place in October 2016 in Rio Branco, a city in Acre, Brazil. The conference, lasting five days, featured neurobiologists, pharmacologists, ethnobotanists, psychologists, anthropologists and other social scientists, lawyers, Indigenous healers, and other practitioners of ayahuasca, as presenters. The crowd was a mix of academics, curious psychonauts,¹³⁷ and practitioners or others with an interest in ayahuasca healing or the ayahuasca experience more generally. There were also representatives from at least 17 Indigenous communities in Acre, as well as some from further away, who were invited to attend the conference free of charge. The location and format of the conference itself are evidence of the strides the field of ayahuasca research is taking toward recognizing Indigenous knowledge. Rio Branco, in the state of Acre, is situated centrally to many Indigenous territories, and is also the birthplace of Santo Daime, a Brazilian ayahuasca religion. Indigenous representatives comprised a large portion of the presenters at the conference, though non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners comprised the majority, and each received more time to speak because of the ways the panels were formulated. In the evenings, after the conference, several different Indigenous groups and ayahuasca religions held ayahuasca ceremonies for large groups of conference participants, sometimes with 50 people in one ceremony.

I used AYA2016 as a site for understanding the breadth of methods used to know ayahuasca. At conference presentations, I documented ways that researchers and other presenters at the conference produced knowledge, and how they spoke about their relationships with ayahuasca and plants. Many of the researchers at AYA2016 referenced their own personal relationships with plant spirits or plants beings. However, I observed little academic research that explicitly engaged with plant agency or animacy, or whose methods accounted for the knowledge that is produced by being in relationship with these plants. There seems to be a discrepancy between researchers' intersubjective relationships with these plants, and the methodological approaches most often used to produce knowledge about them.

In this chapter, I explore what absences are created by leaving out perspectives generated from more intimate, embodied, and personal relationships with more-than-human beings, and specifically plants-as-teachers. I argue that what is at stake is not only who gets to exist in the world, as Donna Haraway (2008) has said, but also whose worlds get to exist, as well as whose knowledges get to count. First, plants are excluded from ontological status as knowing or even animate beings. Second, it limits all that exists to only those things knowable by humans with specific ways of knowing. Last, excluding researchers' personal relationships with plant spirits reproduces racialized knowledge hierarchies that continue to place plant spirits in the realm of *Indigenous beliefs*, and thereby constructs those holding these beliefs as less valid knowers. These hierarchies operate through both knowledge production and knowledge circulation, as well as the opportunities given to Indigenous peoples to advance.

Following an explanation of the various ways that myself and others conceptualize ayahuasca, I first examine the ontological and epistemic assumptions inherent in various knowledge-making practices and discuss how these determine the relationships between knower

¹³⁷ *Psychonauts* generally refers to psychedelic adventurers—those who consume psychedelics in order to explore their own psyches or the other worlds they come into contact with through the experience.

and known, and the types of knowledges produced. I discuss knowledge making practices with respect to my own multidisciplinary research as well as those of others who have studied ayahuasca and other plants. Second, I argue that it is necessary to interrogate our research paradigms and engage seriously with Indigenous ways of knowing to avoid complacency in recreating hegemonic knowledges and structural power imbalances. I explore what science and knowledge production might look like if we begin with the premise that other-than-humans can know, act, and produce their own worlds. Finally, I discuss how scientific and academic knowledge-making practices exclude Indigenous sciences and methods from equal footing in epistemological matters.

BOUNDARY BEINGS & ABSENCES

Feminist STS scholars such as Donna Haraway show us that all knowledge is situated within a particular perspective, within power hierarchies, within a given social and historical context, and within a specific type of body (Haraway 1991). Feminist standpoint theory, introduced by Sandra Harding (1992), shows how focusing research on understanding the perspectives of those most marginalized can illuminate hegemonic assumptions and contradictions that were otherwise made to appear natural and commonsense. All beings have different tools for knowing the world. For humans, these include our senses, scientific measurements as well as cultural and interspecies practices as demonstrated by Orestes and Feliciano in the opening vignette. On the other hand, plants also have their tools for knowing. Plants are very sensitive to specific chemicals, light, microbes, and water in their environments and respond in visible and measurable ways. It has even been demonstrated that they have the ability to learn (Gagliano et al. 2014). But what might plants know that we are unable to measure with tools?

Amazonian ontologies grant personhood to many, if not all, natural entities (Viveiros de Castro 1998). Thus, for Amazonian peoples, plants are considered to be beings with their own subjectivities, worlds, and knowledges. Moreover, as I have discussed in previous chapters, they can be enlisted as healers and teachers. Relating with plants as teachers or healers may be intuitive to some, but to others the prospect may cause some bodily or intellectual discomfort. Such a perspective clearly challenges some of the naturalized Western conceptions of plants: as inanimate, or at least very low on the animacy hierarchy. According to Mel Chen's conception, animacy hierarchies constrain and arrange both living and nonliving matter according to some relative ranking of liveliness (Chen 2012). Disrupting these hierarchies and granting subjectivity to plants, may mean unseating oneself from a position of being a privileged knower, as it fundamentally questions human supremacy and Eurocentric hegemonic knowledges. As Hushahu, a Yawanawa woman, said at AYA2016 while she told her remarkable story, "men and women searching for spirituality must plant humility in their hearts." Relating with plants as teachers requires humility; meeting the other subject at one's limits of knowing and acknowledging that we cannot circumscribe them in our own minds or with our usual methods.

Mechanistic science has increasingly relied on measurement tools and statistics to know the world, and there has been a subsequent denial of legitimacy of other types of tools and ways of knowing (Daston and Galison 2007). Researchers often struggle with their own subjectivities and the subjectivities of their supposed objects of study. Perhaps at the heart of the challenges posed by ayahuasca to researchers, is an ontological tension about the exact nature of ayahuasca. It has many meanings, many names, and many stories for different peoples and communities of practice. Ayahuasca is ontologically slippery, ambiguous, and defies simple categorization and objectification for the purposes of study (Tupper and Labate 2014; Labate, Cavnar, and Gearin

2017). For context, the variety of themes and discourses that presenters at AYA2016 used to describe ayahuasca are shown in Table 5.1 and range from *creator* or *mother* to a *drug* or *experience*.

Although ayahuasca has different meanings and ontological status for different groups, it serves to connect these disparate communities and creates a “bridge” or “path” (see Table 5.1) for dialogue and translation across social worlds, knowledges, and cultures. Ayahuasca also works to connect plants and humans and facilitates communication and translation across their distinct but partially overlapping worlds (Viveiros de Castro 2004). At AYA2016, ayahuasca acted as a *boundary being*. The term *boundary being* is in the same vein as Star’s original usage of *boundary object* (Star and Griesemer 1989; Bowker and Star 2000; Star 2010). A boundary being, like a boundary object, can have different meanings across various communities of practice, and can also be managed to create coherence across different communities. I would specify a boundary being to be a class of boundary object that resists objectification and is useful for considering questions of animacy and agency that are perhaps incommensurate across multiple groups or ways of knowing. In mixed spaces, people will often toggle between various definitions of a boundary object (Star 2010). I observed at AYA2016, conference speakers and participants would toggle between referring to ayahuasca as animate and as inanimate. The uneasiness ayahuasca presents to making clear divisions between being and not-being, animate and inanimate, highlights the need to reconsider who has authority to determine what constitutes life, and how these divisions are enforced (Povinelli 2016).

Part of the ontological slipperiness of ayahuasca is that the spirit of ayahuasca, the brew, and the plants used to make ayahuasca are not fully separable. Nor do I believe that it is desirable to construct ayahuasca as coherent or singular since, as a boundary being, it has meaning and makes meaning in multiple worlds. The ayahuasca complex, as I have described in other chapters, is not simply a plant or a drug, it is not simply a spiritual being either, and it is not only the ceremonies and practices around it that constitute it as both sacred and as a tourist commodity. It is all of those things, and more; greater than the sum of its parts, it forms new and sometimes surprising connections rhizomatically (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The ayahuasca experience is well known for challenging one’s ontological assumptions; perhaps, by providing a new method with which to observe the world(s) (Tupper and Labate 2014), and communicate with other-than-human beings.

When researchers develop relationships with ayahuasca, they may be faced with ontological tension around the existence of spirits. As Rachel Harris (2017) describes it, her feeling of tension was exacerbated to the status of an ontological crisis when coupled with her interview data showing that 75% of the 81 North Americans who she interviewed also reported having a relationship with the spirit of ayahuasca. An ontological tension (or crisis) can also arise when the ontological understandings of the researcher and the subjects of the study are in an antagonistic orientation to one another, or conflict with the ontological underpinnings of the research approach itself. In this case, the researcher may be faced with either re-evaluating their research paradigm or (re)producing fundamental gaps between their actual understanding of the situation (or their informants’ understanding) and the knowledge they are able to produce. Most often, research produces knowledges that are congruent with what was already assumed to knowably exist (Kuhn 1962). One’s perspective, relationships, and ability to perceive, all contribute to one’s ontological understandings (what we understand to exist), and thereby the worlds we inhabit.

Table 5.1. General themes used to speak about ayahuasca by presenters at the II World Ayahuasca Conference, 2016. Select quotes are shown to demonstrate the breadth and variation in language used for each theme. Phrases that were repeated multiple times in very similar ways were combined. Many quotes were recorded based on live interpretations to English from Portuguese or Spanish that were broadcast on headphones during the conference.

| Ontology: What is Ayahuasca? | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Commodity | “ayahuasca is not in the forest, it is in the internet”; “a source of money”; “it is commercial”; “a big business.” |
| Chemical complex | “a preparation of DMT”; “ayahuasca = harmaline + DMT”; “complex of chemical compounds.” |
| Drug / Experience | “short and long-term effects”; “a drug”; “affects humans”; “a complete sensory experience”; “intoxicating”; “a hazard to human mental health”; “recreational use”; “a hallucinogen”; “a substance that promotes finding oneself.” |
| Story | “long important story”; “beautiful story”; “very difficult and delicate story”; “prophesy given millions of years ago.” |
| Plant species | “a species in the forest”; “ayahuasca harvested in the wild”; “good to plant the plants”; “medicine that comes from the forest.” |
| Indigenous | “carries with it the culture of Indigenous people”; “Indigenous heritage traditional medicine”; “traditional medicine”; “science of Indigenous culture.” |
| Sacred | “sacred”; “sacrament”; “god”; “gift from the gods”; “holy”; “sacred brew”; “our sacred drink”; “holy thing that brings us connection”; “sacred source of strength and knowledge”; “instrument for religion”; “sacred medicine for humanity.” |
| Path / Bridge | “path of light we seek for healing”; “path for dialogues between different kinds of knowledge”; “intercultural bridge”; “open to spirit world”; “with ayahuasca we enter the spiritual world and connect with beings.” |
| Therapy / Tool | “psychotherapeutic tool”; “therapeutic medicine”; “therapy”; “millennial tool.” |
| Medicine / Healing | “the healing of humanity”; “medicine”; “plant medicine”; “medicine for healing.” |
| Entity | “medicines are alive, not just substances”; “they have spirits”; “it is a living thing”; “she is an entity, an identity”; “has its own agency”; “sentient being in the plant itself”; “plant intelligence”; “all plants have importance and purpose”; “plants are reaching out and awakening us”; “she has freedom.” |
| Teacher | “one of the teachers of the world”; “a book for learning”; “to learn different types of knowledge”; “professor”; “our teacher”; “the greatest master/teacher/professor”; “learning comes from the plant.” |
| Mother / Mother Earth | “mother ayahuasca”; “our mother and teacher”; “mother earth speaking”; “she is simply the earth goddess doing what she needs to do.” |
| Life / Creator | “medicine is life”; “essence of creation”; “oni means generator.” |

5 | 1 METHODS-AS-USUAL

In my own research methods I have taken several different approaches to knowing plants. I have a masters in plant ecology. Although ecologists have deep respect for plants, plants are generally seen as fulfilling ecological functions and being governed by certain physical and biological constraints in an interaction between the organism and the environment. For the caapi demography study I mentioned earlier, led by Michael Coe,¹³⁸ our aim was to determine the growth rates, reproduction strategies, and harvest levels of wild ayahuasca populations in the forest outside of Junin Pablo. In order to conduct this study, we marked as many caapi vines as we (our guides) could find within a certain plot size, (around 200 vines total), and measured several traits of the caapi vines within the plot area, ideally over several years (girth, height, companion tree, life stage, and number of flowers). In this case, the way we *know* ayahuasca was mediated through instruments and statistics: digital calipers, a laser altimeter to measure height, a GPS unit, statistical regression models that Michael performed later. These measurements, coordinates, and models distil a small fragment of the forest—the particular plants and aspects of those plants that have been chosen to be relevant—divorced from their socionatural surroundings, and into a representation in numerical and textual form, only legible to a certain kind of scientist. These numbers and texts, containing all the knowledges that went into distilling the forest, then make reference back to that complex socionatural space (Latour 1999).

As I mentioned in the opening scene of this chapter, there were many types of Indigenous knowledges that enabled and contributed to the collection of these data. First of all, in the absence of visible leaves, ayahuasca can be quite difficult to identify—in fact, while I could rule out certain vines based on color, habit, and texture, myself and even Michael (a certified botanist) were never entirely certain. On the other hand, we had Shipibo guides that used a variety of methods to identify vines, including visual cues and tasting the inner bark. We relied on their identification practices far more than Michael's botany training. Secondly, from our vantage point on the ground, it was quite difficult to see the height of the caapi vines in the canopy, or to see whether they were flowering—thus, it was necessary to hire a local man who was skilled at tree climbing, which he did with a simple rope harness system, using a looped-back rope in tension between the tree trunk and his body to make his way upwards. Thus, his embodied knowledge was also important in order to generate the scientific data. Furthermore, although Michael had saved GPS locations of each vine, when we went back to locate the vines the following year, Feliciano's guidance and memory of the forest was more accurate than the GPS device itself. While Michael fumbled with the GPS and went traipsing off through the forest in search of our plot corners or a vine, and was sometimes able to find them, I found that if I could just keep reminding Feliciano of which vine we were looking for, he could usually cut a straight line to the exact spot.

In the forest, it is easy to see where the strict guidelines of scientific design break down. For instance, in order for the study to be statistically valid, Michael wanted to create 6 evenly sized square plots, each with around the same number of vines in them. This was not feasible. First of all, it would have taken us several days just to figure out how to draw a square plot in the forest. Second, even if we could, the vines were not close enough together nor in a regular enough pattern to create evenly sized plots with a predictable number of caapi vines in each. Last, the next year when we came back, many of the small metal tags with plot and vine numbers on them had been

¹³⁸ Michael Coe, PhD, at the time was a PhD candidate at the University of Hawaii, and this study was part of his dissertation research.

removed and we were forced to rely on the GPS points and notes we had made from the previous year to figure out how the vines were now seeing corresponded to the numbered vines on our data sheets. These potential sources of error, imprecision, and statistical insignificance were enough to make the work of science quite challenging, particularly if the local knowledge is discounted.

My usual social science methods for understanding ayahuasca, on the other hand, generally consist of ethnography and interviews. I have interviewed dozens of Shipibo healers and community members about their experiences and relationships with ayahuasca and other plants in order to understand how they relate to these plants, and the practices that constitute these relationships. In this case, the knowledge I produced about ayahuasca was mediated through other peoples' bodily interpretation of their experiences, and their willingness and ability to communicate that and translate it into words and into Spanish, which is both their second language and my second language. Although most Shipibo people are aware of the value of scientific or academic studies for translating knowledge into some sort of political power, knowledge, according to the healers I interviewed, comes directly from the plants and the ability to relate well with their *ibo* (spirits) and learn from them.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES AND SCIENTISM

The heat in Rio Branco was oppressive. The grounds of the second World Ayahuasca Conference (AYA2016), held at the Federal University of Acre (UFAC), were framed by a large red arch, and the crowd had a bustling and vibrant energy. Dozens of vendors had set up tables on the plaza outside of the conference, selling Indigenous crafts and beadwork, plant medicines, shoes made from local rubber, and jewelry made from seeds and crystals. Most prominent among the participants were the Indigenous peoples of Acre, many of whom came with groups of 20 or more community members, and each day painted fresh red and black designs on their faces, dressed in full feather headdresses according to the traditional style of each group. In the plaza out front, some of the Indigenous musicians, Yawanawa and Huni Kuin most notably, played music—medicine songs that were familiar to me from ceremonies I had been to in the past. Attended by people from all around the world, there were several full-time interpreters who translated the presentations between English, Spanish, and Portuguese, and broadcast them on headsets that could be picked up at the entrance to the auditorium. Indigenous presenters sometimes spoke in their native languages, but had to provide interpretations for themselves or for each other into one of the colonial languages mentioned above.



Figure 5.1. An “Indigenous Worlds” panel at the II World Ayahuasca Conference (AYA2016). On the very left, partially obscured by the palm leaves, is Joaquim Maná, a Huni Kuin teacher. Next to him, wearing the white headdress is Siã Huni Kui, a Huni Kuin pajé (shaman). The man holding the microphone is Ninawa Huni Kui, also a pajé. Benki Piyako, an Asháninka shaman, is on the right, wearing a headdress with three vertical feathers. Photo by Laura Dev.

Benki Piyako, an Asháninka presenter and spiritual leader, was recognizable with a woven striped kaftan, and three tall feathers pointing vertically from a hat (Figure 5.1). Thick red stripes had been painted horizontally across each of his cheekbones. There was constantly a crowd around him. From the first time Benki took the stage, he commanded the audience, opening with an Asháninka song of alignment that reverberated throughout the conference room. *Within each people’s spirituality*, Benki told the crowd in Portuguese, *many powerful beings pass through*. “Ayahuasca has come to help humanity meet himself again, in the midst of all the pollution and destruction.” Then Benki appealed to the scientists in the audience, asking them to respect the Indigenous peoples. Smiling slightly, he said, “perhaps through science, we will say once and for all whether ayahuasca is sacred or is intoxicating.” This sarcastic comment is a powerful critique of science that shows its limitations at even addressing spiritual or sacred relationships that are the primary area of concern for many Indigenous onto-epistemologies. This was a point of underlying tension for other Indigenous presenters as well. José Correia (Jaminawa) critiqued scientific methods saying “No scientists will find out who [ayahuasca] is, we just need to respect her”.

Scientism is the belief that science is better than all other ways of knowing, and that “reality” or “truth” is limited to what is verifiable by that one way of knowing. This epistemic supremacy becomes hegemonic when it is naturalized and uncritically accepted even by those whose knowledges it subjugates. Colonial power relations contributed to creating a hegemony out of Eurocentric knowledge systems, based in the mechanistic, positivist science that has marginalized other knowledges and worlds for the last two centuries or so (Mignolo 2000; Escobar 2007). Carolyn Merchant (1980) in *The Death of Nature*, describes how the rise of the mechanistic

worldview in Europe served to essentially exorcise the knowable, natural world of any animacy or intelligence beyond the human. Mechanistic science defined nature as its object of inquiry, and thereby categorized any phenomena not answerable to scientific questioning, such as spirits and plant beings, as supernatural (outside of nature).

Defining science as beyond the influence of the social or political created what Bruno Latour (Latour 2012) calls the “great divide,” in which human culture was constructed as fundamentally separate from nonhuman nature (the realm of science), thereby excluding nonhumans from social and political spheres. This created an ontological tension for humans whose worlds included social relations with other-than-humans. These “animists” were constructed as premodern others, who were then could then also be objectified for the purpose of scientific inquiry (Stengers 2011; Povinelli 2016). Therefore, separation between humans and non-humans, which gave rise to human exceptionalism, shares its epistemic roots with the division that subjugated Indigenous knowledges and excluded Indigenous peoples from participation in politics and science (de la Cadena 2010).

ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGIES FOR KNOWING AYAHUASCA

One’s worlds and ways of knowing dialectically inform each other. Ways of knowing are worldmaking practices that also define how one makes sense of their world. Epistemological assumptions about how knowledge is understood and communicated include theoretical frameworks about what forms of knowledge can be obtained and how decisions are made about what is true and what is false (Vasilachis de Gialdino 2011). These epistemologies are also constitutive of worlds. This is why proponents of political ontology (de la Cadena 2015; Blaser 2013a; de la Cadena and Blaser 2018), sometimes call such frameworks onto-epistemologies. However, the realism that underlies science and dominant worldviews assumes that there is one reality to be known through different epistemological frameworks. This is illustrated by the famous quote by the Nobel laureate physicist, Werner Heisenberg (1958): “We have to remember that what we observe is not nature herself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning.” One’s understandings and epistemological assumptions together constrain the questions researchers ask, the methods they use, and how they interpret information. According to my framework, drawing on political ontology, these practices in turn construct both what exists in the world and what can be described.

