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LEARNING ANIMACY THROUGH EMBODYING OTHERS: PLANT DIETS IN THE
PERUVIAN AMAZON

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Abstract

A hallucinogenic brew called ayahuasca has increasingly played a role in drawing people from around the world to the Peruvian Amazon. They come seeking healing and spiritual encounters. As ayahuasca tourism has grown, it has exceeded its designation as mere tourism. Some of the foreigners (mostly Westerners) who come to the jungle for ayahuasca engage in long-term shamanic training with local people, most frequently with indigenous Shipibo healers. The interest in psychedelic substances has extended to an interest in non-psychoactive Amazonian plants and other Shipibo shamanic practices. Plant diets, in which a would-be-healer practices various forms of abstinence to gain knowledge from a teacher plant, have become increasingly popular. Although previous studies have investigated plant diets among indigenous and mestizo ayahuasca practitioners, studies examining Westerners engaged in shamanistic training have overlooked the crucial role of plant diets.

Based on ethnographic research at a shamanic training center where a Shipibo man teaches foreigners how to be healers, this dissertation describes how students learn and experience plant diets. While it is firmly grounded within the ayahuasca world, ayahuasca is not the central focus; diets are - mirroring the importance of diets for Shipibo and foreign practitioners alike. Centered on a two-month shamanic training course, the study examines how foreigners translate and understand Shipibo concepts of healing and spirits, as taught by a Shipibo healer. It also explores the relationships the dieters have with the plants and the kinds of bodies and selves they create through the diet. For my interlocutors, plant diets are a process of merging permanently with a plant spirit. They talk about themselves as plant-human hybrids, describing the diets as saplings growing inside their bodies. The relationships they develop with

the plants, the place, and the people are both intimate and durable; many dieters return every year to diet, and some even stay to work full-time as facilitators on the course.

I argue that dieters cultivate an ability to perceive an animate and agentic plant world, through the experience and mastery of embodying Others. They learn how to listen to plants, share bodies with them, and actively manage porous self boundaries. Dieters develop various skills through the diet - attunement, discipline, reciprocity, and discernment - that allow them to interact with plant spirits, following the norms and values promoted by Shipibo and Western practitioners. I also propose that what the dieters learn supports an alternative ontological stance to Otherness compared with dualistic or monistic stances which reify or erase difference. The ayahuasca community in general and my site in particular offer a potent contact zone at the juncture of Otherhood (self/other, whiteness/indigeneity, humans/nature), laden with histories of pain and healing. Fundamentally, this project is about how people understand Others and the work they do to manage difference in the pursuit of healing.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters which loosely reflect stages of the developing relationship between a dieter and the diet plant: 1) Calling, 2) Meeting, 3) Merging, 4) Negotiating, and 5) Integrating. Calling introduces the site and the spiritual context that drives the dieters to the site. Meeting recounts histories of encounters in the Amazon. Merging explains the diet practices and the kinds of hybrid bodies dieters create. Negotiating investigates the conflicts that arise among humans and between humans and non-humans as they attempt to navigate hybridity. Integrating is about the lessons learned and how they move across cultural and geographic boundaries.

Glossary

Agua de Florida: A perfume used to repel bad spirits and attract good spirits.

Ayahuasca: Hallucinogenic brew from the Amazon, the focus of psychedelic tourism in Peru.

Visitors seeking healing and spirituality participate in nighttime ceremonies led typically by indigenous and mestizo healers. Often gendered as a feminine spirit.

Ayahuasca Foundation (AF): The AF is owned by an American, Carlos Tanner, who lives in Peru and has worked with ayahuasca and Shipibo healers for decades. He is a well-known figure in the ayahuasca community. The AF has its own center where they host healing retreats and research. However, the shamanic course at Inkan Kena is a unique arrangement/partnership between Don Enrique and the AF such that the AF organizes the course but Don Enrique runs the center, the ceremonies, and teaches his own classes.

Bobinsana: A diet plant at Inkan Kena, known as a feminine spirit good for helping with creativity, singing, and maintaining strong but kind boundaries. Also referred to by the Shipibo name Semein.