The most common research approaches used to produce knowledge about ayahuasca have limited engagement with plant intelligences, if plants are granted any agency, animacy, or intelligence at all. Therefore, knowledge about plants is often limited to what is physically measurable or what is learned in interpretivist studies of (mostly) secondhand accounts of human experiences with plants. These knowledges are valuable for certain research objectives but do not approach the knowledges or worlds that are produced by plants directly. In the following sections, I examine practices and assumptions used to learn about ayahuasca and the types of knowledge that are able to be produced, with attention to the role of plants in these different approaches to knowledge production. The resulting analysis locates the most common types of research on ayahuasca, based in part on the presentations at AYA2016, with respect to three main (onto-)epistemological and theoretical frameworks (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2. A simplified representation of common (onto-)epistemological and theoretical frameworks used to understand ayahuasca—does not encompass all possible approaches. This categorization scheme is not meant to reinforce divisions among disciplines, but is useful for organizational purposes.

| Epistemology: How to Know Ayahuasca? | | |
|---|--|---|
| Theoretical Framework | Types of studies | Approach to knowing ayahuasca |
| 1. Objectivist Epistemology: Meaningful reality exists outside of the knowing subject. | | |
| Positivism: Looks for causal relationships through hypothesis testing. Assumes that valid data should be objective, reproducible, and measurable. A deductive and empirical approach. | Ecological & Botanical | Measure plant behaviors, interactions, responses, or physical/chemical properties. |
| | Biomedical, Pharmacological, Psychological | Measure physiological or behavioral responses in humans to consuming ayahuasca or its constituents. |
| 2. Subjectivist Epistemology: Meaning is derived from subjective experiences. | | |
| Positivism: Looks for causal effects and tests hypotheses. Often relies on indices to produce quantifiable data. | | Measure psychological effects of consuming ayahuasca on human participants. |
| Interpretivism: Seeks to understand and interpret others' experiences. Focuses on subjective meaning and details. | Psychotherapeutic & Psychological | Describe how human participants interpret their experiences with ayahuasca. |
| Relationalism: Understanding is achieved inter-subjectively or dialogically between researcher and participant | | Understand through interactive dialogue about participant's experience. |
| 3. Constructionist Epistemology: Meaning is constructed interactively through social practices. | | |
| Positivism: Assumes that valid data should be objective, reproducible, measurable. | Ethnobotanical | Evaluate traditional botanical knowledge and uses for validity and convergence. |
| Interpretivism: Seeks to understand others' ways of making meaning. Focuses on social phenomena and cultural meanings. | | Describe cultural knowledges, beliefs, practices, and governance around the use of ayahuasca. |
| Relationalism: Understanding is achieved inter-subjectively. Centered on relationship-building. | Ethnographic | Attend to intersubjective relationships as a way of understanding the other. |
| | Participatory Research | Dialogue with community. Build cross-cultural or collective understanding. |
| 4. Indigenous Epistemologies: Heterogeneous and self-defined ways of making meaning. | | |
| Relationalism: Understanding is achieved relationally and emergent through relations. | Shamanic & Animistic | Engage and communicate directly with plants and/or spirits. |

LIMITATIONS OF OBJECTIVISM

In the objectivist epistemological framework, there is a fundamental divide between the knower and the known, assuming a singular unified reality exists independently of a knowing subject. Objectivity is one of many potential epistemic virtues (Daston and Galison 2007), and emphasizes that knowledge should not be affected by subjective interpretation. A positivist theoretical framework relies on quantification and experimentation to test falsifiable hypotheses. Objectivism and positivism describe the classical approach to science (Gray 2014) that traditionally excludes nature (and therefore plants) from the social domain. As such, in the ecological study that Michael and I conducted, the plants were not seen as social actors as much as they were natural objects to be measured and catalogued. Medical and pharmacological studies (e.g. de Araujo et al. 2012; Riba et al. 2003) generally rely on positivism as an approach that generates high predictability and control. Many ethnobotanical studies also use positivist-based methods, such as creating quantifiable indices of cultural importance, though these are sometimes combined with interpretivist and ethnographic methods (e.g. Tudela-Talavera, La Torre-Cuadros, and Native Community of Vencedor 2016).

The objectivist epistemology, however, is not able to account for the subjectivity of its objects of study, and therefore is not designed to produce knowledge about plant subjectivities, nor human subjective experiences. Nonetheless, objectivist approaches in botany have been used to show that plants communicate and learn through chemical signaling, and thereby establish the acceptance of plant intelligence (e.g. Gagliano et al. 2014; Dicke and Bruin 2001). As Dennis McKenna said at AYA2016, the existence of plant intelligences is “not that controversial anymore.” At the same time, although scientific data may seek the conditions of objectivity, Monica Gagliano talks about how it was precisely *through* her experiences dieting *ayahuma*, an Amazonian teacher plant (a large tree in fact), that she came up with ideas necessary to carry out her experiments demonstrating plant intelligence with pea seedlings:

[Ayahuma] made sure that I could hear her voice loud and clear when she started prescribing the complete set of instructions for testing Pavlovian learning in plants. I transcribed as she dictated. And literally, this is how the pages of my travel diary filled up with the words she spoke and the diagrams she sketched (Gagliano 2018, 78).

This is a further demonstration of the interspecies social relations that are actually necessary to produce “objective” data, and yet these relations cannot be demonstrated within the epistemological framework of objectivity. STS scholars have long critiqued objectivity, pointing out that all knowledges are socially situated, and therefore only partial (Haraway 1991), and arise out of political and social practices (Latour 1988). Indeed, according to Harding (1992), sciences that claim universality and neutrality will produce more distorted knowledges compared to sciences that contextualize their historical and positional standpoints. Despite these critiques, positivist frameworks emphasizing neutrality are still often privileged in academia by funders, publishers, employers, and institutions. Thus, in published studies the messy process of producing knowledge is often obscured (Star 2010; Latour 1988).

LIMITATIONS OF SUBJECTIVISM

A subjectivist epistemology focuses on how individuals make meaning and locates meaningful reality in the subjective experience. For this reason, subjectivism is the most common epistemology used in psychological and psychotherapeutic studies, such as Benny Shanon’s

(2002) work, *The Antipodes of the Mind*, which seeks to describe and categorize the range of experiences of those (primarily Westerners) who take ayahuasca. According to Shanon, “What is special about Ayahuasca is the extraordinary subjective experiences this brew generates in the mind” (Shanon 2002, 31). Shanon describes several categories of supernatural beings that his interlocutors encountered, though plant spirits are not on his list, and the ontological questions these encounters bring up, he admits, are beyond the scope of his subjectivist epistemology.

Subjectivist studies sometimes reproduce positivist methodologies; for example, they may use experimental designs with control groups, and convert qualitative data into quantifiable indices (e.g. Barbosa et al. 2009). Positivist frameworks are often uncritically accepted as disciplinary standards in psychology (Breen and Darlston-Jones 2008). However, studies using interpretive or relational frameworks that seek more qualitative or phenomenological accounts are also prevalent and are sometimes also combined with positivist approaches (Sola 2017). To some degree, these decisions depend on subdisciplinary focus, and what the questions of interest are. At AYA2016, Santiago López-Pavillard noted that psychotherapeutic approaches that see all experience as internally-generated do not account for the existence of spirits. Rather, they see the results of ayahuasca as a chemically-generated hallucinatory experience, not as a master teacher plant. Thus, he called for the recognition of multiple types of knowledges and realities, integrating both shamanic and psychotherapeutic knowledge. He emphasized that it is not about intercultural knowledge and dialogue, but about *intercosmic* knowledge, meaning these types of knowledge that are different across different worlds (or worldviews).

LIMITATIONS OF CONSTRUCTIONISM

Presently, I am using a constructionist epistemology, in which meaning is constructed out of practices. This is alongside the ontological understanding that there is no singular objective reality, and no one can be truly objective. Therefore, knowledge is understood to be the result of convention (Roosth and Silbey 2008). This allows me to use an interpretivist framework to examine the conditions that give rise to differing knowledge claims, and to treat knowledge claims equally, whether regarded as true or false. I locate ethnographic studies somewhere between an interpretivist approach, in which the ethnographer seeks to describe the meanings made by their informants, and a relationalist approach, in which meaning is co-constructed by both the ethnographer and the informants (interlocutors) (Table 5.2).

Ethnographic studies do have room to view plant teachers and spirits as ontologically valid, as ethnographers are seeking to describe the worlds of their informants (e.g. Brabec de Mori 2012a; de la Cadena 2015; Kohn 2013), but oftentimes spirits are interpreted as mere cultural constructs. For example, at AYA2016, there were heated debates about the existence of spirits and spiritual worlds. One presenter said, “Yes, there are spirits. They are metaphors. People don’t see them; they are like particles.” Evgenia Fotiou, an anthropologist replied, “spirits are not metaphors. They are real. There are different frameworks for seeing them. What is objective reality? It doesn’t really exist. None of us can be really objective.”

In academic knowledge-making, there is traditionally little ethnographic engagement directly with other-than-human beings, particularly their spiritual aspects. Instead, they are described second-hand, through other people who do engage with these beings. However, researchers *can* engage directly with plant beings and spirits by using autoethnographic methods to analyze their own experiences with respect to the research context (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010). Although autoethnography often refers to research that takes place within the researcher’s

own community, such techniques can also be employed when the researcher is an outsider or is engaging with a community of practice. For example, ethnobotanists like Terence McKenna (1993) and Wade Davis (1997), and anthropologists like Evgenia Fotiou (2010) and others, use autoethnographic writing to tell the stories of their relationships with plants. Both Shanon (2002) and Jacques Mabit (1986) use their own experiences taking ayahuasca as evidence in their interpretive studies—a sort of auto-experimentation. This used to be a more common method in psychedelic science, before concerns about neutrality and objectivity became such a priority for achieving legitimacy in the eyes of more traditional academics and funding agencies (Anderson 2012). At AYA2016, Jacques Mabit argued for the importance of recognizing spirits when working with ayahuasca, saying, “how are you going to exorcise these spirits if you don’t know how to work with them, or deny their existence?”

More experimental writing practices, or writing that is part of the self-reflexive process, can also be used to reflect on social relationships with other-than-human beings and spiritual encounters (Fotiou 2010; Harris 2017; Gagliano 2018). Richard Doyle (2012) uses such methods to recount his experiences with plant intelligences and healing:

I share my own experience as an invitation to experiment with post normal contemplative science not because I know it to be true—its truth would be the outcome of the process that sorts through my account as well as others like it—but because of an unavoidable perception of its efficacy.... I make no claims for the universality of my experience and insist, rather, on its particularity (Doyle 2012, 31).

Auto-ethnographic techniques are not always successful at accounting for plant agency, and there is the danger that including personal stories can come across as gratuitous or sensationalized. Using participant-observation as a method—for example, consuming ayahuasca and participating in rituals—is not, by itself, an autoethnographic method for understanding ayahuasca, unless the researcher *explicitly* includes their own experiences as part of their analysis. Likewise, autoethnography goes beyond the sharing of personal anecdotes and asides, which, for many disciplines, are perceived as extraneous to knowledge-making, and not included in published studies. However, these sharings are important. In the absence of disclosure of the researcher’s own process encountering (or not encountering) spirits and plant beings, ethnographic description often relegates these spirits and plant beings to the realm of supernatural Indigenous beliefs. This constructs a philosophical divide between the researcher and the Indigenous *other*, which then serves to justify that researchers, as privileged knowers, may study, categorize, and represent the other (Stengers 2011), thus reproducing hierarchies of knowledge and knowing.

MOVING BEYOND RESEARCH AS USUAL?

As I have illustrated, the most common research approaches used to produce knowledge about ayahuasca and other plants have limited engagement with plant intelligences, if plants are granted agency, animacy, or intelligence at all. Even studies like Gagliano’s, which demonstrate plant intelligence, cannot engage with the spiritual aspects of plant intelligence, which informed the creation of the study (Gagliano et al. 2014; Gagliano 2018). Therefore, knowledge about plants is often limited to what is physically measurable, or what is learned in interpretivist studies of (mostly) second-hand accounts of human experiences with plants. These knowledges are valuable for certain research objectives, but do not approach the knowledge or worlds that are produced by plants directly. Furthermore, when unexamined, certain approaches can reproduce problematic knowledge hierarchies.

At AYA2016, I found that less established researchers, particularly in fields with objectivist approaches, were less likely to mention plants-as-beings at all. It may be that their ontological paradigms do not incorporate plant beings, or perhaps it can be perceived as professionally risky to deviate from norms of discipline or mention plant spirits or plant agency, unless speaking about someone else's beliefs. Because of the marginalized nature of psychedelic research in general, and the contested legitimacy of the topic of research, ayahuasca researchers in certain fields may be less likely to deviate from methodological norms toward more epistemically vulnerable approaches. This could explain why so much of the work on ayahuasca falls into fairly standard research frameworks, as I have outlined above.

However, I sensed some frustration and also excitement from researchers at AYA2016 about the unique challenges that ayahuasca poses. For example, Leonardo Ussin thought that ayahuasca could be used as a potential path for generating dialogues between different types of knowledges. This harkens back to my description of ayahuasca as a boundary being. Jacques Mabit, a French medical doctor who runs an ayahuasca treatment center in Peru specializing in treating addiction,¹³⁹ cautioned about using ayahuasca for medical and therapeutic use that is separated from the spiritual dimensions. In the majority of scientific talks I attended the researchers agreed that it is not enough to see these plants as simply their chemical components. It is a testament to the multidisciplinary and multicultural nature of the conference that scientists felt they should make such disclaimers. Meanwhile, nearly all of the non-Indigenous presenters across disciplines spoke of ayahuasca as having its own agency and knowledges, and as being intertwined with Indigenous traditions. Yet, there are few precedents for cross-cultural, interspecies, inter-cosmic collaboration in producing knowledge and little framework for engaging with plant agencies or plant worlds.

Even researchers such as myself who call for something different and reference the inspired nature of these plants are still limited by a methodological toolkit that tends to reproduce old paradigms and old hierarchies. In the multispecies and interspecies literature, originally focused more on animals, there has been a recent focus on “vegetal” matters as an increasingly popular area of study that promotes and recognizes the livelihood of plants (Natasha Myers 2015; Marder 2013; Goldstein 2019b; Kimmerer 2015; Hartigan 2019). This has been in concert with interesting advances in plant science that also verify plants' liveliness through their abilities to communicate and learn (Gagliano et al. 2014). The vegetal turn has opened new possibilities for ethnographies and theories that push the field further beyond anthropocentrism. Yet, these studies often remain constrained by the seeming inability for academics to form truly communicative or collaborative relations with plants. Thus, like much of the interspecies, multispecies, and more-than-human literature, human ethnographers and scholars are still stuck in old dilemmas between anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism, and scientism.

Research in general is moving toward more inclusive and interdisciplinary approaches, which utilize a plurality of methods, knowledges, and onto-epistemological frameworks (Rowley 2007; Klein 1990; Newell 2001; Parra and Walsh 2016; Cundill, Roux, and Parker 2015; Hoffmann, Pohl, and Hering 2017). This is important, as leaving absences around the existence of multiple knowledges, even when contested, implies complicity in creating marginalization (Dei 2000). Several researchers at AYA2016 encouraged prioritizing intercultural and intercosmic dialogue over predetermined research goals. Beatriz Labate, an anthropologist who was one of the organizers of AYA2016, has been an important player in bringing more diverse voices and

¹³⁹ takiwasi.com

perspectives to the table, particularly those from Indigenous practitioners and researchers, as well as from women. Her work has also foregrounded dialogue about cultural considerations with the expansion of the use of ayahuasca (e.g. Labate and Cavnar 2011; Labate 2017). Still, moving beyond research as usual remains a challenge that has not been fully addressed. In the following sections I will argue that Indigenous approaches to interspecies relating offer promise for moving beyond research as usual, and that community-based participatory research methods offer a way of engaging Indigenous communities in co-producing knowledge.

5 | 2 INDIGENOUS APPROACHES TO INTERSPECIES RELATING

Despite the challenges of engaging with plant intelligences in studies, it takes only a small amount of ecological knowledge to demonstrate that plants *are* agents and *do* make their own meanings of the world. That is, they do not just receive their significance from humans, but are also actively involved in the process of signification. Plants desire, seek nourishment, and have their own form of language (Marder 2013). Monica Gagliano and her team have even demonstrated that plants have the ability to learn through their experiences with certain repeated stimuli (Gagliano et al. 2014). Perhaps because plants rely on other species for reproduction—the birds and the bees so to speak—and on fungi for nutrient acquisition—plant communication is especially interspecies. Plants communicate with and respond to their environments in part by creating new chemical expressions. For example, when plants are exposed to grazing or insect predation, they may respond by producing different secondary phytochemical compounds like tannins (phytophenols), which defend against herbivory (Bryant et al. 1991), or odors that act as signals that are interpreted by other organisms like insects (Landolt and Phillips 1997) or other plants (Dicke and Bruin 2001).

These same secondary compounds are responsible for the toxic, medicinal, and psychoactive effects of plant medicines (Callicott 2013). Ayahuasca’s constituent plants, caapi and chakruna, for instance, produce molecules that act on animal neuroreceptors. These compounds allow humans to relate with them in a direct and embodied way and are responsible for much of the “psychedelic” experience. Christina Callicott (2013) even theorizes *ikaros*, the songs sung in ayahuasca ceremonies in collaboration with the plants, as skillful sonic interpretations of plant phytochemical semiotics (signaling). Richard Doyle (2012) also uses the concept of phytosemiotics as a way of understanding plant intelligence and communication. However, neuroactive chemicals are not necessarily the only way by which humans exchange information with plant beings when drinking ayahuasca, and I caution against reductionist approaches to plant spirits and trans-species communication with plants. For Shipibo healers, the interaction with plant spirits is not dependent on consuming a plant or even necessarily being in physical contact with a plant. Some diets occur while sleeping under a tree, for instance, and in some cases, diets can be passed on from person to person even if the recipient has not contact the diet plant physically. This was often the case with the rare tree, *noya rao*, before they found a new stand of trees.

Indigenous methods for learning are able to engage with plant spirits and plant subjectivities more directly than the usual research approaches I discussed in the previous section. Through interspecies thinking that privileges Indigenous ways of knowing, there is an opportunity to restore animacy and worldmaking activities of other-than-humans, elevate Indigenous ways of

knowing these other-than-humans, and thereby disrupt hegemonic knowledges. However, as Chandler and Reid (2018) caution, using Indigenous knowledges as a way of teaching non-Indigenous people how to live better could be seen as just form of colonization of Indigenous knowledges. Thus, it is important that these approaches also engage with the struggles of Indigenous communities and involve Indigenous collaborators in these efforts. In the following sections, I first explore how both interspecies perspectives and Indigenous perspectives are able to relate with plants. Then I describe how Indigenous knowledges have been marginalized by researchers and the hegemony of Eurocentric scientific knowledges. I argue that Indigenous sciences and epistemologies have crucial insight to contribute to interspecies/more-than-human scholarship, and interspecies relating must be included in understanding ayahuasca and plant knowledges in general (TallBear 2011).

INDIGENOUS RELATIONALITY

As Zoe Todd (2016) and others caution, a decolonial approach must acknowledge that the “great divide” was particular to Eurocentric worldviews. Among many Indigenous peoples, world-making practices and relational ways of knowing that include other-than-human beings as kin have persisted and thrived. Therefore, Indigenous scholars, writers, and thinkers must be foregrounded in conceptualizing relationally-based ways of knowing and being within academia (TallBear 2011; Sundberg 2014). Unfortunately, Indigenous voices have been left out of many of the academic conversations around interspecies and ontological frameworks that actually borrow from Indigenous cosmologies (Todd 2016). Indigenous knowledges are important for critically interrogating hegemonic knowledge systems (Dei 2000). Approaching ayahuasca research from both Indigenous perspectives and plant perspectives can provide an orientation for revealing human-centric and scientific assumptions that are otherwise made invisible.

Indigenous methods for learning from plants are able to engage with plant subjectivity more directly than the usual research approaches. Shipibo healers, for instance, have long precedents for producing knowledge in collaboration with plants. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015), a Native American (Potawatomi) plant ecologist, uses scientific approaches, but reframes her ecological experiments as a way of posing questions to plants and listening for their answers. Relationality is central to many Indigenous epistemologies, as theorized by Indigenous scholars particularly in the North American Indigenous context (Donald 2012; TallBear 2014; Wilson 2008; Deloria 1999), but also for aboriginal scholars in the Australian context (Martin and Mirraboopa 2003; Holmes and Jampijinpa 2013), and Indigenous scholars of Latin America as well (Cusicanqui 1990; Favaron and Gonzales 2019; Yanomami and Albert 2013). Dwayne Donald, for instance, focuses on ethical relationality as a philosophical underpinning of his research, which is a relationality that “seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (Donald 2012, 535). For Donald, this includes webs of more-than-human relations, and relationships with place. This focus on relations emphasizes specificity rather than sameness. Shawn Wilson (2008) theorizes an Indigenous epistemology as follows:

an Indigenous epistemology has systems of knowledge built upon relationships between things, rather than on the things themselves. ... It is important to recognize that the epistemology includes entire systems of knowledge and relationships. These relationships are with the cosmos, around us, as well as with concepts. They thus include interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships, and with ideas. ... Indigenous epistemology is our systems of

knowledge in their context, or in relationship (Wilson 2008, 74).

In Amazonian contexts, these relationalities have been written about more by non-Indigenous researchers like Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998), Philippe Descola (1994), Eduardo Kohn (2013) and many others (including myself) though all of these are translations of Amazonian concepts and practices. Amazonian-focused scholarship often references the importance of the concept of personhood as belonging to a multitude of natural entities, rather than being an attribute exclusive to humans. As such, plants, according to their own subjective perspectives, are people, and thus are considered to be equally as sentient and agentic as humans in perspectival ontologies (Viveiros de Castro 2004a). This is why Eduardo Kohn (2013) has used the term *ecology of selves* to describe the various persons and selves that occupy the forest and exist in a web of relationality. Relationships between humans and other beings, then, are quite important, have particular rules and protocols guiding the establishment and maintenance of interspecies relations (Favaron and Gonzales 2019). These interspecies relations are often mediated through the spirit master of the species (*ibo*), and the rules and protocols are communicated by the *ibo*.

Shipibo methods for relating with and knowing plants include communicating with plant spirits, or *ibo*. Healing knowledge, for one, comes from collaborative, intimate interactions and dialogue with the *ibo*, which often arise in intuitions, dreams, and visions. Singing, dieting, and consuming ayahuasca ceremonially are methods for accessing or channeling the knowledge and songs of the *ibo* (Chapter 4). They are then able to use these plant knowledges for healing or other purposes. Note that learning plant knowledge is importantly distinct from learning *about* plants. The dieting process (*samá*) (described in Chapter 3) is a sensitizing period in which the healer develops a relationship with a specific plant spirit, which then assists them in learning and healing (Jauregui et al. 2011). One of the younger healers I interviewed, Ronin, explained the dieting process like this:

Without diet, plants do not work ... For example, to begin to diet a strong plant ... you must not eat salt, pork, oil, condiments, even sex. You cannot do those things. And during all this time, you will continue to drink the plant barks, 2 or 3 times, depending on how long you do it, 15 days, or weeks, or a month. And when you start learning, your body will begin to feel, and then with time, when you sleep or rest, you hear sounds, or when you close your eyes, visions come as well. That's how plants express themselves... Plants work little by little in the body. It is not like pills that you take and then they have an effect. Plants work in different ways for each body.

Ayahuasca, taken ceremonially, is used to open the dieter to the spirit worlds, and aid in communicating with and learning from the *ibo* of the plant they are dieting. Ayahuasca serves as a master teacher plant, in that it facilitates communication with the other teacher plants. The Shipibo word for healer is *onanya*, which means to have knowledge. Knowledge, *onana*, is also related to the Shipibo word for the ayahuasca decoction, *oni*. The type of knowledge it refers to is not the knowledge that can be attained from measurements or even passed down from other people, but it specifically refers to the knowledge learned directly from plants through the process of dieting.