Ceremony: Used to refer to ayahuasca ceremonies.

Chiric Sanango: Sometimes shortened to Chiric. A diet plant at Inkan Kena known for being a challenging diet plant because of his strong effects on the nervous system and his demanding spirit, typically understood as masculine. Also referred to by the Shipibo name Moka Pari.

Chulla Chaqui: A diet plant at Inkan Kena, also well known as a trickster spirit throughout Peru. Typically regarded as masculine, he is a guardian of the forest, known for appearing human-like with one foot or one backward foot. He often lures people into the forest, so they get lost. Sometimes called by a nickname, Chewy.

Curandero(a): Healer, other terms used include shaman, onanya, ayahuasquero(a), maestro(a).

Diet, dieta, or sama: Ritual process to empty body, mind, and soul to make space for a plant spirit (often nonpsychoactive) to enter and thereby impart lessons, healing, and gifts to the dieter. The main diet plants at Inkan Kena are Noya Rao, Bobinsana, Chulla Chaqui, Marosa, and Chiric Sanango. The word diet may refer to the process or the product of the process, especially when used with a possessive (e.g., “my diets are strong”). Relatedly, dieters refer to “my diet” in reference to their specific diet consciousness (e.g., “my diet said...”). This seems parallel to the Shipibo use of the term sama.

Don Enrique: Shipibo healer and owner of Inkan Kena, also referred to by his apprentices as maestro.

Facilitators: They run the course, teach many of the classes using material provided by the AF that has been created and curated by the facilitators over time, translate for Don Enrique, assist Don Enrique in ceremonies, and serve as the constant guides and assistants for participants in and out of ceremony. They are from various countries, including Denmark, New Zealand, Scotland, France, Canada, the U.S., and South Africa.

Ikaro: Healing songs sung in ayahuasca ceremonies and taught in the course, ideally freestyled in Shipibo and channeled by diet plants.

Inkan Kena: My main field site, in the Peruvian Amazon near Iquitos, run by Don Enrique, host of the shamanic ayahuasca healer training course that is the focus of my research. Participants in the course tend to be from Europe or the U.S. However, I have met others from Peru (Andes), the Philippines, the Middle East, and the Caribbean (although they tend to have some connection to the U.S. or Europe such as having lived or studied there).

Maloka: An Amazonian longhouse used for ayahuasca ceremonies, typically round with a palm thatch roof, elevated from the ground with wooden plank floors, and partially enclosed with entire or half walls open to the jungle, save for mosquito netting.

Mapacho: Local tobacco.

Mareación: Used to refer to the effects of ayahuasca or the state of being affected by ayahuasca.

Marosa: A diet plant at Inkan Kena known for healing and teaching dieters how to heal, she is also known for opening up sensitivity.

Medicine: Used broadly to refer to all substances taken for healing purposes, and specifically to refer to ayahuasca.

Noya Rao: The main plant diet at Inkan Kena, a transcendental tree that is known by many Shipibo and foreign dieters as God in plant form. Most commonly referred to as she/her although sometimes non-gendered, she is known to help with relationships but also has the capacity to teach anything, including flight.

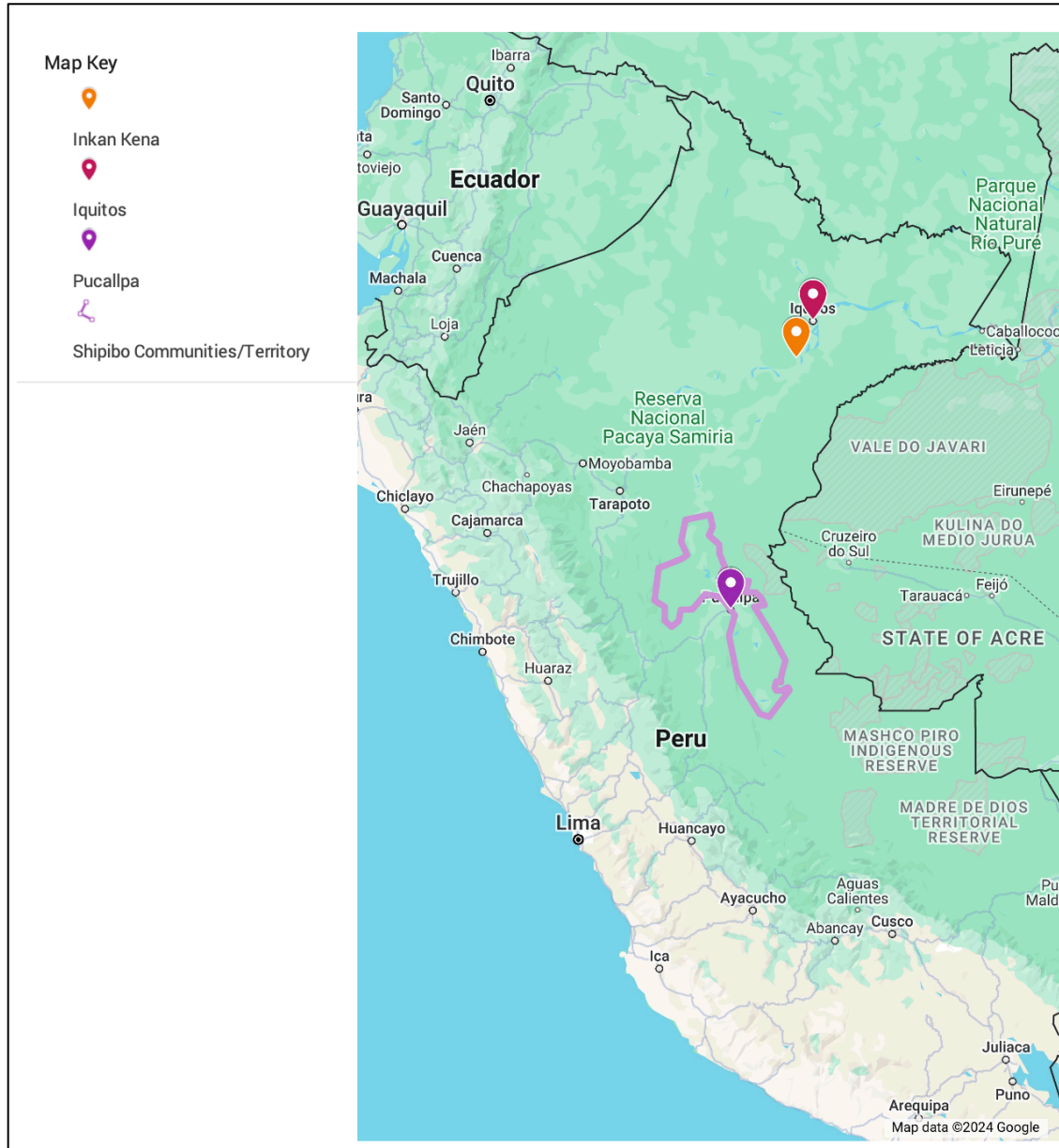
Palo Santo: A sacred wood burned as incense for spiritual cleansing and protection.

Pasajero: Ayahuasca tourist/visitor.