Though not all Amazonian peoples use ayahuasca or plant diets, many use these practices either together or separately to learn plant knowledges. Many of the Brazilian Indigenous presenters at AYA2016, from various ethnic groups, described similar methods for learning from plants, with an emphasis on ayahuasca's importance as a tool for learning. However, ayahuasca, according to Haru, a Huni Kuin musician is importantly *not only* a tool: "ayahuasca is not just a tool but a holy thing that brings us connection... We must prove to science and society that ayahuasca is not a drug, so everyone can see how valuable it is to humanity, no matter our

differences.” Meanwhile, others like José Correia, for example, spoke of ayahuasca as a “professor” for learning, and also to train shamans. In particular, Indigenous presenters repeatedly emphasized that there are certain guidelines that must be followed when using the plants. Siã Huni Kuin, a pajé (shaman) stated, “only certain people know how to use it in a way that will not hurt anyone. We need to bring attention and education to authorities so they can know the importance of using it in a respectful way.” These regulations on the use of ayahuasca are heterogeneous, but also have some similarities across groups. Most, however, are based on principles of relationality and reciprocity.

By centering and taking seriously Indigenous onto-epistemologies based in relationality, I consider plant intelligence and animacy to be an ontological truth that does not need to be proven, contested, or even understood. To take plant agencies and plant spirits seriously, as I think this conversation demands, again, requires humility; acknowledging the inability to know these plant beings completely, that part of the other exists beyond knowability. Whether using science or other knowledge-making practices, one can only view a facet of an animate other’s existence. This acknowledgement alone piques curiosity, invites relating, and grants agency to the other being. What will it reveal to my methods of questioning? How does it wish to be known? How does it know?

For decades, anthropologists and ethnographers have been working through the role of their research practices in constructing otherness and marginalizing the subjectivities of those whom they seek to study. Multispecies approaches to knowing challenge researchers to extend questions of agency, subjectivity, worldmaking, and relationality, to other-than-human beings (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010). Eduardo Kohn (2013), for example, uses principles of semiotics to demonstrate how animals like dogs, monkeys, and walking-stick insects make and interpret their own significations. He also demonstrates compellingly, through thinking with Indigenous worldviews, how even animal spirit masters—spirit beings who live in the forest and are responsible for certain animals—create signs interpretable by humans, and therefore have their own ontological existence.

Interspecies relating can challenge the usual research frameworks. One of the reasons why Kim TallBear (2011) argues that interspecies perspectives need Indigenous standpoints is that non-Indigenous multispecies ethnographies tend to limit themselves in the types of relations they consider; generally, to material, organismal beings. Indigenous ontologies can extend the web of relationality to both material, non-organismal beings (e.g. rocks, mountains, stars, glaciers), and immaterial or spirit beings. For example, Martin and Mirraoopa’s aboriginal research framework includes relating with other-than-human entities:

Methods such as storying and exchanging talk are most often used amongst People but methods for interacting with other Entities (e.g. Animals, Weather, Skies) are equally necessary. This requires fieldwork that immerses the researcher in the contexts of the Entities and to watch, listen, wait, learn and repeat these processes as methods for data collection (Martin and Mirraoopa 2003, 213).

Shipibo practices for engaging with plant spirits sometimes involves going to the tree one wishes to learn from, sitting beneath it and fasting until the tree spirit presents itself and teaches one how to be in right relationship. However, this type of interspecies listening also involves day-to-day embodied practices. Interspecies listening requires a certain intimacy with other-than-human beings; such intimacy can be a site for the social production of knowledge and reworking of boundaries around the self (Raffles 2002a). Intimacy is symmetric, non-hierarchical, and

emphasizes the importance of specificity of the encounter; of time and space and bodies. Engaging with interspecies relating as a research method allows for the transformation of research practice, and can work toward filling gaps in dominant discourses, as well as opening up entirely new spaces for relational inquiry.

I argue that Indigenous practices for listening, knowing, and relating with plants are *better-suited* for understanding how to truly engage in multispecies collaborations. Working toward research that engages the many ways that plants relate with humans—as teachers, healers, and kin—in addition to their well-worn role as objects of study, can provide different and productive valences to the encounters between plants and researchers (Thomas 2016). As of now, there are few examples of this type of work, and it is even difficult to imagine research that truly engages with agencies of plants or other species in general. However, my view is that this is a worthwhile aim, even if (and perhaps especially because) I cannot quite see ahead to what it will eventually look like to have a true multispecies collaboration. In the unknown mystery of the encounter lies the creative and transformative potential.

For non-Indigenous researchers, engaging with Indigenous onto-epistemologies must be done in culturally appropriate ways that recognize the troubled history between researchers and Indigenous peoples (Smith 2012). There is a danger that adopting Indigenous practices may further a sense of colonial entitlement, so I advise continual self-reflection and deep inquiry into the literature on decolonization that I only touch on superficially here. Indigenous scholars and their collaborators such as Martin and Mirraoopa (2003) and Zoe Todd (2016), among others, emphasize that learning and abiding by Indigenous methods for knowing and relating are paramount to conducting culturally respectful research. Within Indigenous frameworks, ways of knowing inform ways of being or relating, including relating with other-than-humans. These ways of being then inform ways of doing, or putting these knowledges into practice for managing land or organizing socially (Martin and Mirraoopa 2003). I will discuss this further in Chapter 6. In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss the ways that researchers sometimes unwittingly marginalize Indigenous knowledges.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, RESEARCHERS, AND EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

The strength and presence of the Indigenous panels at AYA2016 were important, though inequalities were still apparent. For example, sometimes ten or fifteen Indigenous presenters were squeezed into an Indigenous panel, meaning that each person was only given a few minutes to speak. This is opposed to the scientists and academic presenters, who were each allotted twenty minutes to present. Many Indigenous presenters complained about this time constraint, “it is important to honor this topic,” said one presenter, “and the time limit is oppressive.” Because of the lack of time given to Indigenous panelists, and a lack of involvement Indigenous participants felt in planning the conference, the Indigenous representatives and communities present at the conference held their own series of meetings (not open to outsiders) and drafted a statement regarding their concerns, which they shared on the last day of the conference. “Even though this event has a large number of indigenous participants,” the statement said, “we are not feeling included in its creation and organization” (for full statement see Appendix 4).

Indigenous sciences are quite heterogeneous, and yet perhaps their greatest commonality, and what really allows them to be grouped together in this way, is their historical and ongoing exclusion from mainstream knowledge systems. The denial of validity based on their identity or practices is what Miranda Fricker (2007) calls epistemic injustice. Indigenous knowledges are

often expected to be “authentic” (see Chapter 4), and tend to be defined by a distance from Western science and Eurocentric worldviews, but are then studied and validated using scientific frameworks (e.g. Orlove, Chiang, and Cane 2000). Power relations between different knowledges often indicate tensions between the ontological underpinnings of cultural worlds, which are continually judged by dominant conceptions of what is considered “reasonable” (Blaser 2013a). This is one of the ways that research can reenact colonialism and imperialism (Smith 2012).

Academic researchers commonly approach Indigenous knowledges with a sense of entitlement; first assuming that Indigenous knowledges can be learned through methods such as interviewing, and secondly, assuming that these knowledges can be grouped together, catalogued, and verified through scientific and statistical methods (Smith 2012). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith says, “it galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us” (Smith 2012, 1). Joaquim Maná, a Huni Kuin teacher and a presenter at AYA2016 drove this point home by reminding the audience that researchers are not entitled to either know or validate Indigenous knowledges:

It is not necessary to explain everything about our knowledge. That can be our own internal knowledge. There are many names for the plant - it is a multicultural matter. Each Indigenous people has their own names and stories. Researchers sometimes generalize all of this diverse knowledge.

Efforts to validate and recognize Indigenous knowledges within the academy—particularly the sciences—have been advanced by scientists who attempt to integrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) with scientific knowledge with regard to environmental management practices (Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2000; Gadgil, Berkes, and Folke 1993). However, in order to advance such stances, researchers often end up subsuming TEK into Western knowledge systems, which are used to validate the traditional knowledges; or use them in an extractive manner, producing knowledge for the academy without actually engaging with or advancing the struggles of the Indigenous peoples whose knowledges are used. Power imbalances between researchers and Indigenous communities are reinscribed when one form of knowledge is used to validate another. For Kyle Powys Whyte (2013), TEK should be seen as a collaborative and process-based concept, aiming to bring together various stakeholders around an issue, rather than invoked by scholars or professionals to serve their own agenda.

Indigenous scholars (e.g. Smith 2012; Deloria 1999; Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997), as well as many of my interlocutors, have expressed their dismay and anger at researchers who work in their communities, because, in the words of Florence Glanfield, “they trusted the researcher and did not ever learn what happened to the artifacts and stories that left” (Donald, Glanfield, and Sterenberg 2012, 57). Glanfield now grapples with her own positionality as a researcher in Indigenous communities:

How do I live with the “researcher shadow”: that researchers “take away”; that researchers do not honour the voices and stories of the other; that researchers have the knowledge; and that the researchers’ knowledge and ways are valued? Researchers are the knowers and the ones with answers; all researchers have to do is provide an answer (Donald, Glanfield, and Sterenberg 2012, 57).

It is exceedingly tricky for non-Indigenous researchers to engage Indigenous ways of knowing in a manner that is not furthering the colonial project of cultural appropriation, nor ignoring or excluding these ways of knowing from what are considered valid knowledge-making practices. The engagement between Indigenous ways of knowing and Western researchers has a

record of unequal power relations, exclusion, and appropriation. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith says, “research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise, but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” (Smith 2012, 5). Indigenous knowledges have historically been denied legitimacy, and Indigenous people have been denied status as valid knowers. Instead, Indigenous scholarship and knowledge is often subsumed into Western worldviews. Perspectives from Indigenous scholars and researchers are invaluable to the conversation on the decolonization and democratization of knowledge, as current research conventions are still not ontologically and epistemologically appropriate to accommodate Indigenous worldviews (Botha 2011).

Meanwhile, Indigenous communities continue to live in challenging material conditions, and Indigenous peoples face severe structural barriers to advancing economically, socially, politically, and academically. In the next Chapter, I discuss community-based participatory approaches to research, and provide an exposition of a community-based project from my own experiences in Paoyhan. As a white, North American, non-Indigenous researcher, I feel it is important to reconnect myself within a web of interspecies relating, while still reckoning with how my use of Indigenous methods, and working in Indigenous communities at all, can be done in culturally appropriate and morally engaged ways. It brings up important and difficult questions about whether and how non-Indigenous researchers can engage with Indigenous ways of knowing in ways that do not further colonize them by their involvement or inclusion in academic knowledge making.

5 | 3 CONCLUSION

I find myself at the crossroads of the challenges I have highlighted in this chapter: to write this dissertation in a way that does not reproduce hierarchical knowledge systems, while still seeking ground in the academy. I try to honor the knowledges and ways of knowing that I have been learning from my teachers, both humans and plants, while also translating plant knowledges and Indigenous ways of knowing into academic dialogues. I feel I have inadequately portrayed the wonder, beauty, and enchantment of the worlds and knowledges to which I point, and I recognize the danger that my writing will further colonize and objectify the worlds of the plants. Despite human limitations, however, I believe it is critical to learn to consult with and listen to intelligences beyond the human. Interspecies collaboration is going to be necessary as human futures become increasingly linked to those of other species (not that they ever were separate). By focusing on creating direct engagement with plant beings as part of the research endeavor, researchers can bring ourselves into relationship in a felt way within a multispecies ecology of other selves (Kohn 2013), that have been denied subjectivity since the beginning of the scientific project.

Unsettling knowledge hierarchies requires radical decolonization of the methods used to understand the world (radical, meaning from the roots). Decolonization of research requires critically interrogating research practices, and drawing explicit connections between power and knowledge relations to address the underlying roots of these asymmetries (Agrawal 1995). According to Restrepo and Escobar (2005), decolonization of knowledge needs to occur at multiple layers of power relations: epistemic transformation aimed at making other knowledges and worlds visible; social and political transformation, which locates the role of the academy in global colonial power relations; and institutional transformation, which seeks to decolonize expertise by moving through or past borders of discipline and academy. It is important for

researchers to think through the norms and practices that unevenly determine what knowledges are produced and circulated, and how these contribute to reproducing hegemonic knowledges.

This chapter has introduced plant intelligences and ayahuasca research into an ongoing conversation that links Indigenous perspectives and interspecies research with decolonization of knowledge. Ayahuasca research, because of the ontological tensions generated by relating with plants, and its inherent cross-cultural engagements, is fertile ground for decolonizing work, and the colonial relations around the use of ayahuasca in general require deep examination, as I have attempted to provide in this dissertation. I would like to follow Shawn Wilson's (2008) reframing of research as a type of academic ritual or ceremony that also involves trans-cultural and trans-species communication. Research, like ritual, is a repeatable and mimetic process, whose structure is taught to initiates. Viewing academic practices as rituals can be useful in situating them in their own cultural context, rather than universalizing them. It is important to understand the rituals we are performing and to enact them consciously and delicately, in a way that allows for exposure of the hierarchies and social structures that we may reproduce. This includes the relationship between researcher and researched as subject and object relationship. I suggest that by focusing ayahuasca research as a ritual boundary engagement with Indigenous onto-epistemologies, and with plant worlds and knowledges, there is a potential for beginning an emancipatory move from a research system that is linked to a long and violent history of colonialism.

I have argued that both research-as-usual creates important absences in scholarly knowledge that exclude plant knowledges and animacy and marginalize Indigenous ways of knowing and relating. Privileging Indigenous ways of knowing creates the potential for intercultural and interspecies collaboration. I call ayahuasca a boundary being because of its ability to facilitate listening and dialogue across species and worlds. To be in proper reciprocity, one cannot use this being for human spiritual needs while ignoring the spirit of ayahuasca itself. Nor can one use Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing while ignoring the struggles of the Indigenous communities themselves (more in the next chapter). Attending to plant beings, in my own experience, means loosening my grasp on what constitutes knowledge, sensitizing myself to interspecies listening, and resituating myself in ethical relationality. I suggest that relating with medicinal plants as teachers and healers has the power to subvert hierarchies of knowledge and animacy and promote sovereignty in an extractive system that increasingly overdetermines interspecies relations.

While writing an earlier version of this chapter, I had the opportunity, during an ayahuasca ceremony, to propose some of the ideas I am writing about here to some of the plant beings with whom I have been developing relationships, and ask if they were interested in collaborating with me. I did this by finding a space of connection within myself, where I felt the presence of my teacher plants, and posed this question to them in my mind. I realized, in the moment of asking, that I should have begun this dialogue long ago; or perhaps it was simply part of the same conversation we have been having all along. Nonetheless, what I gathered was that these ideas excited the plant beings, as my vision was punctuated by a burst of activity discontinuous from what I had been previously experiencing. When I next queried that place where I meet the plant worlds, *what exactly would a collaboration look like for you?* The answer I clearly perceived, written in an ornate script (in English), after only a moment in which the script assembled itself from the scattered designs of my visual perception, was, "we build life." This of course, cannot be denied, and again, made me feel very small and humble at how little I actually know about the ways and motivations of these plant beings, and how insignificant my question seemed in comparison with their great works. And yet, these simple words have helped guide my research.

CHAPTER 6 | PARTICIPATION

THE POLITICS OF MAKING A MEDICINAL FOREST PRESERVE

6 | 0 INTRODUCTION

OPENING

Down a narrow logging road in Ucayali, a short boat ride away from the Shipibo community of Paoyhan, ten hectares of community land is being developed as a medicinal forest preserve by a dedicated Shipibo committee of fourteen, some more active than others. They have cut paths through the forest that circle around two hectares of the forested area and crisscross the middle to pass by several important trees. The committee members have catalogued and labeled over 300 medicinal trees, hanging small metal placards from lacerations cut superficially on their trunks with a machete. Onto the placards, the tree's names have been etched with a nail or drawn on with a permanent marker in two or three languages: Shipibo, Spanish, and, when applicable, English (Figure 6.1). These trees are teachers, healers, and guardians of the forest. The committee has built a simple shelter, planted the area around it with useful plants like papaya and coconut palm, and are generating a small income from visitors.



Figure 6.1. A placard hanging on a Pashaco tree, called Awapishi Jiwi in Shipibo, in the Farmacia Viva community forest garden. Photo by Rae River.

The act of cataloguing and labeling the trees serves to make this forest visible to outsiders as a place that is managed, a place in which trees have importance. It also serves to make legible Indigenous forms of knowledge production and forest management. However, turning a forest into a project also has consequences. On the one hand, developing a community-run medicinal forest preserve connects with values and visions that offer openings to celebrate and revitalize indigenous

knowledges and healing practices grounded in more-than-human relations. On the other hand, the project could become a conduit for reproducing colonial relations by casting this small area of native forest as a site for development and ecotourism, marking the community's cultural and botanical resources for consumption by outsiders.

BACKGROUND

The intention of the forest preserve, according to the committee's vision statement is: "Through the reforestation of medicinal species, we hope not only to reconnect our community-members with their millennial knowledge for improving their health, but also to generate a sustainable economy that will boost community welfare" (my translation). They plan to develop *Farmacia Viva* as a regional learning center for medicinal plant use and forest management, produce value-added plant medicines, and manage the site for ecotourism. The name of the forest preserve has been modified several times since 2017, from *Farmacia Viva* (Living Pharmacy) to *Farmacia Viva Indígena* (Living Indigenous Pharmacy) to *Farmacia Viva Shipibo Sanken Yaka* (The Sanken Yaka Living Shipibo Pharmacy). The latter, its current name, is named after a woman, Sanken Yaka, from Paoyhan who was a healer and midwife; she also worked in the hospital in Pucallpa as a nurse. For short, I will refer to the project as *Farmacia Viva*, as we often do in conversation.

In this brief chapter, I detail the ongoing process, beginning in 2017, that has led to the participatory creation of *Farmacia Viva*, and the tensions and equivocations that this intercultural and interspecies collaboration exposed among various collaborators. These types of tensions can create both challenges and opportunities for creative worldmaking through interspecies practices. The story I tell here is primarily a reflection on my own research praxis as I delved into the work of facilitating a community-based participatory project. In order to reflect critically on the collaborative process, I adopt a relational framework to attend to how I am fulfilling the various roles and responsibilities of the dynamic relations in which I am engaged (Nicholls 2009; Wilson 2008; Smith 2012). I chronicle the missteps, surprises, and moments of insight of this collective effort in order to share the lessons I have gleaned through the process. Navigating these challenges with my Shipibo colleagues has been generative in thinking through my positions on ethical and engaged research.

This chapter is also a critique of development-as-usual. Outsiders and NGOs who work in Indigenous communities often adopt supervisory roles in the planning of community projects, in which funding and expertise are funneled through these outsider intermediaries. This creates (sometimes against best efforts) a type of hierarchical relationship that subordinates Indigenous decision making and land management to these intermediaries. This can happen even under the guise of participation, whether genuine or not, because of the structures common to the development-as-usual framework. Craig and Porter (1997) have argued that within such frameworks, projects, professionals, and organizations become instruments of control, rather than of participation. I advocate for research and organizations dealing with Indigenous communities and practices to engage with community members as research collaborators, and to develop participatory projects that can contribute to the community's own self-determined goals and measures of success.

Land management projects developed by outsiders and organizations are not able to account for the subtle interspecies practices that are essential to Indigenous forest management. Relational practices are not typically considered under development-as-usual forest management

models at all. Thus, the meanings given to the success or failure of such projects often do not reflect Indigenous values (Mistry et al. 2016). This could be one reason that development projects are often abandoned by both community members and the outsiders that initiated them. Indeed, it has been repeated to me from many different people that the Amazon is “a graveyard for failed development projects.” This trend has consequences for the communities in which the development projects fail, often fostering a rightful sense of abandonment and mistrust of outsiders. This is why scholarship on community-based approaches often emphasizes the importance of trust-building as a critical part of research in Indigenous communities (Christopher et al. 2008).

In the remainder of the chapter, I first provide a brief review of my approach to community-based participatory research, which I call *accompaniment*. In section two, I tell the story of the birth of the *Farmacia Viva* project. The participatory planning process revealed differing values held by members of the more-than human collective involved. Divergent understandings of *garden*, *project*, and *trees* have become generative areas of inquiry. Thus, activities with trees in places called “gardens” or “projects” are not just placemaking, but world-making. Last, I highlight some of the lessons I have learned from the endeavor. I adopt a framework that views these tensions and equivocations as reflective of the multiple worlds that constituted relationally through practices.

RELATIONAL & PARTICIPATORY METHODS

Relational frameworks ethically engage the researcher in how the outcomes of their research affect the community. An ethically engaged researcher might choose to privilege the lives and futures of the people they work with and seek to further their claims by allying themselves with Indigenous struggles, rather than speaking on their behalf or otherwise representing them. Engaged research, therefore, must be reflexive beyond the text, and ask how one’s research contributes to or engages with the communities who host the researcher, and about whom the research pertains (Kirsch 2018). The researcher must interrogate their own responsibility to the communities they work in and critically probe the relation between power and knowledge. As mentioned earlier, Dwayne Donald has conceptualized *ethical relationality* as an ethical guideline for conducting research with Indigenous communities (Donald 2012). This form of relationality,

...requires attentiveness to the responsibilities that come with a declaration of being in relation. ...These philosophical teachings emphasize that relationality is not just a simple recognition of shared humanity that looks to celebrate our sameness rather than difference. Rather, this form of relationality carefully attends to the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a person or community understands and interprets the world. It puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across perceived frontiers of difference. This concept of relationality instantiates an ethical imperative to acknowledge and honour the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people in the world are tied together. It is also an ethical imperative to see that despite our varied place-based cultures and knowledge systems, we live in the world together with others and must constantly think and act with reference to these relationships. Any knowledge we gain about the world interweaves us more complexly with these relationships and gives us life (Donald 2012, 535-536).

One approach for conducting relational and engaged research is to use community-based participatory approaches to develop research projects and methodologies. Participatory research

(e.g. Fortmann 2008; Fals-Borda 1982) encompasses several process-oriented approaches (i.e. Community-Based Participatory Research, Learning Communities, Participatory Action Research) that rely on dialogue and co-learning between the researcher and the community. With these approaches, community members are active partners in the research, from setting research goals to interpretation (at varying levels of involvement). Including Indigenous people in developing research that involves their communities is increasingly recognized as important for redistributing power in the research process (Hoover 2017). However, *participation* itself is a problematic concept with a lot of variation in how it is carried out—for some projects, it involves simply consultation with the community and other times it means full participation in designing the research (Nicholls 2009).

Examining who benefits from the outcome of research is equally relevant for understanding the implications of how the knowledge researchers produce gets deployed, and what is at stake in research endeavors. The knowledge produced in participatory research is primarily meant to be put into practice and used by the community, rather than to be described for outsiders or the academy (Davidson-Hunt and O’Flaherty 2007). For Cynthia Dillard, research is defined as a responsibility to the community with which the researcher is engaged, and what she calls an “activist praxis” means creating “concrete physical actions in service to community and beyond solely researcher theorizing” (Dillard 2008, 4). Though not without limitations and potential pitfalls, participatory approaches are becoming recommended (and required) practice for any type of research done in Indigenous communities, as a step toward decolonizing the research process (NCAI Policy Research Center and MSU Center for Native Health Partnerships 2012). Participation is also often a requirement for development projects or the funders of development projects. Because of this, development agencies often use a nominally participatory approach, which in reality does not give much agency to the community in the process.

For the *Farmacia Viva* project, I saw my role with the community as being based in *accompaniment*, a style of participatory action research that involves walking alongside the community-led development of a project. As Caroline Kroeker (1996) notes, with this type of research and project development, the presence of the researcher is a constant intervention. The researcher is available to receive complaints and reflection, attend or facilitate meetings with outsiders, help with the navigation of legal or formal processes, and leverage their position for the benefit of the project, possibly through either technical knowledge and skills or fundraising (Kroeker 1996). The process is facilitated with an attention to reflexivity and continuing to probe and develop both the process and the relationship. The accompaniment model is based primarily on relationship building and mutual trust. Relationship building, according to TallBear (2014) can work toward “softening” the divisions between knower and known that have long been problematized in research. Kroeker describes what accompaniment meant for a community she worked with in Nicaragua: “For them, accompaniment implied being given importance as a group, that their fate mattered. It meant being given a voice and an audience, that someone wanted to hear their stories, to understand their perspective on life, to learn from them” (Kroeker 1996, 133). Mary Watkins (2019), offers the term *mutual accompaniment*, reflecting the mutuality of the relationship, and recognizing that accompaniment can also take place with our more-than-human relations toward the creation of and intercultural and interspecies commons.

For Dillard (2008), research that acknowledges the spiritual aspects of knowledge-making is a type of resistance to hegemonic conceptions of knowledge that oppress and marginalize Indigenous and feminist ways of knowing and being. Participatory approaches are often aimed at finding shared understandings between the researcher and among the community members through

dialogue. However, in cases where there are fundamental onto-epistemological differences, consensus may not be the appropriate outcome, and ontological tensions may be revealing and generative. We need embodied insights on how to bring together different knowledges and knowledge communities without subsuming one into the other, but allowing them to be sovereign, collaborative, and non-hierarchically organized. Anishinaabe scholar Sonya Atalay (2012) offers us the concept of braiding knowledge to create better and more complete kinds of science that are more inclusive and multifaceted. Atalay specifically applies this to community-based participatory research with Indigenous communities. In Atalay's words, "'braiding knowledge' brings distinct forms of knowledge together. Research partners engage in situated weaving to create complex histories that are grounded in specific locations" (Atalay 2012, 207). This formulation resists the totalizing tendency to form one homogeneous or unified account of a situation or issue, and rather allows each form of knowledge to exist on equal terms. This allows us to learn from the tensions between different strands to create a more cohesive whole.

6 | 1 THE BIRTH OF A PROJECT

A CONFLUENCE OF CONNECTIONS

When Michael Coe first emailed me in 2017 wanting to conduct ethnobotanical interviews in a Shipibo community and wondering if I had connections, I was at first skeptical. I had been working in Paoyhan on and off for nearly three years. When asked to justify how his research would benefit the community, Michael told me that his plan was to take the interview data and calculate a "cultural importance index" that would tell us which plants were the most important for the community, and therefore most important for conserving. I was suspicious that this would be another type of extractive knowledge endeavor, and expressed to him my concerns, particularly with his methodological approach. Questions about decolonial research praxis were swimming in my head. *Why would you do a calculation to determine something that you could ascertain qualitatively? Why is it important for Michael to learn the uses of plants by people in the village? How would his cultural importance index benefit the community? How would his methods deal with a plant teacher that has its own knowledges?* When I asked Michael some of these pointed questions, he surprised me by thanking me, emphasizing that he would be excited to work with me to learn how he could make his research more relevant to the community.

Around the same time, Limber Rojas, the Jefe of Paoyhan at the time, had visited the OVIMA, (Organization for Indigenous Life and the Amazonian Environment),¹⁴⁰ a Pucallpa-based NGO that I had become involved with during my fieldwork. I was visiting their office that day and joined in on the meeting to hear the Jefe's request. The Jefe was concerned about climate change. He had been to a workshop on the issue in Pucallpa, but knew that many of his *comuneros*, the residents of Paoyhan, did not know much, if anything, about climate change. He was wondering if we could host a workshop in the community. Furthermore, the Jefe was worried about the economic future of the community. The only hope, he thought, was for them to purchase their own sawmill and develop a timber processing facility in their territory, "to take advantage of the wood that we have." Having their own sawmill would allow them to benefit more from their trees than selling their wood for cheap to the logging companies (see Chapter 2). However, he broke down

¹⁴⁰ *Organización para la Vida y Medioambiente Amazónico.*

the expenses for us, and the price of the equipment they needed was far out of their reach. There were some Russians, clients of Papa Bari, who had said they were going to support them with this, but the plan ended up falling through due to conflicts with logging corporations operating nearby. At the same time, he felt they needed to conserve the forest and reduce deforestation, and he wanted to understand how the community's activities related to the issue of climate change. I volunteered to help lead the workshop, in part since I had already been working in Paoyhan. Prior to hosting the workshop, my other co-facilitators and I decided to embark on a participatory process to understand community environmental struggles and goals for climate change adaptation, which would begin with a day-long focus group in Paoyhan.¹⁴¹

At the time of these initial interactions with Limber and Michael, I was also in the first week of a 44-day diet¹⁴² with a powerful teacher tree called Noya Rao, that I was doing under the guidance of Yoshan, the healer I work with in Yarina (see Chapter 4). I was engaging with Shipibo ways of knowing plants as part of my research praxis. However, this is not the same thing as learning Shipibo knowledges, as I do not have the same set of familial, cultural, and ecological relations that surround those practices or plants. My plant relationships arise from my own situated experience through engaging with Shipibo plant-human practices while also conducting research. As part of my plant education, Noya Rao was teaching me. Each ayahuasca ceremony left me bursting with ideas and connections, and I continued to lengthen my to-do list related to both my research and my community engagements. I felt that Noya Rao was putting me to work. The knowledge that I learned from Noya Rao is not easy to write about or catalogue. It is knowledge that is embodied and meant to be put into action. Noya Rao gave me a series of connections to make and leads to follow, which have continued to shape my research trajectory.

This is not the ideal or “traditional” way to practice dieting—it is what I have called a “working diet” in which I did not pause my work and research schedule to do the diet. Typically, diets are undertaken in quiet periods of relative isolation and little outside stimulation (see Chapter 4). This is not how I did this diet, and I do not recommend undertaking a “working diet” lightly. However, my teachers, Yoshan and Papa Meni, gave me their blessing to keep working, and it allowed me to diet for a much longer duration than I would otherwise have been able to do. On the positive side, I felt that Noya Rao also gave me its blessing, and even seemed enthusiastic to guide me on the initiation of this project. I was enrolling this plant teacher's participation in my work through the interspecies practice of dieting, by following the directions and leads that Noya Rao gave me.

As I continued with the diet, finding ways to be more reciprocal with the communities I work in was increasingly at the forefront of my mind. With the Jefe's timely visit, I began to see tangible ways that I could engage. During one ceremony, after putting off Michael's prior email, I finally decided that if Michael and I could find a way to contribute to advancing the community's own struggles (like those that the Jefe had been describing), Michael's proposed research might be of interest and relevance to them. Thus, under the guidance of Noya Rao, I invited Michael to Paoyhan provisionally to join the focus group we had been planning. This would allow Michael to ask the community members their opinion about his research proposal, and also introduce Michael

¹⁴¹ This first focus group was primarily facilitated by Karl Vikat, Jessica Northridge, and me.

¹⁴² Dieting is a Shipibo practice for learning from plants involving fasting and other restrictions.

to the issues of relevance to the community. I also told Michael, as Paul¹⁴³ had told me at the beginning of my research, that if he was going to study plants, it was important that he diet.

WORKING WITH(IN) INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The focus group involved several activities designed for generating dialogue about Paoyhan's environment and the most pressing concerns affecting the community. For example, we had the thirty or so participants¹⁴⁴ create individual maps of the community, and then a collective map of the community highlighting various socio-environmental issues. The collective map was drawn by two high school student participants who volunteered their artistic skills (see Figure 6.2). We later guided the participants in ranking these concerns in importance through a dialogical process in which community members advocated for their main concerns, and formed groups who shared similar priorities. We learned that the community's primary issues of concern included increasing flooding, lack of clean water, erosion of the riverbank, pervasive chronic illnesses, lack of economic opportunities, the drying of the lake, and a loss of traditional knowledge. Other concerns included lack of educational materials, lack of medical supplies, need for an artisan market, need for trainings and workshops regarding traditional *artesanía* (crafts), deforestation, and desire for electric lighting in the community.



Figure 6.2. Map of environmental concerns developed collectively during a focus group in Paoyhan in 2017.

¹⁴³ Dr. Paul Roberts, my mentor and collaborator.

¹⁴⁴ The number of participants fluctuated throughout the 7-hour workshop, with a maximum of around 35. Participants included a relatively even mix of men and women; elders and youth.

When the topic of traditional knowledge came up, we invited Michael to pitch his proposed research to the community and see if there was interest in inventorying botanical knowledge. We had the idea that with the data we collected, we could create a tri-lingual medicinal plants booklet (in Shipibo, Spanish, and English), that could then be used as educational materials in the community. Michael and I also broached an idea that had come to me during my diet with Noya Rao, of whether there was interest in creating a community medicinal plants botanical garden. I thought it could serve multiple functions for the community: a way of retaining traditional knowledge, to provide medicines to the community, and possibly to serve as a site for ecotourism. As evidenced by the other discussions during the focus group, there was a need for viable and sustainable sources of livelihood that do not depend on extractive industries. There was great excitement at the prospect of a garden. One man, Roberto, stood up and said, “if I see a botanical garden in Paoyhan before I die, I could die happy. I could just die right then.”

Because of this unexpected enthusiasm, we later used this idea during the subsequent two-day climate change workshop (two months later) as a hypothetical local climate adaptation project, in which we outlined the steps that would be necessary to develop and implement a community-driven project. Following the climate change workshop, several community members decided to run with the idea. A committee of twelve interested people was formed, and the community granted ten hectares of forest land. I continued to use a community-based participatory model to facilitate and accompany the project, which I will discuss in greater detail below.

6 | 2 FARMACIA VIVA INDÍGENA SANKEN YAKA

VISIONS OF A GARDEN

I was the one who originally brought up the term *botanical garden* (*jardín botánico*). However, the word *garden* itself invokes a somewhat colonial vision of land management. Botanical gardens were once important imperial sites where economically exploitable or medicinally useful plants were studied in the colonies, and the plants and traditional knowledge was brought back to the imperial centers in Europe (Grove 1996; Brockway 1979). The way land is managed in these colonial garden spaces is often quite unnatural—plants are labeled and set neatly in rows. I had been envisioning a botanical garden like this, but thankfully no one in the community had seen that type of garden before. Therefore, something quite different emerged from the visioning process we began during the climate change workshop. For one, the most powerful medicinal plants that the Shipibo are in relation with are trees, and many of these trees were already growing within the community’s territory, so we would not actually need to plant them. Indeed, the forest was already a garden; for generations, the people of Paoyhan have been involved in facilitating the growth of important medicinal plants and maintaining relations with the *ibo*, the mothers or spirit masters of the trees. Therefore, envisioning the garden for my Shipibo colleagues involved thinking of certain places in their existing forest that already had guardian trees, who care for that area of the forest. These included teacher trees like Machinga, Ayahuma, and more.¹⁴⁵ This is why *Farmacia Viva* is actually more of a forest preserve than a “garden,” *per se*.

¹⁴⁵ For the curious, Noya Rao, unfortunately, is quite rare and there are no known Noya Rao trees near Paoyhan.

The visioning process for *Farmacia Viva* took place over the course of a year before the space was actually inaugurated. During this process, we brought in Manuel, a Shipibo man from a more urban community who is a forestry technician from OVIMA. During the second day of the climate change workshop, Manuel generated a lot of enthusiasm from people in Paoyhan by sharing about a garden project he developed in a community near Pucallpa. He envisioned the project in Paoyhan to similarly be a site of community learning and the production of important food and medicinal plants. However, the vision of the project was far from cohesive. Of the twenty or so participants at the workshop, some imagined that the project would be a production space for food, timber, or non-timber forest products. Some thought it could have a fish hatchery. Some imagined it as a site of ecotourism and conservation. Some imagined it as a healing center for outsiders and a site for researchers. Others imagined it as a community space for young people to learn about the plants and how to prepare the medicines. Calling the space a “project” enabled it to hold all of these visions.

When we first began talking about the project, Papa Meni told me many stories about *gringos* who had come to the village saying they were going to build a botanical garden, and for various reasons it had never happened. According to him, either the foreigner had not followed through on their promises, or they had sent money for a project that people in the community ended up squandering. I deeply felt that I did not want to be one of those foreigners, so I committed to myself that I would not abandon *Farmacia Viva* and promised to come back in six months to pick up with whatever the committee had achieved in my absence. However, there was always a lingering doubt as to whether I would abandon the project too, which I believe prevented the committee members from initially fully committing to the project themselves. At the same time, I knew that my desire for the project to succeed would not be enough to sustain the project. I was careful not to promise any particular outcome. Rather, I told them that I would support the committee as I could, but it was ultimately their project, and if they wanted it to happen it was up to them.

I saw facilitation of *Farmacia Viva* to be an extremely delicate process. Having studied participatory methods, it was important for me that the community be involved and in control of every part of the process. After a year, the *Farmacia Viva* committee was only just beginning to feel ownership over the project. For example, when I returned to Paoyhan after six months, several people told me that they were “waiting for me to get back” before they made any further decisions. Part of this challenge, I suspect was due to the fact that the project had not *truly* been initiated by the community members themselves. In the many meetings that I attended in the two months I spent there, my primary strategy was to constantly defer authority to their elected president of the committee, Roberto. For example, in the first *Farmacia Viva* committee meeting, Roberto began by saying, “okay Laura, we’re ready for you to start the meeting.” I simply turned it back over to him, saying, “oh no, you’re the president of the committee, you’re in charge,” and I took out my paper and pen.

By the time I returned to Paoyhan six months later, the committee had already chosen a site and had an idea for how the project should be implemented. Since I had been unable to secure any of the grants I had applied for, we used Michael and my personal research funds to keep the basic operations of the project going and carry out the initial inauguration of the site. We hired Manuel to take the lead as a technician on the setting up of the site, especially since the community seemed to like and trust him, and as a fellow Shipibo, he spoke their language. On the day of the inauguration of the site, we also brought in several volunteers (Peruvian and foreigners) from OVIMA, and dieters from Papa Meni’s house who were interested in the project to help us in

labeling plants and trees. Four of the committee members, armed with machetes, worked to cut paths through the dense forest of the site that they had chosen—a site that was rich with medicinal plants and guardian trees. The crew of volunteers helped label and catalogue 200 trees with the guidance of the *Farmacia Viva* committee members that were most knowledgeable about identifying important plants.

Papa Meni, who was an expert on plants, *was* involved with the committee, but peripherally. He was usually busy hosting his dieters, and, I believe, was still gauging the extent to which he wanted to be involved, so he did not join us on this effort. Many of the *Farmacia Viva* committee members had joined the committee precisely because they were interested in learning more about medicinal plants themselves. Several of them even hoped to be able to participate in their own diets eventually at the *Farmacia Viva* site. Only a few members of the committee had ever done a plant diet with a teacher plant. Ironically, many of my Shipibo collaborators did not have access to participating in plant diets themselves, as Papa Meni and other healers tend to be quite guarded with their knowledge among their *comuneros*. At the time, I was again doing a plant diet with Papa Meni, this time with chiric sanango again, and was aware of this strange twist that gave me, as a foreigner, access to a certain type of Shipibo interspecies knowledge that was denied to many Shipibo people themselves. Many of us hoped that this project would work toward creating more opportunities for the people of Paoyhan to engage with plant medicines and plant teachers.

TENSIONS WITH DEVELOPMENT-AS-USUAL

Forest management projects are often implemented in a top-down fashion. I define development-as-usual as a style of development practice that depends on the instruments of projects, organizations, and professionals (Craig and Porter 1997). According to Craig and Porter, these tools are deployed in order to turn development into “a series of technical (and thus politically neutral) organizational processes and bounded, manageable objectives” (230). A *professional* or *technician* who is trained in agroforestry will come and tell an Indigenous community how to manage their forests. It is the professional’s job to wield knowledge, make rational plans, and create order. Like many projects involving Indigenous communities, people from outside of the community (Peruvians or foreigners) then end up making decisions about the management and control of Indigenous cultural and ecological resources (Atalay 2006). Thus, research and management projects *as usual* not only produce knowledge, but they also reproduce colonial and political structures that serve to subjugate Indigenous communities’ ability to manage their own resources and relations.

For the committee members, Manuel embodied the role of the technician, and he was often referred to as purely “*el técnico*,” or when addressing him directly, “*técnico*.” The committee members looked to him for guidance, and Manuel had a strong idea about how things were meant to be done. His methods were rooted in agroforestry and permaculture practices, and he had recently helped Michael and me during the second year of the *caapi* demography study. When it was time to demarcate the area for the preserve or “garden”, Michael and I were somewhat surprised that Manuel ended up drawing up square plots in the forest, and planned to inventory and measure plants with ecological data sheets very similar to the ones Michael and I had been using a few weeks prior. Using these scientific practices and tools not only helped train the *Farmacia Viva* committee members in these techniques, but also established Manuel’s expertise in relation to the community members.

In this case, Manuel's role as a technician was both aided and complicated by the fact that he is also Shipibo, though he had been trained in a more usual development setting. The differences between his approach and my approach came to a head one evening that summer. We had assembled on Papa Meni's porch for a large meeting with all of the *Farmacia Viva* committee members, myself, Manuel, Michael, three other members of OVIMA, and five of Paoyhan's elected officials. The goal of the meeting was to try to gain consensus about the direction of the project. After the obligatory long-form formalities characteristic of these types of meetings, Manuel took the floor. He wove in and out of speaking in Spanish and in Shipibo at first, but eventually settled on Spanish, describing eloquently his vision for the garden, describing his previous project in-depth, and telling the group how he envisioned *Farmacia Viva* to take shape in a similar way.

When I realized that Manuel was attempting to get the group to buy into his vision and did not seem to be angling toward a participatory process of envisioning the garden, I found myself in a position of undermining him. I was compelled to interrupt him and remind Manuel and everyone present that as we had discussed from the beginning, this was not OVIMA's project; it was Paoyhan's project, and it was up to the community to decide what they wanted to do with the land. I explicitly assured them that OVIMA would not be making decisions regarding the project. As I did this, I saw the Jefe of the community visibly relax, and become more enthusiastic toward *Farmacia Viva*, even contributing his own ideas about creating a larger forest preserve for wood species.¹⁴⁶

This interruption made me uncomfortable for several reasons. As a woman, there are gender dynamics about who gets to speak and make decisions. However, as a foreigner and researcher, I seem to occupy an ambiguous position with regard to these sorts of social hierarchies. This was, thus, a moment of me exercising my white and academic social privilege in a Shipibo context, which I try to be cautious about as I do not generally want to reproduce these types of hierarchies. Additionally, I respect Manuel as a friend and colleague and he has a lot of experience working in Shipibo communities. I felt bad undermining him in front of the group, and was worried that it would affect our working relationship. Despite these concerns, I felt strongly that this issue was important, and needed to be addressed in order to put the control of the planning and decision-making process back in the hands of the community council, including the community authorities and the *Farmacia Viva* Committee. This was not the first time I had brought up a similar issue with Manuel. Specifically, on the day that we inaugurated the forest preserve space, and Manuel guided the group in delimiting square plots in the forest, I later asked him about it in private. I wanted to know why he had decided to use square plots, and whether he had consulted with the committee members about it first. I stressed that this was meant to be a community-driven project, in which the committee should make all the decisions regarding the project's implementation.

After the committee meeting, when I again brought up my concerns with Manuel privately, he waved his hand and told me that we are on the same page. That he feels that way too, and that they *do* have control. Manuel also believed that participation was important. "I have worked with many communities," he assured me, "and this is how it works. They need a technician to guide them." I thought that he was likely right. He has much more experience than me at working on this type of project, and I began to question whether I was being too idealistic and naive. Although I still remained concerned about Manuel's style of leadership, this project took shape over the end

¹⁴⁶ By this time a new Jefe had been elected, Juan Maynas, who had not been involved in the original planning process.

of my time in the field, and I would not be able to continue being as closely involved with the *Farmacia Viva* committee. Therefore, I would eventually be leaving that role to Manuel and others at OVIMA. I recognized that being involved in this project was important for Manuel professionally, as the project was something he was excited about and allowed him to get paid extra for his visits to the community. In that way I wanted to support him in also leading the project and I was concerned that I was perhaps being overly worried or territorial.

Truth told, none of us had ever done a collaborative project of this sort before, and I felt that we were learning from each other. I began to see my role as helping to grow the *Farmacia Viva* committee's leadership capacity by continuing to follow their lead and be a witness, while also responding to their concerns and needs. During my several weeks in Paoyhan, in which Manuel was back in Pucallpa, I spent hours each day talking with Elías, *Farmacia Viva*'s treasurer, and Roberto, the president, to work out a plan and vision for the coming months. My commitment was to continue to show up and help move the process forward according to their direction, but ultimately to keep ensuring that they were the ones in control and that they felt supported and empowered to accomplish their goals.

That year I also began to mentor masters researchers from the United States, and I directed them toward helping with the *Farmacia Viva* project. Hawkins Lewis,¹⁴⁷ who was the first masters student on the project, has been an important intellectual sounding board for me on the topic of decolonial and community-based approaches. He has also been an ally for the committee throughout the process, and has continued to stay involved over the last two years. Hawkins was able to continue facilitating the project for a month after I left, particularly working to nurture cohesion and representation among the committee members and ensure that they were all being included in the planning process and meetings.