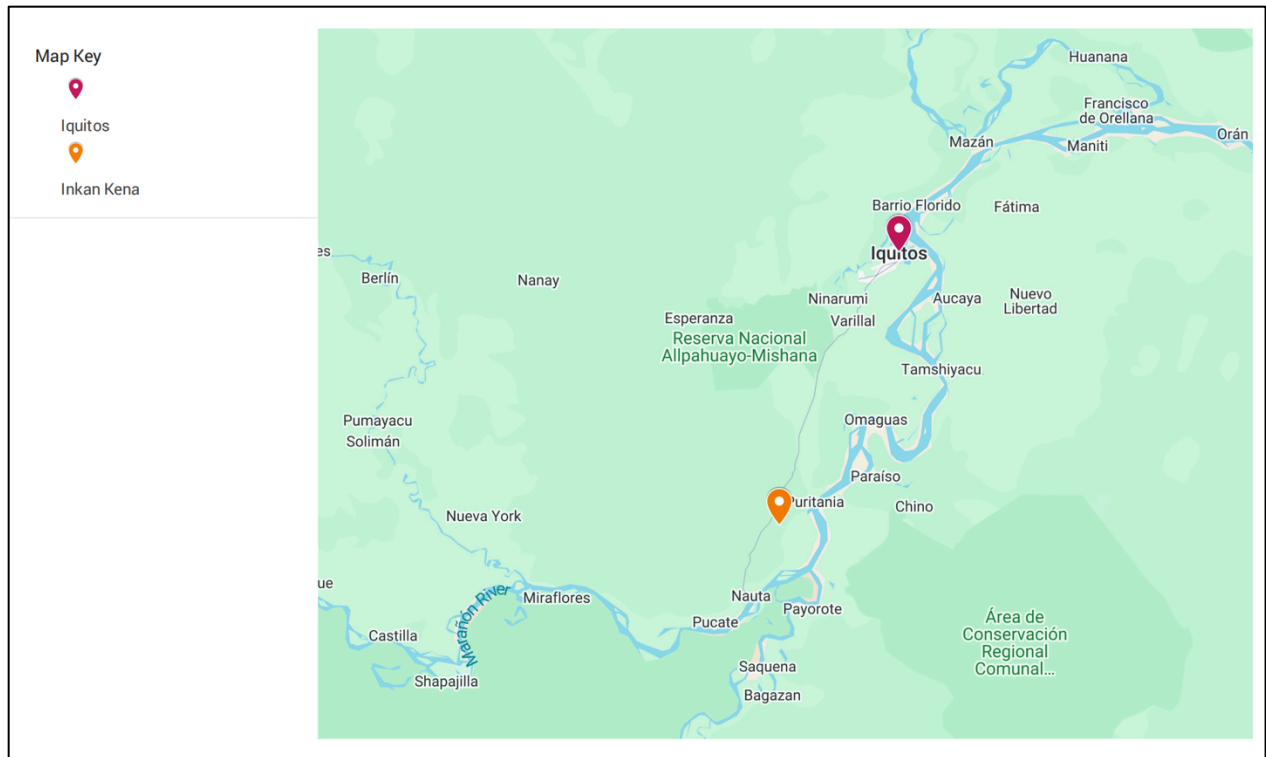
Soplay: A practice of blowing smoke or Agua de Florida over the body in order to cleanse or protect.

Tambo: Used to refer to the huts used for student housing at Inkan Kena.

Maps



Map 1: Map of Peru – Showing the locations of Inkan Kena (the main field site), Iquitos, Pucallpa, and an approximation I have drawn of the boundaries of Shipibo territory based on a map provided by the Shipibo community governance (Google 2024; Payaba Pacaya 2019).



Map 2: Road to Nauta – A closer look at Iquitos and Inkan Kena, located along the road from Iquitos to Nauta where many of Peru’s ayahuasca centers are located (Google 2024).

Introduction

“Don Enrique says that if you don’t smoke the *mapacho*, it will smoke you.” It was my second day at a shamanic training course in the Peruvian Amazon and a Canadian facilitator, Adam, was explaining a teaching of Don Enrique, an indigenous Shipibo¹ healer. He was showing us how to blow *mapacho* (‘tobacco’) smoke on our bodies to protect ourselves from bad entities while in ayahuasca ceremonies. Adam continued: “Mapacho’s goal is to go to the spirit world. It does that by being smoked. So it achieves its objective when you smoke it. It uses you. Many people who misuse tobacco are being used by tobacco.” For Adam and Enrique, mapacho has an intention, an agentic and animate quality, whether humans recognize it or not. The purpose of the course was to teach us how to recognize, respond to, and interact with that animacy for the benefit of ourselves and others.