There had been an issue of certain committee members not being informed of meetings. These exclusions and internal division among the committee were for various reasons; some seemed to be gender based, others were because of political differences and family dynamics. Throughout the process women's voices were often not given equal status or consideration to those of the men, even while outwardly they were treated with respect. Women also tended to be quiet at the committee meetings, though we tried various strategies to engage them, with some success. People who did not keep an active mobile phone were also often left out of meetings for logistical reasons. Divisions among families were also perhaps economically motivated. There was a potential prospect of money to be gained, and the more people involved, the less there would be for each committee member. Thus, there was an incentive for one's own family to be involved.

During this time, *Farmacia Viva* had begun to receive a small but steady trickle of visitors to the site. These were primarily foreign dieters who were staying with Papa Meni, who wanted to see the forest, and perhaps the plants they were dieting, in person. In exchange for a fee of 50 soles each (around \$15 USD), committee members would take groups of dieters by motorboat to the *Farmacia Viva* site, where they would then lead them on a tour of the notable plants that we had labeled with placards, and tell them about their medicinal uses. Elías, the treasurer, kept track of the money that came in from the visitors, and used it to fund various administrative expenses, such as gas for the transportation to the site and refreshments for committee meetings, which had

¹⁴⁷ Hawkins Lewis at the time was a masters student in the Depth Psychology program at Pacifica Graduate Institute, specializing in Community, Liberation, Indigenous and Eco-Psychologies. He has since graduated and will begin a Masters in the Social Sciences at the University of Chicago in Fall 2020.

become a standard practice in the community. The tour guides would also collect a small salary for their time.

Horacio, who began working at OVIMA after I went back to the United States, joined Manuel in coordinating the project on their end. He is a Peruvian from Lima, had a degree in sustainable tourism studies, so he facilitated a series of workshops to help the committee members develop their skills as tour guides. When I left, the way that we had collectively conceived the role of OVIMA was that the *Farmacia Viva* committee would have their own internal meetings and planning sessions and would let Manuel, Horacio, or someone else from OVIMA know when they needed support, whether it was in the form of workshops, workdays, or materials. This way the project would take place at their own pace and under their own direction. The organization would help by providing limited funds, technical support, capacity building, and volunteer labor. We had begun to use one of OVIMA's donation platforms to raise money to go toward funding their facilitation of the project, and a small amount was trickling in monthly. I had also raised a sum of money by contacting several foreigners I knew who had been long-time dieters in Paoyhan with Papa Meni, which went toward the construction of the small house that would be the visitor's center (Figure 6.3).

However, OVIMA's involvement ended up taking shape somewhat differently. Horacio and Manuel were both used to working on an NGO timeframe where results needed to happen quickly to meet project goals according to funding requirements. The organizational forms of NGOs in Latin America often end up replicating the structures of Northern funding agencies and organizations because of these types of constraints (Craig and Porter 1997). Therefore, they took a more active role in the implementation process. In an email Manuel sent me to report on the progress of the construction of the small house in the forest that would be the visitor's center, he expressed his dismay that the work had taken longer than expected. "We have to take the initiative," he said, saying that they had planned eight more days of work. In addition, he raised concerns that the committee members were not satisfied with the working conditions:

The progress on the work is not that significant, because they are volunteer workers. There is a concern among the members of the committee that there should be something provided to help recuperate their lost energy in the mornings, a beverage or some food that each person can carry with them. We witnessed that the work is very hard and tiring. Now we have to walk very far to the site because it is mid-summer [and the river is lower].¹⁴⁸

This message concerned me. I had assumed that the project funds that we had raised would have been providing lunch and drinks for the committee members while they were working in the forest, rather than just a lunch at the conclusion of the day, and I said so in my reply. Furthermore, Manuel's message made it sound as though the committee members were working for him rather than the other way around. I recognize that this can be a very delicate balance, but an important one. In the reply to his email, I expressed as much:

And what do you think about the rhythm of the work? I'm worried that it could turn into a case in which OVIMA is asking too much of the committee. I prefer that the committee is deciding the pace, and work at the pace for which they have the energy. What do you think? If OVIMA has too much involvement they are not going to be able to work without you. I want to see the project grow into something self-sufficient and I worry that they are going to depend too much on you ...

Manuel's reply was frustrating:

¹⁴⁸ Emails translated by me from Spanish.

To work with communities is very difficult. It is always going to generate dependence. On the many projects that I have seen and worked on, they just don't have the initiative. The basis of the workshop we did was to help them gain initiative and commitment to the work. We must build capacity and leadership in them. But if they don't have trainings they are never going to learn how to make decisions. As OVIMA we are not following them [their lead], that wouldn't work. I swear this from my experience in working with the community. I tell you this as an Indigenous person. I understand your concern as *gringa*, excuse the term, and I tell you this as an *indígena*. It just doesn't work like that. This dependence and paternalism is what we want to change. But you have to be patient. It is not ethical, but that is reality.

At that point I realized that being in the U.S., the project was essentially out of my hands, and I stepped back a bit from being so involved, but still played a supporting role, giving advice during monthly video meetings involving Manuel, Horacio, Hawkins, and me. Under Manuel and Horacio's guidance, the committee developed *Farmacía Viva* into a functioning site with trails, a visitor's center, and over 400 plants labeled, and fruit trees planted around the visitor's center. Manuel and others at OVIMA had been hosting workshops, trainings, and workdays to help move the project forward, and they had also begun to provide a stipend for people who were working in the field on the project, which seemed like a good idea.



Figure 6.3. *The Farmacia Viva visitors center in 2019, just after the construction was complete. This process took nearly a year, partly because of the difficulty of bringing building materials, tools, and people to the relatively remote site. I am standing in the doorway of the building. Hawkins is walking toward me wearing a rectangular backpack. Humberto and Elías (on the right) are both carrying machetes, and had taken us to the site to show us its completion. Photo by Rae River.*

Months later, the sentiment from Manuel and Horacio was that the work stipend system was being abused. They explained in a video meeting how community members would show up saying they were going to work, but hardly helped at all. Committee members would just bring people who were family members, who would help very little with the construction but still get paid. I suggested that perhaps that was actually all right that there is a way for people in need to contribute to a project and receive payment. However, Manuel and Horacio were disappointed that the house that was meant to be the visitor's center had still not been completed, despite their efforts at facilitating workdays. They believed their decision to provide stipends had been a big mistake.

In April 2019, tensions erupted between OVIMA and the *Farmacia Viva* committee. From OVIMA's side, the committee members, particularly the president, Roberto, had accused OVIMA of stealing their money. He had made this accusation not to their face, but to someone from another organization that had then relayed the message. According to Manuel and Horacio, his claim was completely unjustified, and was quite offensive. They had been working really hard and doing their best to support the project, and considered the committee members to be close friends. Harsh words were spoken against both Manuel and Horacio personally from other committee members as well. Although OVIMA provided financial records to show that the claims were untrue, there seemed to be lingering concerns about transparency, and members of *Farmacia Viva* did not issue any apology, saying it had been a simple misunderstanding.

In August 2019, I made a trip down in order to understand the situation better, timing the trip to arrive at the same time that Hawkins and two other researchers would begin another round of fieldwork. Up until that point, I had not spoken directly with anyone in Paoyhan, and my understanding of the conflict was entirely based on what I had been told by Manuel, Horacio, and others at OVIMA. By that time, OVIMA had decided to cease their involvement in the project altogether. There was still anger between both parties at this time. OVIMA had felt betrayed by the *Farmacia Viva* committee members, who had leveled what they thought of as false accusations against them that put their relationships and reputation at risk. They had decided that it was not worth their emotional and energetic investment to continue to work with people who would treat them that way, and potentially be a risk to the organization. For them, it was personal. I was not happy about this outcome, but I also respected their decision and it seemed that they had thought it through carefully.

The day after I arrived to Paoyhan, the entire *Farmacia Viva* committee of fourteen people gathered into Papa Meni's maloka by candlelight with me, Hawkins, and several of the town authorities to discuss the conflict and the future of the project. In addition to local sources of tension both within and around the committee and the committee's president, a deep resentment had been building toward the facilitators at OVIMA. OVIMA's decision to leave the project had further confused the committee. The tensions from the past several months resurfaced as they reported on the conflict to me. Statements from several of the members of the committee indicated that OVIMA had been pushing their ideas for what the project was to become, and the community did not feel in control of the direction of the project or how the funds were being allocated. Roberto, the president of the committee, said that they had brought this up several times with Manuel and Horacio.

Furthermore, suspicions had started to grow that money that was meant for the project was going toward other things. The provision of financial records, the treasurer said, did not adequately address their concerns about transparency. This was partly because only one copy of the financial records had been provided, and that had gone to the Jefe, and not to the committee. In addition,

there was anger when they found out that Manuel and Horacio were both getting paid a travel and living stipend for their trips to the community, in addition to their small stipends they are paid for working at OVIMA (a primarily volunteer-run organization). Humberto, the vice president of the committee, said he had been under the impression that Manuel and Horacio were volunteers. Meanwhile, according to the president of the committee, when the committee members made trips to have meetings at the OVIMA headquarters in Pucallpa, they had to pay their own boat passage, and Manuel had told them there were no funds to cover it. Several months earlier, one of Papa Meni's dieters had spoken to a committee member claiming that she had donated to the project on OVIMA's website, and was surprised that the money had not gone directly to the community.

Part of this misunderstanding was that the donation funds were partially intended to enable OVIMA to support its own role in facilitating the project—paying the passage and living stipends for OVIMA's staff, and funding workshops. Money from the fund was also used to buy materials and tools requested by the community that were needed for the construction of the house, fund meals for workdays, and pay working stipends for community members. However, the funding pot was small, and there were fourteen committee members, so at the time of planning how to manage the project and the donations, OVIMA had felt it would have been unrealistic to fund travel for the committee members whenever they wanted. From the treasurer's point of view, however, this was deeply unfair, and they felt OVIMA had stolen money that should have gone directly to the treasurer of the committee.

During that meeting, I found myself caught in a liminal space as an engaged researcher with ties to both parties. I was also trying to learn from my own mistakes and relations that led to this situation. I felt I needed to take a step back and take on the role of simply receiving the *Farmacia Viva* committee's concerns. This meant that I had to let go of the resentment I had held after hearing about the conflict initially from OVIMA and I also had to let go of my own agenda hoping for the project's success, which I realized was holding me back from allowing the committee to have full control over the process. Instead, I recommitted myself to ethical relating and the dialogical process of staying with the trouble (Haraway 2016). I realized that the best thing I could do was to keep the dialogue going, even when anger and false accusations were directed at me—holding the tensions that arise so that the relationships could stretch and grow, but not break.

In one tense moment, one committee member, a good friend, even told the group that he had been trying to contact me on Facebook, and that I never replied to him (when actually the reverse was true). Although I felt extremely defensive in that moment, I simply thanked him for his comments and asked if anyone else wanted to speak, electing to respond to all of the statements together after all the concerns had been aired. Although I do not believe in neutrality, I found myself striving to remain neutral and see what emerges, and yet also to prioritize the health of the relationships I am a part of. It seemed to be a test of putting ethical relationality into practice.

One committee member did speak up in favor of Manuel and Horacio, saying that they had been fair and kind. However, he was still confused as to why they had kept certain information from the committee, and why they had now abandoned the project. This same committee member also spoke against Roberto, the president of the committee, saying that he had not been involved with the project for months, and had left the rest of the committee to complete the work on their own. Though these various accounts were difficult to process, a clear story began to emerge for me.

When it was finally my turn to address the group, I first repeated the concerns I had noted back to them as I understood them. I then tried to explain where I thought some of the

misunderstandings were coming from about the purpose of the donation funds. However, I agreed with the treasurer that the committee should have been included in the decision-making about the use of the funds, as well as the project planning. I told the group that I did not necessarily agree with the approach that Manuel and Horacio had taken in facilitating the project, but I also acknowledged that they had done their best with the tools they were familiar with. I wished that I could have been more involved personally over the prior year, but with my schooling in the United States, it was too difficult. Lastly, I expressed to them that I still wanted to be involved with the project, but that when there was disharmony among the group and within the community, that it was very difficult to support the project. If they could organize and work things out among themselves without seeking intervention from outsiders, I told them, it would be much easier to continue supporting the project.

What struck me the most during the meeting was, after a long period of deliberation and discussion, one of the committee members turned to me from across the room and asked pointedly, “*Que queremos saber, Laura es, Farmacia Viva es un Proyecto? O No?*”—*What we want to know, Laura is - is Farmacia Viva a project or not?* I was taken aback. “What is a project?” I asked him, “for me, it’s up to you whether the project continues or not.” It was clear to me that if *Farmacia Viva* was to succeed it would need to be directed by the community’s own desires for the land and the community. But his question suddenly made the word *project* appear strange to me. What does it mean to make a piece of land or an idea or a group of people into a project? What kind of worldmaking practice is this?

LESSONS LEARNED

For me, the word *project* denotes an intention or commitment to work toward some transformation, and I saw that as something that our collaborative group would design together. The question posed above, however, revealed to me an equivocation about the word *project* and the power relations therein. For the community members, I sensed that a project was only something engaged in by outsiders, who then brought certain resources to the community. By asking whether *Farmacia Viva* was a project, I believe he wanted to know if outsiders (OVIMA or myself) were going to continue to be involved. As this case demonstrates, *project* is a brittle construct often beset by conflicting agendas and understandings.

To make a place into a project imposes human, economic, and colonial intentions for organizing space, also making it legible to outsiders, funders, and governments. According to Craig and Porter (1997), this almost always requires formal procedures and techniques that follow conventional rationalities, that I am calling *development as usual*. These are based on achieving specific ideals and objectives, which are generally defined by the outsiders or NGOs that are directing the project’s funds. These goals are often value-laden, and implicitly aim to “reconstruct the community in the image of the overall goal” (Craig and Porter 1997, 231). The result is that community members who are best able to express themselves as allied with those ideals are able to control a greater portion of the project’s direction and resources.

The framing of *Farmacia Viva* as a project had implicitly constructed the community members as beneficiaries who are beholden to the project’s frame, whether or not that frame was agreed upon collaboratively. Sometimes I was seen as the arbiter of this frame, and sometimes it was Manuel and Horacio. According to Craig and Porter:

...in the less than ideal world of everyday project reality, the local participants rarely engage with our ideals and objectives in quite the way we intended. They do not fully disengage from their

own dreams and ideals, but bring them along on the project journey, and try to realise them within the confined space of the project. In terms of the space, time, and categories allocated to them by the project, they become “deviant”; or, by various means of foot-dragging and flight, they resist (Craig and Porter 1997, 235).

The committee members’ resistance to the project framing is evident throughout the story I have narrated above.

Part of the way that projects are framed is through the funding platform and the media communications exchanged with funders and donors (Craig and Porter 1997). In this case, OVIMA’s fundraising platform had not adequately been explained or demonstrated to the committee members. Because they did not have access to the funding platform as a framing tool, their participation in the project was limited. Fundraising, therefore, was a mysterious process that invited suspicion on the part of the committee. In retrospect, Manuel also agreed that it would have been helpful if they had allowed the committee members to have access to their funding platform, at least to explain how it worked. Keeping the funding mysterious and controlled by the NGO prevented the community from truly have control over the direction of the project as well.

The development-as-usual project model imposed on *Farmacia Viva* produced a deep underlying dissatisfaction and dissonance with the *Farmacia Viva* committee’s sensibilities and shifted the control over their land. I suggest that the tension between the *Farmacia Viva* committee and OVIMA was *not only* a tension due to unequal power relations but is also part of an ontological tension that arose from making this piece of Shipibo forestland into a project. Indigenous worlds in which trees and other forest beings participate in forest management are in tension with the worldmaking practices employed by usual development and academic approaches. Turning the forest into a project gives the space some purpose aside from the lives and wills of the trees and the plants, and perhaps neglects the spirits of the forest that are so important for good interspecies relating. Perhaps, the *commons* as an alternate framework would work better for *Farmacia Viva*. As Nightingale defines it, “the commons is not a resource or place, but rather a set of more-than-human, contingent relations-in-the-making that result in collective practices of production, exchange, and living with the world” (2019, 18). However, commons, too is foreign to Shipibo categories of forest governance and management.

I argue that imposing often unquestioned, implicitly hegemonic and singular agendas onto placemaking projects de-animates the worlds that are created—as it excludes many of the beings that inhabit them—trees, guardian spirits, birds, ants, and the peoples engaged and woven into these relations—from participating in the worldmaking practices. What would it mean to have a truly Shipibo model of forest governance and project development? Evaluating a project’s success should be dependent on understanding the community’s principles for defining “good” and “successful.” *Jakon* (*good* or *towards life*) (Best 2019) has been a guiding principle for me in moving through these tensions—asking, *does this bring us toward something that nourishes life, or not?*

6 | 3 CONCLUSION

Since that meeting in August 2019, relations between *Farmacia Viva* and OVIMA have been nearly completely severed. OVIMA even made a statement saying they would never conduct any other projects in Paoyhan. To be clear on my position regarding the falling out, I do not believe that Manuel and Horacio did anything malicious or intentionally “wrong.” They, like all of us,

were genuinely doing their best to manage the project with the tools and frameworks they were trained in, and the structures dictated by their positions in the organization. My main critique is in their decision to no longer work with the committee or community at all. This goes against a relationship-building approach to working in communities that has defined my research. However, their decision was partly based in a logic of self-preservation that I can understand and respect.

There was a deeper equivocation here about the meaning of participation that I failed to see at the time. Indeed, Manuel and Horacio believed that they *had* been engaging in a participatory approach with the community, and by many standards, this was true. I sense there was a missed opportunity here, in which I could have done more to guide or teach OVIMA's staff about the participatory and community-based approaches that I felt they should adopt. Perhaps that could have provided some type of opening or constructive critique to move away from an outdated and paternalistic development model that they themselves were purportedly trying to avoid. Providing a type of training or capacity building for the organization is a different tactic than the one I used, simply asserting the way I thought things should proceed without providing a compelling reason for why it would work or why it was better. However, I am not certain things would have necessarily played out any differently.

Despite OVIMA's decision to pull out of the project, I have continued to serve in an advisory capacity to the *Farmacia Viva* committee. During the meeting, the authorities and the committee ended up asking me to take over the role of *asesor* (adviser) to *Farmacia Viva*. Up until now, I have fulfilled this role primarily through advising the three researchers, Hawkins Lewis, Melaina Dyck, and Rebecca Buell, who stayed on in Paoyhan after my brief visit, continuing to work with the committee, and at times with OVIMA as well. Their presence was likely essential to the continuation of the project at all. As researchers, we were somehow able to retain relationships with both sides, though not without tension.

We were able to reframe the break with OVIMA as something that was positive for the committee's growth. They no longer needed to depend on OVIMA, and therefore should move ahead with their own direction. However, there is still a fear from the committee that I, too, may abandon the project, and this trust will take time to rebuild, especially since I have been away. Shortly after the falling out, under their own direction and with the accompaniment of the researchers, the *Farmacia Viva* committee held new elections and was entirely restructured. The current president, Humberto, seems to be less contentious than the previous one among other committee and community members, and sometimes, he says, he just goes out to the garden space to think and spend time with the plants. The new vice president is a woman, Nora, who was initially interested in the project because she wanted to learn more about healing with plants to treat her children and family members.

As of January 2020, *Farmacia Viva* has now become an officially formalized organization, which they wanted to do so that they could seek their own funding from the state and other granting agencies. They are currently involved in internal meetings within the community to determine the future direction of *Farmacia Viva* and its role in the community. However, tensions remain. Papa Meni's family, for instance, originally involved in the project, withdrew after the falling out with OVIMA. This is possibly because they have had ties with members of OVIMA as well. This tension was exacerbated when at some point one of Papa Meni's sons supposedly brought a group of dieters to the *Farmacia Viva* site without permission from the committee and without passing along the funds that were generated from the trip. Furthermore, Papa Meni had not been happy about the former president's ideas of turning *Farmacia Viva* into its own diet center, which would

directly compete with Papa Meni's clients. The new iteration of the committee is hoping to assuage some of these concerns through a series of meetings within the community involving the local healers.

I do not know what the future holds for *Farmacia Viva*, but the committee and I move forward with ongoing questions in mind: How can we enfold tree spirits and other forest beings into *Farmacia Viva* so that this project can be collaborative and participatory, even across species lines? Can Shipibo practices for relating with plant teachers invite plants into the participatory process? How can interspecies practices foster relations of mutual care and caretaking with the forest? How can we collectively build worlds and places that nurture life? There is an equivocation in the way trees are understood and constituted through forest management practices. Shipibo ontologies hold trees as primal sources of power; beings with their own knowledges that are critical to human health and wellbeing. With proper relations with the spirits that guard them, there is no conflict in using the material parts of trees for medicines or building materials. Forest management practices employed by development-as-usual do not take the trees' owners or spirit masters into account in the management of forest spaces, and do not have ways of engaging with or accounting for relations with those plant beings.

Equivocations and ontological tensions on their own do not need to be detrimental. Indeed, these moments, when attended to, can offer regenerative potential for new emergent practices and "worlds otherwise." I return to Sonya Atalay's, concept of braiding knowledges together. In this chapter, I have provided an exposition on some of the ways I have worked to braid different types of knowledges together (Atalay 2012) in the form of this community-based project, which I am also calling an interspecies collaboration. This includes dieting practices, forestry techniques, and collaborative knowledge production and placemaking. This is first and foremost a self-reflexive critique of the process of conducting engaged and collaborative research. From the beginning, this project was imbricated with exactly the kinds of power-relations that I wanted to avoid and was trying to address with this effort at community engagement. However, there are structural and institutional obstacles to these types of decolonial goals. I have argued that development-as-usual frameworks often end up taking away community control over land management decisions even while attempting to follow participatory approaches. This is not necessarily a result of mismanagement or malintent, but of organizational structures, logistical and time constraints, and protocols that determine the frame of the project according to values, visions, and measures of success that are in tension with those of the community. I have further argued that these development models do not account for the types of relational interspecies practices that are central to Indigenous values and forest management. Some of these same structural obstacles haunt the trajectories of ayahuasca's commodification.

CHAPTER 7 | CONCLUSION | HEALING

BECOMING BEYOND HUMAN WITH MEDICINAL PLANTS

7 | 0 INTRODUCTION

THE NOYA RAO STORY

Jovita works at the local artisans collective, where she sells handmade tapestries and other fabrics that she embroiders with Shipibo designs in distinctive geometric shapes and patterns. She spends most of her days working on her embroidery, whether in a hammock chatting with family members, or in the shade of the building that houses the artisan's collective. Jovita's fingers seemingly effortlessly work her needle in a way that, inch by inch, complex and brightly-colored patterns reveal themselves on her canvas. It can take her up to several months to complete large tapestries. She also dyes her artesanía with various combinations of local tree barks. This requires several iterations of submerging the cloth in the extracted liquid and then allowing it to dry in the sun, so the process can take an entire day. "When I do my work, she told me once, I do it with a lot of faith and a lot of care." On this day, I had passed by the artisans collective on my way to the market, and she asked if I wanted to hear the story of Noya Rao, the flying tree, so we sat sharing some *camu camu* juice while she told me. Although this was the first time I heard this particular story, it was repeated to me in different ways by several other people during the following weeks and months.

The story takes place in the town that her family was from originally, down the river. "I lived there in the community; my mother is from there," she began. *The lake is called Cumançay. My grandfathers and uncle would take us on trips to go fishing in the lake, bringing everything we needed, mosquito nets and cooking supplies. They were fishing for gavitana, a type of big fish. Our grandfather would tell us, "don't go over there because over there is Noya Rao," he said. "Don't touch that tree, because that medicine is dangerous. When someone who has a diet with ayahuasca or with Noya Rao, they can touch it, but you don't know how to use it." We were just children, so maybe he didn't want us to touch the branches or flowers, and he thought telling us this would avoid that.*

It was a big tree, whose branches hung over the oxbow lake there. Its leaves glowed brightly when it was dark out; the people who always went to fish there in the past could see that the fish, eating the fallen seeds from the tree, were able to fly. The people didn't know why they did that or why those things happened. One day, there was some trouble in the village and the people were going to have to relocate. A woman went to the lagoon. She took the water from the lake, crushed leaves from the tree into it, and sprinkled the water all around the edges of the village land to see what would happen. In the morning, she told her grandson, don't go far today because I have done that Noya Rao treatment, and we should wait to see what happens. But the youth didn't listen, and he went out to fish.

At ten in the morning, it had already started making a sound trk trk trk trk... The woman said "what's going to happen?" It felt like an earthquake, because it had already started levitating, the community's land was already rising. When the youth came back in his canoe, he saw that the

whole place was already aloft and was flying away. It was more than 2 meters off the ground. All of his family members were looking down on him, and he said “don’t leave me, don’t leave me. I want to go where you’re going too!” His uncle tried to send a vine down for him to climb, but they were already too high, and though the boy called to them, it was too late and the village floated away and landed far away down the river. The boy was left behind as a bird; he was not a human being anymore. And for those in later generations we say this type of bird was transformed from that boy, and he still says “kokaan kokaan.” Because of that, at this lake there is still a bird that sings that way. It is saying “kokan” because in Shipibo this word kokan is the word for uncle, and that’s what he’s saying, calling for his uncle not to leave him. Meanwhile, the community landed in Canshahuayo, but you can’t see them because they are not humans. Well, they are like humans, but you can’t see them. They are called chaikuni people.

When I asked Jovita whether or not the tree was still there, she said that it had died many years ago. “When I went there last, when I was 22 years old, I saw in the lake, at the bottom, the trunk of the Noya Rao, because it had already fallen, and the water was very clear. There it was in the lake.” She did not elaborate on the troubling circumstances that gave rise to the relocation of the village, though I can imagine any number of social or ecological factors to explain their flight. For example, it was historically fairly common for villages to move locations, as the river channels on the Ucayali are not consistent, and subject to changes causing flooding, and requiring relocation.

I find myself in the midst of many narratives framing familiar stories. They are stories that span different species, times, and worlds, and also create divisions between them. These stories seem to be important in contextualizing the changes happening on the Ucayali River, as well as elsewhere in the world. Some of these stories are part of a discourse of socio-environmental change that encompasses narratives being told in many different times, in different places, and by different peoples with different voices. Some of these stories have not yet entered into this discourse, or have possibly been excluded.

Noya Rao is one of the many plant teachers that are dieted by Shipibo healers in order to learn how to heal. Noya Rao is also one of my great teachers, and I have sung its songs and visited some of the few Noya Rao trees that are known to exist. This is a tree of legends, and it is also a tree of songs. The legends take place within human memory, within dreams, and within visions, and are alive in the present moment. The songs are less sung about the tree than sung by the tree spirit itself through the human bodies of healers. These songs are used to heal other human bodies, and this tree is considered a great teacher.

PLANT TEACHERS GLOBALLY

Why have ayahuasca and these other powerful teacher plants come into global awareness at this time? What does it mean that they are now becoming integrated into human bodies and subjectivities far beyond the Amazon? Through dieting and my plant education, I have only just begun to learn how to interact with plant spirits, and felt myself how the ibo act through human subjects and bodies. This is how plant spirits are given life. It is worthwhile to question who is bestowed with the distinction of *human, self, animate, alive*. It has been part of colonial power plays to dominate through the denial of humanity to certain subjugated groups, to dehumanize the *other*, in which humanity was structured within racialized hierarchies (see Chapter 2). These racialized hierarchies also define conceptions of animacy (Chen 2012), denying liveliness and selfhood to the many forms of life we relate with. I suggest that if we see ourselves as inhabiting

an inanimate and separate world, we are at risk of losing contact with our own humanity. One way that we could define humanity is through our relational encounters with other-than-humans. If we go along with feminist theories that consider *relations* to be the smallest divisible unit (Haraway 2008), it is the multispecies assemblages of relations that we are “becoming with” that make humans human at all.

This dissertation has focused on the Shipibo plant-human practices that *animate* plants through the bodies of healers and dieters, and through personification.¹⁴⁹ This can also be accomplished through other types of interspecies relating. Throughout this dissertation I have claimed that learning from plants can subvert hierarchies of animacy and create worlds that are more alive, that are spaces of life, that are *jakon*. I conclude this dissertation with a deeper discussion of what I feel these plant beings offer to humans in these times of great disconnection. I offer my own experiences of forming relationships with specific plants that strive to be less objectifying, less oppressive, and more collaborative and reciprocal. I call this striving *healing*. I draw on feminist theories of belonging and care, along with Indigenous and Amazonian concepts to discuss a theory of healing that integrates humanity as and within an ecology of selves—comprised of human and other-than-human beings. Again, I borrow the term *ecology of selves* from Eduardo Kohn, who describes it as the many voices and agencies that occupy our inner and outer landscapes and that we are always becoming in relation with (Kohn 2013). I propose that by forging tighter multispecies connections through collective imaginaries, we allow ourselves to become sensitive to the ecology of selves through whom we come into being.

In this conclusion, I will first reconstruct the Noya Rao story that I introduced above to bear on some of the disconnects of late capitalism and the silencing of natural voices. Then, I explore more deeply the concept of animating plants through voice, and the entwinement of plant and human agency. Next, I will develop the concept of healing as an ethical stance that serves as an orientation for coming into being. I explore the potential for relating with plants through de-objectifying or *animating* healing practices to open the possibility of different modes of humanity, through more reciprocal, less hierarchical, and less oppressive multi-species assemblages. Particularly, I focus on the practices of relating with, learning from, and understanding plants that I have been learning from Shipibo healers.

I will close by synthesizing the main critiques I have made throughout my dissertation regarding the commodification of the ayahuasca complex, and its spread among people of the Global North. Despite these critiques, my point is not to discourage the use of ayahuasca by Westerners. Rather, these critiques are meant to illuminate the power hierarchies that are reinscribed through colonial and capitalist mechanisms. As othered humans and other than humans have been dehumanized through hegemonic processes, the commodification of ayahuasca has similarly reconfigured power, constricting the power held by plants and plant spirits and routing it through human and economic mechanisms (see Chapter 4). Through recognition of these power dynamics there is an opportunity to do things differently, creating more ethical and accountable relating (Donald 2012; Wilson 2008). Thus, I argue that healing should not be seen as merely an individual act or an individualized experience. Ethical and accountable relating in this case is a call beyond using ayahuasca as simply a means for one’s own personal healing and transformation. Healing takes place within an interpersonal, intercultural, and interspecies web that is laden with power dynamics. Responsibility to Indigenous communities must extend beyond payment for a

¹⁴⁹ When I use the word *animate* as a verb in the context of other-than-humans (in this case, plants), I use it with the idea to allow for agency, selfhood, and the recognition of the worldmaking capacities of other-than-human beings.

healing service, and responsibility to the plants calls us to extend our care beyond usual human concerns. On both counts we must learn how to listen and be in reciprocity.

THE SILENCING OF NATURAL SUBJECTS

Late capitalism has been fueled by the construction of human identities in opposition to nature, which also enabled them to exploit that nature and colonize new lands, and thereby serve the goal of concentrating wealth and resources (Latour 2012; Levins Morales 2019). This “great divide” formed a hierarchy with nature at the bottom and culture, the realm of the civilized human, above (Latour 2012). In between these two things, were the *others*—notably, women, racialized subjects, and colonized peoples who were labeled as non-modern or pre-modern subjects. This divide was also part of the process that rendered nature inanimate and exploitable (Merchant 1980).

I do not wish to construct Shipibo healing in opposition to the so-called *great divide*. The hierarchies and the divide do exist. Much of contemporary dominant culture in the colonized world has constructed itself precisely on the back of nature, purposefully subjugating nature and natural subjects—both human and non-human. It is not a negation or denial of the divide that I am seeking, but rather a way to view it so that it is not so great. Not so far, in fact; that if we look inside of ourselves we find that the divide is still there, but that what once seemed so vast, now seems that we can step easefully from one side to the other, without hardly realizing we have crossed over.

I wish to return to the story I began with. The following excerpt is a transcription and translation of the end of the Noya Rao story, the second time I heard it, during an interview with Yoshan:

And when the boys returned to the village they couldn't reach it, because they had arrived a little late. Their mother had already made the treatment with the flying medicine, and the village was already flying away. So the boys transformed into little birds. And there is a bird that always says—because his uncle—they asked their uncles for help that they come get them, but the uncle didn't come for him, and that's why they transformed into birds. They make this sound: “kokan, kokan.” That is the story of the flying tree, which flew and landed in another community. From Cumancaya they had left, and they landed in Canshahuaya.

Though similar to Jovita's version of this story, the one told by Yoshan involves *two* boys that were left behind. The two boys pleaded with their uncles to come back for them, but the uncles didn't come, and the boys transformed into birds who can now only make sounds, “kokan, kokan,” whereas before they were able to speak words. Who were the boys who were left behind? It is common in Amazonian mythology for animals to be created from transformed humans (Viveiros de Castro 2004a). The transformation of the boys is a clue that the story of the village came out of mythic time, out of the half-formed spirit world, inhabited by human-animals and animal-humans, and was relocated into a new reality, which demanded that the boys either join their village with the other humans, or become animals forever. The boys are recontextualized from a non-corporeal spirit world, and into the corporeal material world as birds. Their human uncle never returns for them. The bird-boys are left behind in a state of being in between two worlds, not fully able to participate in either.

There is a tendency to turn to Indigenous cosmologies as way-showers to a view in which this divide is not so stark. However, Indigenous peoples, too, are coming into being at the intersection of multiple narratives about their identities and what it means to be human, and what it means to be Indigenous. Frantz Fanon describes how racialized subjects are always constructed backwards, beginning from the view imposed on them by the dominant narrative (Fanon 1967).

Colonized peoples, like the bird-boys in the story, are part of modernity even as they are excluded (Mignolo 2000).

Shipibo mythology draws on the past to inform the present (e.g. Taussig 1984), perhaps attempting to reconcile the great divide that has taken place in their own history. After I had already transcribed the first two versions of the story, I came across the Noya Rao story in Jonathan Hill's (1993) book. The story is quoted directly from Peter Roe (1988), and appears there like this:

To paraphrase two variants of the myth, a large village of "Incas"... lived there [Cumancayacocha] until one day either a woman shaman or the "Inca" poured flight medicine (noiarao) on the ground surrounding the village and it slowly rose. As the village levitated to the sound of drums and flutes, some pots fell to the ground and smashed. The village flew over the Ucayali to descend either upon the mysterious Cerros de Canshahuaya on the lower Ucayali, downriver from Pucallpa, or at Masisea (Roe 1988, 106).

For Hill, this story is one of transformation. Shipibo narratives set in the time of the Incas are usually about transformations from a mythic past in which animals and humans were less distinct, and could communicate and transform into one another. They are brought into the more recent, historical past, in which humans have a culture distinct from that of animals. Hill's interpretation suggests then that this story may be a Shipibo version of the story of the great divide. The flight of the village transitions it from the mythic world of spirits into the material world, where humans are separate from nature. The Noya Rao, the flying medicine, which was critical in this transformation, in this version of the story is strangely disconnected from the tree itself.

When I referred back to Roe's extensive collection of Shipibo myths and cosmology called *The Cosmic Zygote*, I discovered a different version of the story there; it appears like this:

When the sun first emerged, its rays hit the branches of the tree hanging heavy with fruit. The fruit dropped into the lake like rain. Fish, attracted to the surface by the sound of their splashing impact, began to eat the bobbing fruit. As the fish took bites out of them there emerged all the species of birds there are in the world. The leaves of the tree were later used by a woman shaman to prepare flight medicine that levitated the entire site off the ground and sent it flying off through the air to the accompaniment of drums and flutes until it eventually descended to earth again on a mountain downriver at Canshahuaya (Roe 1982, 139–40).

Noya Rao, the great tree, through its "flight medicine," can be seen as the mediator that is able to bridge the two worlds, relocating the village from the spirit world, and allowing it to take on its new location in the material world. In neither of Roe's versions of the story are the boys mentioned—that is, the ones who were left behind. Whether on the part of his informants or his own, it is a poignant omission in this story of materialization, modernization, and transformation, to leave out the story of those who did not survive the journey, or who survived it but were left in a speechless and subjugated state, no longer recognized as human. Unfortunately, this erasure can be seen as a reflection of an erasure that has been replicated time and again in historical and textual accounts worldwide. This is part of the modern narrative that leaves out the stories of violence that were left in its wake. According to Marisol de la Cadena, it is precisely the silencing of subjugated voices that has allowed for the persistence of ideas of race and racism, as well as the elimination of "nature" from the political sphere:

The object of policies of improvement, only through a process of transformation (e.g., through which they should deny the social relations they held with plants, rivers, or mountains) could "the naturals" gain active and legitimate access to politics. ... If embedded in the political was the silence about the antagonistic exclusion of "naturals," the elimination of "Nature" from the same sphere completed the hegemony (de la Cadena 2010, 345).

With this dissertation I have co-constructed events that lead to the entextualization of certain narratives. My choices have determined what is written, and what is left out, as well as whose stories are being recorded and voiced in the first place. In general, written history has privileged the dominant account, and I'm not certain that my project can claim to be any different. However, I have tried to retain a dialogic nature between oral narrative and text, since oral narratives have the flexibility and adaptability to continually reinterpret history (Cruikshank 2005). I also hope I have brought new narratives and voices into the discourse about socio-environmental change, and environmental justice in multispecies worlds, including those of plant spirits, and the healers through whom they speak and sing.

It has not been my intent to reinforce oppositions, but to allow for the existence of multiple worlds, potentially even within a single body or geographic locus. It is not the burden of Indigenous people or cosmologies to overcome European divisions between nature and culture. As Viveiros de Castro notes, it is not “as if the only point of a nonmodern cosmology were to stand in opposition to our oppositions” (Viveiros de Castro 2004a, 464). Valuing Indigenous ontologies for their alterity and ability to show “moderns” a different way of being is part of an essentializing project that fails to understand and value Indigenous peoples on their own terms, and for their right to exist according to their own cultural norms and values, whether their ways of being offer value and contrast to outsiders or not (Chandler and Reid 2018). Thus, according to ethical relating, if outsiders are to use practices, concepts, and plants from Indigenous societies they (we) must actually find a way to be in reciprocity and alliance with those societies and communities on their own terms, and according to their own self-determined values. That said, interspecies relating is not just an Indigenous matter, and engaging in relations offers openings toward a more ethical and equitable world.

7 | 1 ENTWINEMENT AND AN ETHIC OF HEALING

My understanding of healing comes from what I have learned from my own experiences with Shipibo healing rituals, in relation with healers, plants, spirits, and my own particular cultural and scholarly milieu, as a white North American, a feminist intellectual. In order to illustrate how healing can work to bring us into being within a multi-species assemblage, I have drawn on Shipibo concepts of health, which link social, ecological, and bodily health. Shipibo healing rituals bridge communication across species lines through the performance of songs and the personification of plants (Brabec de Mori and Seeger 2013). This is based on a concept of health that is beyond the individual, in which discord within our relationships can result in disease in the body. Thus, healing is by definition relational, embodied, and situated.

HEALING WITH MEDICINAL PLANTS

Medicinal plants and plant vitality relate in transformative ways with human bodies beyond simply supporting the growth and maintenance of animal flesh, as could be said of food species. Each plant species has its own character—specific sensual ways of being, perceiving, and knowing, and its own modes of expression. Plant chemical expressions, for instance, are often perceivable by other beings—plants and otherwise—as scent, as flavor, as nutrition, or in the case of the psychoactive plants, as a shift in animal cognition. What makes a plant *medicine* or not is fundamentally relational. In other words, the healing potential of a plant is dependent on the

relation between the person and the plant, and *not only* on the material or chemical attributes of the plant itself. Many Indigenous health systems understand these relations in a much more nuanced way than the limitations of Western allopathic medicine allow, in part because of their recognition of the spiritual nature of plants.

Thus, teacher plants cannot be seen as *only* for healing. These plants have the power to either teach, heal, or harm, depending on their relationship with the bodies they interact with. The agency of ibo or spirits of teacher plants and trees emerges relationally through the plant-human practices that constitute them as teachers and healers, and thereby enact worlds in which they participate. However, these are not the *only* practices these plant spirits are participate in, nor the only way they relate with humans. They also have relations with myriad nonhumans. They can also cause harm, or wreak havoc in peoples' lives if they are angered. This is why Jovita's grandfather cautioned the children to stay away from Noya Rao. A plant only becomes a teacher or healer when one knows the practices that enable one to call on the plants' sentience and animate them as such. When teaching and healing are performed in collaboration between plants and humans, these plants and humans *both* come into being as healers and teachers.

Among those outsiders who are learning Indigenous practices of relating with plants, there is a resurgence in the recognition of plant animacy in conjunction with the adoption of Indigenous-based healing practices such as participating in ayahuasca ceremonies, singing, and dieting. These outsiders are perhaps searching for connection with something beyond themselves, for connection with the Sacred. These ways of relating are then brought to new places and new bodies. As M. Jacqui Alexander has said of the African and Yoruba diaspora, "Migrations are one indication that these cosmological systems are marked by anything but stasis. Some energies have been fused; others apparently atrophy in certain places while becoming dominant in others" (Alexander 2005, 292). This type of shift is apparent in the relation-forming and spiritual practices associated with Shipibo healing rituals and the use of ayahuasca as it spreads globally. While plant spirits do not need outsiders, *per sé*, as Alexander says, they do need "embodied beings" in order to be animated in our worlds. We could thus view the consumption of medicinal plants as a subversive colonization or appropriation of Western bodies by the agencies and spirits of the plants, in a way that also offers resistance to their de-animation and commodification.

I have argued that learning from and relating with plants offers a form of semiotic resistance to ideological domination—the material and symbolic restructuring of nature defined by extractive economies. These are the "submerged perspectives" that Gomez-Barris (2017) describes as offering places of hope even within zones of extraction. Plant-human healing practices disrupt hierarchies of animacy (Chen 2012) through the blurring of boundaries between plant and person and the proliferation of plant-based knowledge and lifeworlds. Connecting and relating with plants in such a way has the ability to unsettle the taken-for-granted sensibilities handed to us from entrenched and dominant ideologies that see bodies as sources of labor and repositories of debt, and plants as commodities and resources.

Healing with plants can also disrupt an individualized sense of self and subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari describe a similar dissolution of the individual, which they call the "dismantling of the organism," resulting in an opening to connections and alternate realities.

Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor. Actually, dismantling the organism is no more difficult than dismantling the other two strata, signification and subjectification. Signification clings to the soul just as the

organism clings to the body, and it is not easy to get rid of either. And how can we unhook ourselves from the points of subjectification that secure us, nail us down to a dominant reality? Tearing the conscious away from the subject in order to make it a means of exploration, tearing the unconscious away from signification and interpretation in order to make it a veritable production: this is assuredly no more or less difficult than tearing the body away from the organism. Caution is the art common to all three; if in dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from signification and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 160).

Such a dismantling of a singular subjectivity locates the body, and in this case, the human body, as a site of multiplicity—for multiple selves, multiple voices, multiple ontologies, which forms new and unexpected connections. The dismantling of the individual also functions to make visible some of the biopolitics of hegemony, which aim to control people's existence through normative discourses on how people should act, work, and comport themselves (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010).

ENTWINEMENT: BODIES, PLANTS AND VOICES IN AN ECOLOGY OF SELVES

I have conceptualized Shipibo healing rituals as organized processes by which plants and spirits are given voice through specific human bodies, and thereby become animated. I also see it as a process in which more selves in the ecology of selves, and thereby more matter within the body (or ecosystem) become animated, more alive, less dead—hence, healing. Shipibo healing practices blur the boundaries between human and plant, self and other, collapsing hierarchies of animacy, and bridging material and spirit realms. These others are then included in the social process of subject formation, involving listening, mimicry, and exchange. The healing process operates on all scales of selves—including the voices within the body, including the embodied self in relation to the other selves in the ecosystem—traversing perceived divisions. Internal relations among various selves interpenetrate with external relations through voice. This is a mattering of worlds, a process which is never complete and is always becoming.

Ikaros, songs used for the purpose of healing, are co-produced during communication between the healer and the plant spirit masters (Callicott 2013), aided by consumption of ayahuasca. Singing is considered to be the appropriate form for communication with spirits, as it is the means by which spirits communicate with each other. When one concludes a successful diet, the dieter should be able to contact the plant spirit, and throughout the course of apprenticeship will eventually learn to sing with the voice of the plant spirit. This is a practice similar to what other authors and spiritual lineages have called “spirit possession,” in which spirits animate the human body while the healer is in an altered state (Seligman 2014). The world of the plant spirits exists in mythological time, which according to Bernd Brabec de Mori (2012a), can be understood as a “distant present,” and can be far away in time, space, past or future, or in other worlds, and can be accessed through altered states of perception such as dreams and ayahuasca visions. These spirit worlds are perhaps more true than and also give rise to our ordinary experiences. Healers have long-term relationships with these spirits, allowing their embodiment and materialization—what I am calling animation. Thus, the singing and performance of ikaros serves to simultaneously animate the human body by the plant spirit and animate the plant spirit through the human body.