Animism is “one of anthropology’s earliest concepts, if not the first” (Bird-David 1999: 67). In 1871, anthropologist Edward Tylor, exemplifying anthropology’s history of problematic and racist ethnocentrism, defined animism as a childish mistaken belief among “primitives” that inanimate objects have spirits. For most of the 19th and 20th centuries, Western theory largely relegated animism to irrational primitivism. However, animism has lost its stigma over time; it was famously reassessed and revalorized in Nurit Bird-David’s (1999) examination of Irving Hallowell’s (1960) ethnography of the Ojibwe. In recent decades, animism has had a moment with the so-called ontological turn in anthropology (Kohn 2015). Western thinkers (Bennett

¹ Chapter 2, the historically focused chapter, will provide further background on the Shipibo people. The official denomination for the Shipibo people is Shipibo-Konibo. This reflects the composite nature of the community which historically was comprised of separate groups – Shipibo and Konibo. In fact, there is even a third group of people, the Xetebo, who are sometimes included, making the proper name of the entire community the Shipibo-Konibo-Xetebo. In my experience, even though Shipibo people talk about the differences between each sub-group, they often use the word Shipibo alone to refer to themselves, their practices, and their communities. Shipibo are the majority group. Similarly, many people at ayahuasca centers use simply “Shipibo.” In this dissertation, I too use just Shipibo, reflecting the lived usage and the utility of shortening it.

2010; Kohn 2013; Latour 1993) have posited various theories for conceptualizing an animate world that recognizes agency beyond the human. But how do people learn to experience the world as animate? How do they learn to respond to the animate world?

Mirroring the shifting Western academic opinion of animistic indigenous beliefs, non-academic Westerners, too, have turned to indigenous people to learn to reformulate their relationship with the natural, animate world. The phenomenon of ayahuasca tourism in the Peruvian Amazon is part of a broader trend, which can be traced to the 1960s, of growing Western disenchantment with dualistic, rational modernity and a parallel idealization of indigenous animistic beliefs and practices. Some of the interactions between Westerners and indigenous people within the world of ayahuasca tourism have led to interesting cross-cultural communities and practices, such as the adoption by foreigners of Shipibo shamanic practices beyond the use of ayahuasca. Shipibo healers are generally respected by Westerners as the ayahuasca experts. Although that reputation is often accompanied by claims of an unbroken historic tradition, the Shipibo² most likely do not have the longest ayahuasca tradition of any indigenous group. Instead, they likely began to adopt it around the turn of the 20th century (Gow 1994; Brabec de Mori 2011). However, that has not diminished their prowess and magnetism in attracting foreign adherents.

As ayahuasca tourism in the Peruvian Amazon has grown, so too has an interest in non-psychoactive plant diets, a cornerstone of Shipibo shamanic apprenticeship. Plant diets are ritual

² Note that I use Shipibo as both a noun (singular and plural) and an adjective throughout this dissertation, again to reflect flexible lived usages and utility. The word Shipibo circulates in different ways in Shipibo, Spanish, and English. In the Shipibo language, Shipibo is a plural noun (-bo is a plural suffix) and a specific grammatical form at that (typically for subjects of intransitive verbs), but I find it is rarely used when speaking Shipibo (speakers are more likely to say something along the lines of “our language” *non joi* or “our people” *non jonibo*). In its adaptation to Spanish, it becomes an adjective and a singular noun, but it is used in flexible and varied ways (e.g., both los Shipibo and los Shipibos, both la cultura Shipiba and la cultura Shipibo, both las Shipibas y las mujeres Shipibos, etc.).

processes to connect with, channel, and learn from teacher plants, with the intention of healing or learning to heal others. This dissertation is an ethnographic research project that takes one site of ayahuasca-motivated encounters – a shamanic training course where Don Enrique teaches foreign students how to heal themselves and others through learning from plant spirits – and examines how students understand the teachings and practices. It specifically focuses on plant diets, and how foreigners learn animacy through cultivating the ability to interact with plant spirits through the diet.