For Shipibo healers such as Yoshan and Papa Meni, ikaros have the potential to alter the structure of the material world, and the mastery of singing with the voices of spirits is the technology by which healing is able to occur. Thus, the manifestation of plant knowledge into

action, through the personification and animation of a plant spirit (ibo) in the form of song, has the ability to heal or otherwise alter the material world. I have described in previous chapters how the primary process used to do this involves an Amazonian concept described by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro as an “abduction of agency,” by which plant agency is able to act through human bodies, or by which the human body abducts the agency of the plant to perform its purposes (Viveiros de Castro 2004a). The two agencies become entwined to the extent to which it is unclear whose agency is appropriating whose, or whose ends are being served. Shipibo healing practices involve such an entwinement of plant and human agency acting through the human body. Shipibo healing practices are centered on the ability to communicate with and give voice to multiple selves across species lines, bridging the material and the spirit realms. The body acts as a gate or window to access these different subjectivities and voices, and ayahuasca as a facilitator for listening to the voices of plants and other spirits.

If multiple voices can be spoken from the same body, even within a single utterance, then who exactly is the subjectivity that is singing? Further, if my own dream could be the experience of a non-human subjectivity experiencing my body, then what does it mean to be a self? In thinking about my work with Shipibo healers, and how to come to terms with appropriating their voices and the voices of plants, I draw on the concept of multi-voicedness (Voloshinov 1987). There is no single voice or singular narrative that is making meaning of my existence. Indeed, I cannot even seem to see myself as a single self. I am more like a collection of voices, contributing to the discourse of myself as a self. We use narratives and voice to construct our own sense of identity and history, and a way of making meaning of raw experience. In a sense, narrative is used to weave together reality and memory.

In this dissertation I have viewed the body as a site of struggle between multiple voices and multiple worlds. This multiplicity of voices animates an ecology of selves, with whom are always coming into being. An individual uses different voices to find a way of communicating to another self. The multiplicity of inner speech can be viewed as a conversation among many voices and between separate selves, which arise in a social process of appropriating others’ voices (Bakhtin 1986). In a political ontology framework, the dominant ideology and voices that emerge from the *one-world world* are characterized by capitalism, coloniality, and patriarchy (Law 2015). Part of the inflexibility of the one-world world resides in its imperviousness to social processes of co-construction or worldmaking. I argue that through expression and animation more silenced voices may be given voice and thereby construct worlds in which more selves participate.

The articulation of oppressed voices is similar to the ways that Thomas Csordas describes spiritual and transformational healing: “Healing at its most human is not an escape into irreality and mystification, but an intensification of the encounter between suffering and hope at the moment in which it finds a voice, where the anguished clash of bare life and raw existence emerges from muteness into articulation” (Csordas 2002, 11). By giving voice to mute selves, these selves are then included in the social process of subject formation. I view the animation of the ecology of selves as an integral part of a more-than-human healing process. Then, through expression and dialogue, antagonistic voices can come into more responsible relationships with each other.

AN ETHIC OF HEALING

According to María Puig de la Bellacasa, we must orient ourselves to a revised collective ethics of everyday living in engagement with biopolitical regimes and socio-technological assemblages. That is, a “collective ethico-political commitment,” which guides an

individual's everyday actions, while also linking it back to a larger collective ethical engagement that concerns itself with a flourishing of more-than-human life. She calls this an *ethics of care*. I relate this back to the Shipibo notion of *jakon*, a *life giving good* (Best 2019). Feminist projects of care see resistance to hegemony as not just breaking down boundaries that separate various life forms, but actively forming connections and interdependencies across different life forms (e.g. Haraway 2016; 2008; Parreñas 2018). These types of ethical engagements decenter the human, and rather view individual agency as complexly articulated within more-than-human relational formations. This creates an interdependent sense of self that is socially constructed or *embedded*, as opposed to the monadic or independent self that was put forward during the proliferation of enlightenment individualism (Ucok-Sayrak 2014). Thus, identity is a product of relationships, narratives, and the cultural milieu in which the identity is embedded.

As Puig de la Bellacasa points out, these ethico-political collectives are specific. It matters which relations we are speaking of, which form of life or artifact is being engaged with, beyond just an abstracted *earth* or *environment* (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010). Relating in ethical and accountable ways with other-than-human beings requires that we continually move into better relating as we become more intimate with others, in ways that can “respond to alterity without nurturing purist separations between humans and nonhumans” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010, 8). Puig de la Bellacasa focuses on care as an ethos and practice that is also involved with worldmaking. This is similar to the concept of *ethical relationality*, which also includes more-than-human collectives, as a form of research praxis (Donald 2012, see Chapter 4).

I offer an *ethic of healing* as a way in which we come into more reciprocal and ethical relations within an animate, multispecies ecology of selves. As described in the previous sections, healing is by nature transformational of both the body and the concepts of self and subjectivity, in addition to one's *being-in-the-world*. These transformational aspects of the self and body are part of what distinguishes *healing* from relations of *care* (Csordas 2002). *Healing* also implies an acknowledgement that there is illness and disease within our ecologies, that our relations are unhealthy. This stance takes into account the histories of inequality, colonialism, and oppression that continue to shape our more-than-human assemblages. Acknowledgement of these processes is necessary in order for healing to occur. An ethic of healing offers a pathway out of a trajectory in which humans are destroying themselves within a mostly-dead world, and into a world that is always already alive and inhabited by other selves. Healing has the potential to reach across boundaries of the skin, blur distinctions between self and other, and allow for both transpersonal and trans-species reconciliation. It integrates the body within the community, and with other beings in an ecology of selves. Thus, I conceptualize an ethic of healing as a type of embodied and relational ethical stance that orients us through these more-than-human relations toward reparation.

7 | 2 SYNTHESIS OF DISSERTATION

Despite my claim in the previous section that interspecies healing practices offer a particular antidote to the human exceptionalism and disconnection characteristic of late capitalism, the adoption of Indigenous interspecies practices by outsiders is not without consequence and not always possible. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, when outsiders adopt and adapt Amazonian healing rituals and plants within capitalist frameworks, the resulting practices tend to divert the spiritual power that defines these plants and practices into economic and humanized forms of power. I conceptualize these changes as an unraveling of plant potency that de-animates

the plants. That is, power, knowledge, and healing—three attributes often associated with ayahuasca and tightly bound with ayahuasca’s spiritual aspects—become separated from each other, and separated from the plants and their spirits.

In contexts where healing practices are increasingly determined by outsiders, the power of the plants and healers within that frame is reduced. Spiritual and shamanic power is diminished as Shipibo healing ceremonies are routed through capitalist modes of power in which plants and rituals are commodities and healers are employees. The outsiders who adopt Shipibo healing practices often have a more individualized conception of healing, and a more instrumental view of plants that may undermine that power of both the healer and the plant beings. Meanwhile, scientific ways of knowing plants tend to affirm reductionist and materialist views of plants while sometimes inadvertently constructing Indigenous ways of knowing as less epistemically valid. These processes together serve to de-animate plants, stripping plants and plant spirits of their perceived liveliness, agency, and ability to act in the world, in favor of humanized forms of power, knowledge, and healing. This in turn subverts the role of Indigenous healers, as their specialty is to command these plant spirits and wield their knowledge and healing powers.

At the same time, Indigenous plant-human practices, when performed by and for outsiders, create new openings for connection with transformative effects on those who participate. Healing with medicinal plants offers new pathways of connection between people and plants, as well as between Shipibo healers and outsiders. Those who form relationships with plants tend to increasingly recognize the agency of plants and plant spirits, and their ability to act, heal, and know. Thus, the relationships these plants form with the bodies of outsiders tends to create a re-entwinement, in which plant powers are reconstituted and plants are animated in the Western milieu, with a renewed capacity for influence and relation.

The ayahuasca economy also generates new economic and livelihood opportunities for Shipibo healers, which are not dependent on extraction and exploited labor. Although I would caution that there is a potential for the ayahuasca industry to become further extractive and exploitative, many healers and communities also stand to gain from economic opportunities that celebrate rather than oppress their Indigeneity. However, the commodification of Indigeneity is not unproblematic. It is particularly important for Indigenous healers to be in control over their own business operations so that more of the benefits flow to the communities and healers themselves, and to prevent the extraction of Indigenous labor and botanical vitality to primarily serve outsiders.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

In the first part of this dissertation I focused on various forms of power that are important for thinking about how ayahuasca travels between cultural contexts. In Chapter 1, I argued that relations between Shipibo healers and outsiders continue to be haunted by colonial encounters. At the same time, I show that Indigenous histories must also be understood as histories of resistance to ideological and demographic domination. Ayahuasca healing rituals have evolved from this milieu to adapt and hybridize to colonial mechanisms of power. Even as new types of relations emerge with the ayahuasca economy, these historical encounters continue to overdetermine the roles enacted between Shipibo healers and outsiders.

In Chapter 2, I showed that the extractive history of the Ucayali and Amazon region more broadly was instrumental in construction nature and Indigeneity together, as exploitable resources. Both colonial and neoliberal regimes violently constructed racialized hierarchies in which

Indigenous resources and Indigenous labor were extracted and extorted from the forests of Ucayali to serve outsiders and capitalist endeavors. I suggest that the commodification of the ayahuasca complex must be viewed in relation to this history of forest extraction.

Although the commodification of ayahuasca is part of a colonial and extractive trajectory, in Chapter 3, I showed how ayahuasca behaves unusually compared with some of the other plants extracted from the region. I argued that ayahuasca displays certain types of resistance to commodification based on its ecological, physiological, and social relationships. Although these relations do not prevent ayahuasca from becoming a commodity, they shape the trajectory of commodification. This case demonstrates how plant relationships and tendencies can influence the resulting economic networks, which can thereby be seen as representing an emergent plant agency. This chapter also showed how even though opportunities exist for Shipibo healers to advance economically within the ayahuasca network, most of the economic benefits accumulate in the Global North.

As Shipibo practices for relating with plants are translated into new cultural contexts, the meanings and values ascribed to these practices also shift, and thereby reconfigure shamanic power. For those raised with a Western conception of healing, healing tends to be understood as an individual process, and plants are seen as instrumental to human needs. In Chapter 4, I showed that even as Shipibo healing practices like ayahuasca ceremonies, shamanic singing, and plant dieting are learned by outsiders, their preconceptions about healing and plant agency serve to shift the balance of power as these relation-forming practices are performed. Thus, plants are de-animated, and healing is seen as an individual process aided by the chemical constituents of the plants. Meanwhile, although each of these practices also co-constitutes plant agency and is transformative for outsiders' conceptions of plants, the resulting agency of the plants is constricted, as plants tend to be construed as benevolent actors who are there to serve human needs. This is in contrast to the fear and respect with which the Shipibo people I interviewed discuss relating with plants.

In Chapter 5, I analyzed the different practices that researchers use to study plants, and ayahuasca more specifically. I showed that most academic knowledge-making practices are insufficient for considering plants as animate beings with their own knowledges. This has served to limit not only what may be known, but who is considered to be a valid knower. In particular, Indigenous ways of knowing have been excluded from producing what academics and researchers typically recognize as *knowledge*, and thus, plant spirits have been relegated to the category of *beliefs*. I argued that Indigenous ways of knowing serve to create different forms of knowledge that are not attainable through research-as-usual methods.

In Chapter 6, I detailed my foray into participatory research based on a project with community members in Paoyhan toward the construction of a community-run medicinal forest garden. I show that even the categories of *garden*, *project*, and *tree* need to be troubled when working across ontological divides. These equivocations can also be generative, and open new possibilities for collaborative and interspecies worldmaking practices. This is how my dissertation research has begun to provide an opening toward new types of research relationships that strive to be more ethical and responsible.

In this conclusion, I have suggested that an ethics of healing offers us an ethical stance for coming into such relations in a way that moves beyond the individual and into an animate ecology of selves. Healing is a way of moving into new types of relationships that are not based in oppression and objectification, a way of orienting oneself. I explored direct, unmediated, multi-

species relationships, achieved through ritual boundary-crossings as a form of resistance to hierarchies of objecthood, humanity, and animacy. Strengthening our connections within a multi-species ecology of selves, and becoming integrated into the life and death cycles of nature seem to be key in ensuring the future of our ecosystems, by way of binding our human fates more closely to the fate of the other-than-human earthlings.

7 | 3 CONCLUSION

Relationships that outsiders form in Shipibo communities, whether for research or healing purposes, must take into account the history of inequality and violence that has characterized the encounters between the Shipibo and outsiders since the time of colonization. Thus, when ayahuasca ceremonies and healing are seen as an entitlement in exchange for a small fee, this may be not essentially different from previous colonial relations in which Indigenous Amazonians brought medicinal plants from the forest to serve the colonizer's needs in exchange for weapons and other goods. However, because of ayahuasca's unique tendencies and relations—its continued reliance on ceremonial forms, its transformative relations with the human body, and its ecological habits that make it difficult to mass-produce—there is an opportunity for this socionatural commodity to forge new modes of being and relating between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples, between plants and humans, and between individuals and their ecology of relations.

As I have stated elsewhere, those from the Global North seeking healing from Amazonian plants and practices will likely find it. However, when healing is seen as pertaining only to the individual, and when shamanic or spiritual power is conflated with economic and social power, such healing will likely reinscribe the inequalities that lead people from the Global North to assume entitlement to the botanical and cultural resources of the Amazon. Thus, the Indigenous labor of performing healing and plant vitality will continue to be transferred toward outsiders while Indigenous communities continue to be plagued by health inequities in their own countries. These inequities have become evident during the current coronavirus pandemic, in which Indigenous communities globally have experienced the worst of the pandemic, between shelter in place orders that restrict livelihoods, and lack of basic sanitation and healthcare access. The Shipibo communities I have written about here have been struck hard by the pandemic, and many elders have died. An ethic of healing must be part of an ongoing relational praxis that works on many scales. Those who open themselves with humility to the plants may learn this themselves in their own way. The healing work is never over, and it pertains to each of us, should we choose to engage with such a transformation. However, I argue along with many others, that this is what the plants are asking of humanity in these times—to continue to work toward new modes of being that are more conducive to a flourishing of life, in all its forms.

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APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH METHODS

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Alianza Arkana is a grassroots nonprofit organization that served as my research host, particularly when I was living at their headquarters in Yarinacocha, a suburb outside of Pucallpa. This organization provided me with an international intellectual community, and an introduction to several Shipibo communities in the region. According to Alianza Arkana's website:

The word "Arkana" comes from the Quechua noun Jark'ana: a blocking object or force, and the verb Jark'akuy: to protect oneself. The Shipibo have adopted the word "Arkana" into their language to mean a "protective force." Together with "Alianza" in Spanish ('Alliance' in English), the name of the organization, "Alianza Arkana," expresses our vision of a protective alliance to defend and respect the extraordinary diversity, vitality and planetary importance of the Amazon by working in partnership with its indigenous peoples and other organizations¹⁵⁰.

Though Alianza Arkana has gone through several transformations, it remains almost entirely volunteer-run, and works primarily in Shipibo communities around the themes of regenerative solutions, intercultural education, women's empowerment, sustainable livelihoods, and language revitalization. It was Dr. Paul Roberts, co-founder of Alianza Arkana and an English ex-pat, who invited me to come to Peru in the first place in 2014. Paul conducted the first round of interviews with me, introducing me to the many healers that he knew in the greater Pucallpa area, and accompanying me on my first diet. Brian Best, an American ex-pat, and the other co-founder of Alianza Arkana, has also been a friend, confidant, and mentor in introducing me to Shipibo worlds and practices.

Part of my research approach was to engage in the activities of Alianza Arkana, and do what I could to assist in their programming, mentor volunteers, and contribute to their growth as an organization. This relationship helped me make connections that were important for my research, and I also grew Alianza Arkana's connections through the contacts I made beyond the organization. For example, when I received a foreign language area studies scholarship (FLAS) for the Shipibo language, I contacted Jeiser Suarez Maynas, a nurse and a Shipibo interpreter for the Peruvian Ministry of Culture, who connected me with *Profesor* Eli Sánchez, a Shipibo language specialist, Indigenous activist, and primary school teacher. At the time, in 2015, they both were involved with a Shipibo organization, AIDI (*Asociación Indígena para el Desarrollo Integral*), which focused on developing educational materials and medical support for Indigenous language speakers locally. Paul decided to join me in my summer of intensive language lessons with *Profesor* Eli, where I gained a basic understanding of the Shipibo language. Over time, *Profesor* Eli and Jeiser would deepen their connections with Alianza Arkana, and eventually form a new sister Shipibo organization, ARIAP (*Asociación Raíces Indígena Amazonicas Peruanas*, or Association of Indigenous Roots from the Peruvian Amazon), which now shares Alianza Arkana's office space and certain other resources. ARIAP was created as an organization for Shipibo people and led by Shipibo people, in contrast to Alianza Arkana, which had a more international team. Through its many iterations, Alianza Arkana now also has a completely Shipibo directory team, though it continues to be supported by international volunteers and donors.

¹⁵⁰ alianzaarkana.org/our-alliance, 2020

In 2017 I took on some of Paul's previous roles when he stepped down as director of Alianza Arkana, and I became the Research Coordinator. This presented me with many opportunities for collaboration. Researchers from around the world would contact me with the desire to work with Alianza Arkana, or in Shipibo communities, oftentimes driven by an interest in Shipibo healing practices and the use of ayahuasca. Through this role, I was able to form several ongoing research collaborations, and direct the energies and resources of some researchers toward community-based participatory research practices in support of and alongside the local committees such as the one that is managing the project *Farmacia Viva*.

When working on the *Farmacia Viva* project, I worked with another local NGO called OVIMA (*Organización para la Vida Indígena y el Medioambiente Amazonico* or Organization for Indigenous Life and the Amazonian Environment).¹⁵¹ I had met members of OVIMA through the forestry team that I worked with on another project, and it is through my connection with OVIMA that I was invited to co-lead a climate change workshop in Paoyhan in 2017, which would lead to much of the participatory work I undertook in the community before and after the workshop. The creation of a community-led medicinal forest preserve, now called *Farmacia Viva Shipibo Sanken Yaka (Farmacia Viva)*, grew from the initial conversations during the focus groups we conducted in preparation for the workshop. I continue to be involved with this project as *asesora* or advisor. Staff from OVIMA helped to administer the project in Paoyhan when I was absent, and provided capacity-building and forestry guidance for the *Farmacia Viva* committee. I had invited them to work on this project because they had experience leading forest projects in Shipibo communities, and the person I worked with, Manuel, was Shipibo himself.

FIELD SITES & FIELD METHODS

Over the course of five years (2015 – 2019), I spent a total of fourteen months in Peru, between one and five months at a time. During each visit, I kept a room in Yarinacocha, a suburb of Pucallpa, at the headquarters of Alianza Arkana. I formed relationships in urban Shipibo communities, located on the outskirts of Pucallpa, such as Bena Jema, Jhon Hocking, and Roberto Ruíz Vargas. I would also spend weeks at a time staying in rural Shipibo communities on the Ucayali River, located several hours by boat from Pucallpa itself. I spent the most time in Paoyhan, which is the most populous Shipibo community outside of the city, with around 1,700 residents. This number is seasonally-dependent, as many people have second homes in the communities surrounding Pucallpa, where they stay especially during the flooding season (December-March). Paoyhan is located downriver from Pucallpa, and is just over the Ucayali border in the Loreto region.¹⁵² I also spent time in Junin Pablo, a community located around 7 hours upriver from Pucallpa, on the Río Tamaya, a tributary of the Ucayali, and set on the shores of beautiful Lake Imiría. Junin Pablo is a large community, and though it is not quite as populous as Paoyhan, it is geographically larger, with wide streets and a more spread-out village structure. In addition, I conducted some research in Northern California, which has been my primary home for the last eight years when I have not been in Peru. Many people in Northern California are connected with

¹⁵¹ OVIMA is a pseudonym.

¹⁵² For ease of reference, throughout this dissertation I lump Paoyhan into what I am referring to as “Ucayali” and the “Ucayali region” because it lies in the Ucayali watershed just over the border and is highly connected with Pucallpa, as the closest city. Paoyhan is technically two communities: Paoyhan and Paococha, though they are located just adjacent to each other. Again, for ease of reference, I refer to these together as Paoyhan.

the same Shipibo villages and healers that I write about, and interviews in California provided greater understanding of how Shipibo practices circulate and how they are translated.

I conducted semi-structured life-history interviews with twenty-five Shipibo healers on the topic of the learning process, botanical knowledge, plant spirits, dieting, relationships with teacher plants, and environmental change¹⁵³. This series of interviews was designed to understand the changes in healing and learning practices that were happening generationally and throughout the lives of the healers, as well as changes due to tourism and urbanization. Five of these interviews were conducted in pairs—interviewing a mother and daughter, father and son, or teacher and apprentice at the same time. This helped with the translation between Spanish and Shipibo, as I conducted interviews in Spanish, and many elderly people are not fluent in Spanish; their younger family member was then able to serve as interpreter, while also providing an intergenerational perspective. A few of these healers I interviewed multiple times, as these interviews occurred during three different field visits. After the first round of interviews, which I conducted with Paul, I hired my god-sister, Edith Maynas Bardales, to serve as an interpreter between Spanish and Shipibo during the interviews.

In order to investigate details of the ayahuasca commodity network, I interviewed twelve people involved in ayahuasca production and/or export who were based in the Pucallpa area. These interviews pertained to how and where ayahuasca's constituent plants (caapi and chakruna) are acquired, monetary exchanges that occur, where plants are shipped to, and how they are transported and prepared to make ayahuasca. Many of these interviews included participant observation periods in which I observed and learned the practices of making the medicine. I also interviewed five people in or from the U.S. who import ayahuasca and/or conduct ceremonies in California. These focused on their relationships with the plants and the Shipibo healers they work with, as well as the economics and logistics of importing and holding ceremonies in the U.S., where ayahuasca is illegal.

In order to understand some of the political and historical background of the communities I was working in, I conducted seven interviews with village officials and elders about the forest history, history of land tenure, management and governance of forest/plant resources, history of extraction, and distribution of benefits in both Paoyhan and Junin Pablo. To supplement these accounts of regional forest history, I have used primary and secondary documents, including accounts of missionaries and explorers, a history book that was written by a local of Paoyhan, Hernando Inuma Macedo (2007), and government documents and reports.

If interviews provide the bones of my field data, ethnographic observations form the flesh. I have extensive ethnographic field notes from time spent at Alianza Arkana, in Pucallpa, at markets, in communities, in ceremonies, at the Center, and from meetings. These include meetings at Alianza Arkana, at the local university, community assembly meetings, meetings with the ayahuasca committee in Junin Pablo, meetings with other researchers, and meetings of the *Farmacia Viva* committee in Paoyhan. I conducted further ethnographic work at the World Ayahuasca Conference in Acre, Brazil in 2016, where I examined ways of knowing and the language with which presenters at the conference spoke about ayahuasca. Presenters included anthropologists, neuroscientists, lawyers, Indigenous healers, and other types of practitioners.

I further worked with and interviewed several members of a small U.S.-based start-up, Caapi Drops, who wanted to import to the U.S. a pure caapi extract that was sustainably sourced.

¹⁵³ Some of these interviews, as I mentioned earlier, were conducted in collaboration with Paul Roberts.

I followed and observed the process of them setting up their contract in the community of Junin Pablo, the beginning stages of their production, and their subsequent failure. As part of this project, I worked with Michael Coe, an ethnobotany PhD student at the University of Hawaii at the time, who had contacted me through Alianza Arkana. We collaborated on an ecological study in a conservation area near Junin Pablo, to investigate the population demography of wild caapi vines. This study was intended to inform Junin Pablo's management plan for harvesting vines for Caapi Drops, and would give them an idea of sustainable harvest rates. Caapi Drops was going to fund this management plan, and therefore our study. We tagged and located over 200 caapi vines of various ages and life stages, and have collected two years of demographic data (one year after the baseline measurements) on the diameter, height, companion tree species, flowering rates, GPS location, and harvest pressure. This would allow us to determine growth rates, reproduction, most vulnerable life stage, and approximate sustainable harvest rates. This yearly data collection occurred over 1-2 week periods of intense field work in the forest, coming back to Junin Pablo to sleep each night. I used my background (Master's of Science) in plant ecology to help Michael design, adapt, and implement the study, while also making ethnographic observations of the process of collecting scientific data and creating scientific knowledge about these plants.

Michael Coe and I also conducted ethnobotanical interviews with thirty Shipibo community members in Paoyhan about their uses of medicinal plants. We later did a follow-up focus group on the subject. These included how the plants are prepared, managed, cultivated, and harvested. In this series of interviews we wanted to understand the most important plants that are used by community members, and the range of uses for each plant, including during pregnancy and childbirth, for wound care, for spiritual or shamanic purposes, and for *artesanía* (crafts)—usually as dyes or paints. Thus, we interviewed not only healers (*onanya*), but herbalists (*raomis*), nurses, midwives, mothers, fathers, farmers, craftspeople, harvesters, and loggers. We found that even people who claimed they had no special knowledge of plants were still able to talk to us for over an hour in great detail about the plants that they commonly use.

I conducted four days of focus groups and workshops in Paoyhan using participatory research methods, regarding the topic of environmental issues, climate change, and sustainable livelihoods. In these focus groups we identified the social and environmental issues that were most important for the thirty or so community members who attended. As I mentioned, the outcome of these focus groups and workshops was the formation of *Farmacia Viva Shipibo Sanken Yaka* (*Farmacia Viva*), a community-run medicinal forest preserve and garden, directed by a community committee. I have accompanied this process through its formation as a facilitator and advisor, and sometimes fundraiser, while following the committee's lead. I attended many meetings during this process, with several permutations of participants, including Paoyhan's authorities, the committee in charge of *Farmacia Viva*, the research team I coordinated, and members of OVIMA who also assisted in the facilitation of this project for a period of time (more on this in Chapter 6). Under the direction of Manuel, a Shipibo forestry expert, and now the president of OVIMA, the committee members, with the help of Michael Coe, myself, and several volunteers, inventoried and labeled over 300 medicinal plants growing in two hectares of the garden site. This work has been funded entirely by donations, including from foreign dieters that visit Paoyhan. The accomplishments of the project so far must be attributed first and foremost to the Shipibo committee in charge of the project, but also to the efforts of members of OVIMA and the team of researchers that I have been coordinating, including Hawkins Lewis, Melaina Dyck, and Rebecca Buell.

During the time that I conducted fieldwork in Ucayali, I “dietet” four different master plants (*chiric sanango*, *bobinzana*, *machinga*, and *noya rao*) for a total of around 145 days of diet, and participated in over one hundred ayahuasca ceremonies. I see these diets and ceremonies as interviews with the plants themselves, and the way by which I engage in trans-species communication. I sometimes refer to this as my “plant education.” These encounters with plants have helped guide my research profoundly. Most of these diets took place in Paoyhan, under the care, protection, and tutelage of Papa Meni, though I also dieted several times with Yoshan, Papa Meni’s niece, during my stays in Yarinacocha. I also did a twelve day retreat at a foreign-run ayahuasca center in Iquitos, which I refer to as *the Center*, and a few short visits to another ayahuasca center in Iquitos. Attending ceremonies and staying at various types of diet centers has also allowed me to observe and come to know perhaps hundreds of foreign (Western) dieters and ayahuasca tourists.

APPENDIX 2: DECLARACIÓN DE YARINACOCHA

*Declaration of Yarinacocha*¹⁵⁴

January 19, 2019

We, the undersigned Shipibo-Conibo and Kichwa indigenous peoples' communities and their representative organizations: the Federation of Ucayali native communities and tributaries (FECONAU), the Ethnic Council of the Kichwa peoples of the Amazon (CEPKA), the Federation of the Kichwa peoples of Bajo Huallaga de San Martín (FEPIKBHSAM) and the Coordination of Development and Defense of the indigenous peoples of San Martín (CODEPISAM) of the Ucayali and San Martín regions, who gathered in Pucallpa to assess the situation of our territories and indigenous defenders with respect to the dispossession, violence and deforestation allowed or endorsed by state entities, affirm the following:

1. **We suffer** the serious impacts and damages of the biased gaze of the entities of the Peruvian State who see our territories as a simple spoil of natural resources put at their service to exploit or declare untouchable. As a result of them, we live cornered by invasions of our territories by settlers, drug traffickers, loggers, fishermen, miners and recently by agro-industrial companies of oil palm, papaya, cacao and rice. These activities turn our rivers and lakes into drains, our forests into deserts and our leaders into targets of threats and criminalization that puts their lives at risk simply by defending our forests. On the other hand, much of the forests and ecosystems that we have nurtured and cared for over generations have been converted into natural protected areas where they treat us as intruders for the simple deed of wanting to access the forest to feed our families, build our houses and sustain our identities. For us, the forest is not a natural resource to exploit, it is life.
2. **We remember** that despite titling initiatives in the Peruvian Amazon since the 1970s, the vast majority of our ancestral territories still do not have any recognition or title of state property, which exposes them to the risk of being handed over to third parties in the form of proof of possession, individual titles, forest or agro-industrial concessions and even protected natural areas.
3. **We reaffirm** that the State, especially through MINAGRI¹⁵⁵ and the agrarian directorates of regional governments, are the main engines of the grabbing of our territories and the associated conflicts. This is due to corruption related to land trafficking, and the lack of adequate and effective mechanisms for the legal recognition and titling of our territories.
4. **We regret** that despite the existence of millionaire funds to address the issue of titling, these funds are dedicated to implementing current titling procedures without due recognition of our rights as indigenous peoples. This includes the exclusion of ownership of areas of the ancestral territory classified by the State as 'forest' under the modality of 'cessation of use'. In addition, current procedures define our territorial limits arbitrarily without respect for our occupation and ancestral possession as required by the standards regarding the rights of indigenous

¹⁵⁴ Document translated from Spanish by the author.

¹⁵⁵ The Ministry of Agriculture.

peoples ratified by the Peruvian State. Furthermore, many of these funds and titling projects are paralyzed by the simple [sentence is cut off]

5. **We deplore** the ineffectiveness of the administrative and judicial system to protect our rights and resolve our complaints. There are a set of barriers in access to justice, such as linguistic, geographical, economic and cultural that to date have not been overcome with any reform. The judicial processes are slow, cumbersome, costly and inaccessible to communities without lawyers or money to facilitate investigations in penal and environmental matters as well as expediting demands for the protection of our rights. This leads to impunity for the companies and associations responsible for deforestation and invasions and maintains the high level of conflict and violence that afflicts us.
6. **We hold responsible** government entities, above all the Ministry of Agriculture and the agrarian directorates of regional governments, for generating land conflicts and not solving them. This omission of obligations in turn exposes our leaders to a climate of harassment and violence where they are being kidnapped, threatened with death, shot and even killed. This context is aggravated because there is no political will, logistical capacity or specific mechanisms of the police to guarantee the physical security of our human rights defenders who are persecuted and criminalized for the cynical use of the law by the State itself or agents involved. In this way we are forced to exhaust the few resources and time we have to defend ourselves against accusations that often have no basis.
7. We reaffirm our right to self-determination as indigenous peoples, which includes the right to decide how we want to live and organize. Thus, we denounce the efforts of different regional and local institutions and authorities to promote and pressure communities to accept figures of recognition such as in hamlets (caseríos), population centers (centros poblados) and even individual farms instead of recognizing our right to organize ourselves collectively. We reiterate that the identification of an indigenous people or community as well as the definition of our territory depends on self-identification and should not depend solely on a registry or database of the Peruvian government.

Faced with this problem, we call on the regional and national authorities to respect our rights as indigenous peoples and implement the following emergency measures:

1. MINAGRI and MINCU must design and coordinate the implementation of immediate mechanisms to safeguard untitled indigenous territories, starting with a registry of pending territorial claims in coordination with indigenous organizations. This is to prevent their classification as private lands, possession certificates, state conservation areas, forest or agro-business concessions.
2. MINAGRI, in its capacity as the governing body in community titling processes, must develop and approve guidelines, mechanisms and the corresponding budget for the resolution of disputes that arise in the titling processes and address as a priority the pending cases of titling that are associated with high levels of socio-environmental conflict.
3. Develop institutional, administrative, and judicial mechanisms to effect the restitution of ancestral indigenous territories that were handed over to third parties irregularly and to nullify established rights in those territories.
4. Develop an urgent action plan at a multi-sectoral level to address the problem of illicit coca planting and production in indigenous territories.
5. Comply with its legal obligations and international climate commitments by reforming the norms and public policies that threaten our collective rights, prioritizing the reform of

cumbersome and discriminatory titling procedures and the mode of assignment used to recognize property rights on forest lands and in natural protected areas.

6. Support and publicly value our territorial defense and protection initiatives, including monitoring and surveillance of our communities and rounds. The MINJUS¹⁵⁶ must dedicate public resources to promote the physical security and legal defense of the threatened and criminalized leaders through a decentralized and specialized legal program for indigenous peoples, human rights and land defenders.
7. The Congress of the Republic, the Judiciary and the Public Ministry must prioritize the reform of the existing judicial systems, including the environmental prosecutors of the regions to ensure that they have the necessary resources and personnel to carry out the investigations and have an intercultural approach to consider indigenous peoples and not only the State as aggrieved for environmental crimes committed in their territories. This will allow our participation in criminal proceedings and thus streamline the processes of measuring the social and cultural impacts of environmental crimes. Likewise, respect the procedural guarantees that indigenous peoples have when they are prosecuted by ordinary justice, such as interpreters, anthropological expertise, the right to defense and the obligation to prefer alternative penalties to those deprived of liberty.

Until the measures mentioned above are taken, the regional governments of San Martín and Ucayali, the Ministry of Energy and Mines, provincial and district municipalities, justices of the peace and political authorities, as lieutenant governors, must declare a moratorium at the level of our two regions in the granting of proof of possession, private properties, issuance of concessions or easements and the reclassification of lands suitable for forestry or protection for agricultural purposes, while these measures described above are not implemented.

[Signed by 27 people]

¹⁵⁶ Ministry of Justice.

APPENDIX 3: DECLARACIÓN DE IMIRÍA

*Declaration of Imiria*¹⁵⁷

Junin Pablo, August 30, 2012

The Shipibo--Conibo people and local communities of Lakes Imiria, Chauya and the river Tamaya in the District of Masisea who came together in the 'First meeting of Indigenous leaders of Masisea' convened by the Organization of indigenous peoples of the District of Masisea (ORDIM) and the 'Indigenous and local community committee for the defense of Lakes Imiria, Chauya and river Tamaya' in order to address the problem of the Regional Conservation Area of Imiria (ACR-Imiria) in the meeting hall of the village of Junin Pablo from the 29-30th August 2012.

We Indigenous and local communities alongside the indigenous organizations of ORDIM, ORAU and AIDSESP and the municipality of Masisea have signed this declaration after having analyzed the ACR and the policies and projects of the Regional Government of Ucayali (GOREU) and having discussed it in working groups. We wish to communicate the following conclusions to the Regional Government of Ucayali, the National System of Protected Areas. (SERNANP) our communities, national and regional authorities and those national and international institutions involved in the management of Protected Areas and the defense of indigenous peoples' rights.

1. **We reject and do not recognize** the supposed process of consultation that resulted in documents signed by members of our communities supposedly approving the creation of the ACR-Imiria which was described in the official 'Technical report for the Establishment of the regional conservation area of Imiria. Although there were meetings and workshops with some of the communities and their authorities these were only informative in nature and at no time have the indigenous peoples of this area given their consent to the creation of the ACR. A genuine process of consultation based on our right to Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC - as recognized in various international norms including ILO 169 and the decisions and jurisprudence of the Inter American human Rights System) would first consist in a profound analysis of an ACR including its costs and benefits and the alternatives for our people. Only later would we proceed to take a decision, a process that would be based on our own internal regulations and traditional means for decision-making.
2. **We are alarmed to note** that the ACR overlaps 7 indigenous communities whose land titles are inscribed in the National Registry (Junin Pablo, Caimito, Nuevo Egipto, Nueva Yarina, Buenos Aires, Nuevo Loreto and Puerto Purin) as well as 12 local communities some of which were previously recognized through local Resolutions and others whose recognition remains pending but who have been occupying the land for many years (Doce de Mayo, Bella Flor, Perla de Imiria, Nueva Generación, Santa Rosa de Chauya, Unión Vecinal, Santa Clara, Pacifico, 23 de Diciembre, Flor de Imiria, Puerto Alegre and Vinoncuro). We consider that this constitutes a

¹⁵⁷ Document translated by forestpeoples.org with minor revisions by the author.

violation of the property rights of indigenous peoples and Peruvian citizens. Furthermore, our land titles only represent a small portion of our traditional territory which is also included within the ACR and therefore affects our fundamental rights as indigenous peoples that recognize the inviolability of our traditional territories. While the Supreme Decree (006-2010-MINAM) that established the ACR indicates that it 'respects any prior rights that have been established' we note that this only contemplates recognition of our titled lands but not our traditional territories.

3. **We express our grave concern** that the ACR-Imiria will be managed and controlled by the Regional Government of Ucayali (GOREU) with only the participation of the 'benefiting populations'. We indigenous peoples' are rights holders and not just a 'population' with only rights to participation. We are the traditional owners of this area and it is unacceptable that the GOREU should assume exclusive management of this area without recognizing our rights as indigenous peoples nor the role that our indigenous organizations play in defending our rights. We make this point in the light of our experience to date with the various projects implemented by the GOREU in the Lake Imiria area which amongst them include projects for the production of Paiche, cacao and camu camu as well as for reforestation. These projects have not benefited us indigenous peoples despite their stated objectives and we denounce the fact that we are still awaiting an auditing process that clarifies the use of funds for these projects that we note always provide most benefit to those who are implementing the Project but first of all to us indigenous peoples and local communities.
4. **We express our grave concern** that the creation of the ACR may result in restrictions of our use of, and access to, our territories given the experience of other ACR in Peru (E.g. ACR-Sierra Escalera- San Martin) where charges are being pressed against community members for the legitimate use of their forests. We note for example that the Text of DS-006-2010 indicates that 'the direct use of renewable resources are only permitted with management plans or specific plans' which could be interpreted to control our subsistence activities. Since time immemorial we have organized the protection of our lakes based on our traditional knowledge as indigenous peoples. More recently and since the start of the 1990s we confronted the commercial fishing industry which has resulted in the recovery of fish stocks. For this reason we consider ourselves to be the original protectors of this area and therefore key actors in any conservation initiative. For this reason we demand that our contribution must be recognized and supported instead of being treated as potential threats.
5. **We highlight that** the Technical Report for the creation of the ACR suffers from key legal and technical deficiencies which include amongst them; the failure to recognize the right of Indigenous peoples to our territories and to Free Prior and Informed consent with which the Peruvian state must comply given its international obligations, the failure to recognize our traditional knowledge of biodiversity as a principal element in any conservation project, the failure to include indigenous peoples or local communities in the Management committee for the ACR which includes 6 representatives of the State and only one from our regional federation, ORAU resulting in disproportionate advantage for the State in any decision making process, the failure to analyze any alternatives to the ACR which must be an essential component of any cost-benefit analysis that is recommending the dispersal of public funds.
6. **We challenge** the process that has resulted in the conversion of the Imiria Communal Reserve (created with Regional Directive No 610 on Nov. 30, 1991) to an ACR and the reduction of its extension of 218,000 ha to 135,737,520 ha despite the fact that at no point in the Technical Report nor in the SD 006--2010 do they justify this modification in status or size.

We agree and resolve that:

1. The implementation plan for DS 006-2010 including the Master plan for the ACR-Imiria must be suspended until our right to our territories and to Free, prior and informed consent are respected.
2. We demand that GOREU facilitate a new process of genuine consultation. This process must be designed and implemented by our own organizations and communities in our own language and according to our own customs and traditional decision making processes. The decisions that emerge from this process must be respected by the Regional Government of Ucayali.
3. GOREU must provide documents presented in public forums to our communities and organizations that justify the conversion of a Communal Reserve (RD 610 of 30th November 1991) to the ACR-Imiria.
4. GOREU must proceed with the process of resolving pending territorial issues (recognition, demarcation and titling) in the area earmarked for the ACR. This process must include the due recognition of the traditional territories of indigenous peoples as well as of those local communities who still await their recognition.
5. GOREU must organize a public meeting in order to present all information regarding the budgets spent on, and results of, the multiple projects implemented by GOREU and various NGOs in the area of Lakes Imiria, Chauya and the Tamaya River. This process must be directed towards the native communities and local communities in the District of Masisea and involved in the ACR as well as to the Imiria defense committee, ORDIM, ORAU and AIDSESEP; the Municipality of Masisea, SERNANP and the human rights ombudsman must be invited as observers. This audit must be carried out within 60 days and must also include the submission of a report to the communities written in accessible language and must be considered as a prior step before initiating the new consultation process, This process must at a minimum include the following projects:
 - a. The Paiche Project
 - b. The Paiche Preservation project
 - c. The BloCan project
6. A comprehensive process must be initiated by SERNANP in coordination with ORDIM, the Imiria defense committee, ORAU and AIDSESEP to investigate the supposed consultation process that resulted in documents signed by community authorities approving the creation of the ACR-Imiria. This process must be conducted in the shortest possible time frame and must be considered as a prior requirement before initiating a new consultation process.

APPENDIX 4: OPEN LETTER FROM THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF ACRE, BRAZIL

Open Letter From the Indigenous People of Acre, Brazil¹⁵⁸

Nixi Pae, Huni Pae, Uni Pae, Kamarãbi, Kamalanbi, Shuri, Yajé, Kaapi...¹⁵⁹

II World Ayahuasca Conference

Rio Branco, 22nd October 2016

We, the undersigned, present at this conference, belong to the Yawanawa, Shanenawa, Jaminawa, Huni kuĩ, Apurinã, Manchinery, Katukina, Nukini, Puyanawa, Ashaninka, Madja, Jamamadi, Nawa, Shawãdawa, Apolima-Arara, Jaminawa-Arara and Kuntawa indigenous communities, in the State of Acre and South of Amazonia since our ancestors, are 17 indigenous communities from 36 indigenous lands recognized by the federal government, speakers of the languages Pano, Aruak and Arawa, totally an estimated population of 23,000 indigenous people, distributed across approximately 230 villages. It is worth remembering that these lands are located in 11 of the 22 municipalities in Acre.

THE II WORLD AYAHUASCA CONFERENCE was held in the city of Rio Branco, Acre from 17th – 21st October 2016, the main objective of which was: “to promote a space for dialogue, sharing and learning, synergy and collaboration, while respecting the cultural diversity of the traditions of Ayahuasca.”

However, we realize from the presentation of the first table, made up of indigenous representatives, that the “dialogue, sharing and learning, synergy and collaboration” that is the main objective of this conference, would not take place between indigenous and plenary debaters, given the short amount of time available for this purpose, envisioned by the organizers.

Thus, we express our point of view with the following questions:

1. Even though this event has a large number of indigenous participants, we are not feeling included in its creation and organization.
2. Through of a largely indigenous dialogue, we the participants of this conference will not make any decision relating to the matters raised during this event, especially those of a more relevant nature, such as cultural heritage records, without first:
 - a. Promoting the holding of indigenous meetings in which all those with knowledge of the plants (cipó and folha) are present, with whom the sacred drink known as Ayahuasca is prepared, in the presence of the institutions, those responsible and those involved in the discussions over cultural heritage, with the aim of discussing the subject in more depth, because during their fragmented approach at the conference, it was not clear for indigenous communities exactly what this means.

¹⁵⁸ Translated document obtained from <http://bialabate.net>.

¹⁵⁹ Words for *ayahuasca* in several indigenous languages.

- b. Create a Technical Group (TG) to be coordinated and guided by the indigenous communities to carry out consultations regarding those knowledgeable about Ayahuasca and Decree no. 051 of 19th April 2004, which states that Brazil must respect Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization – ILO, and consult the indigenous communities before the works (prior) so that these communities can choose to be consulted (free) and still have to take all the information that exists on the venture (informed).
- c. Form a board of ethics to discuss the subject of the origin and define criteria for the use and cultural heritage of Ayahuasca, and from this perspective and understanding, hold meetings with churches and other sects that use this sacred drink. In this way, we can present our position on the issues on the agenda.
- d. We require a guarantee of participation of indigenous peoples in other Brazilian states that use the sacred drink in the discussion about cultural heritage;
- e. We also require the right to participate in and plan future World Ayahuasca Conferences;
- f. Finally, we require that the World Ayahuasca Conferences and the public and private institutions, discussing the subject should recognize the traditions for the use, healing and preparation by the spiritual leaders of the indigenous communities.

Finally, we would like to reaffirm that we are willing to build a common future with respect to the diversity of use of the indigenous peoples and to collaborate in all the processes for the progress of discussions for the use and the right to the consecration of the drink for all mankind.

In this sense, we would like to thank the effort of ICEERS, UFAC, the indigenous communities and organizations regarding the organization of the II World Ayahuasca Conference to integrate and unite all the players in the Ayahuasca universe.

Haux, Haux!