I use the term animacy, rather than animism, to capture this active capacity. While animism is a type of worldview, animacy, as I am using it, conveys the assessment and mobilization of the quality of being animate. I am not arguing that course participants are developing a bounded and clearly definable animistic worldview or ontology. Rather, I am interested in their cultivation of particular skills and ontological stances that allow them to experience and engage with the world as animate. In cognitive science and linguistics, animacy refers to linguistic markers for conceptual categories distinguishing the animate from the inanimate – the more alive, agentic, and sentient from the less. The broader definition is the “state of being alive or animate” (Collins Dictionary 2020). Thus, in using animacy, I combine the learned ability to categorize elements of the world as animate and the quality of being animate, gesturing toward the dialectical nature of one animate being engaging with another. In learning to recognize plants as animate and place them in the animate category, dieters also expand their own capacities as animate interlocutors with non-humans.

The rest of this introduction is split into two sections. The first section situates the work with respect to ayahuasca literature, explaining its distinctive contribution. The second summarizes the project, providing an overview of its contribution to anthropological literature as well as the

main arguments, concepts, and chapters of the dissertation.

From Ayahuasca to More-than-Ayahuasca

The genie is out of the bottle, tweeting about the next shamanic bodywork leadership seminar, and the bottle; well, check and see if it isn't in the back of your fridge by the vegan TV dinner. Who would have ever imagined that ayahuasca, the enigmatic jungle potion William S. Burroughs once referred to as "the secret" and whose very botanical identity was a matter of debate through the mid-twentieth century would, within a matter of decades, become a household (or at least, yoga-mat) word; the subject of hundreds of scientific, anthropological, and medical studies; a magnet for international tourism; the motor behind a global religious diaspora; and the victorious plaintiff in absentia of an historic Supreme Court case? (Shepard 2017: xv)

The "ayahuasca world diaspora" is here (Labate et al. 2017). Ayahuasca is a hallucinogenic brew at the center of a growing spiritual, health, and psychedelic tourism industry in Iquitos. While only an estimated 200 tourists traveled to Iquitos for ayahuasca in 2005, an estimated 80,000 came in 2015, and by 2019 the ayahuasca tourism industry was estimated to bring 6.5 million dollars to Iquitos annually (Fotiou 2020). However, ayahuasca's remarkable capacity to "propitiate encounters with radical otherness" (Shepard 2017: xvi) has captured the imagination of a range of diverse global actors and communities outside the Amazon. Its expanding resonance has fueled the diaspora of syncretic religions (Santo Daime and União do Vegetal) out of Brazil, the discovery and experimentation with ayahuasca analogs such as "Aussie-huasca," and of course the pilgrimage of travelers from far corners of the world to the Amazon.

The rise of ayahuasca in recent years has also accompanied a psychedelic renaissance in academia, as psychedelics have regained legitimacy as objects of study (Hadar et al. 2023). Ayahuasca, like other psychedelics, has recently benefited from the academic respectability of Western biomedical studies showing mental health benefits (Ruffell et al. 2021; Lewis 2008). It appears that we are in the midst of a second wave of the psychedelic revolution born from the "spiritual orphans of [the first] failed revolution" seeking out ayahuasca in the 1970s and 1980s

(Shepard 2017). Scholars wonder whether it will crash and burn like the first or whether the particulars of this wave, mirrored in the particularities of ayahuasca's allure and affordances, might have more staying power. Ayahuasca is messier than the synthetic substances, such as LSD and mescaline, at the heart of the earlier revolution. It is a complex brew made with a range of additives. It makes you puke. Its effects are varied and hard to predict. Visions can be elusive. It doesn't lend itself well to parties or excessive use. The capacity of the "vine of the dead"³ to induce terror and ego dissolution is legendary. Perhaps most importantly, ayahuasca seems to invite community and ritual rather than individual, informal recreation: "wherever it is used, imported, or reinvented, ayahuasca seems to quickly, almost automatically, elaborate around itself a protective cloak of ritual and social control" (Shepard 2017: xvi).

Like the promise of an ayahuasca vision, the academic promise of psychedelics can also be elusive. The psychedelic experience can evoke grandiose feelings of progress, only to melt under the scientific lens. Many scientists who are also members of the plant medicine community express difficulties balancing their experiences and knowledge of plant spirits as subjects with the rigidity of their academic production. Ruffel et al. (2021) provide a quantitative psychological account of the effects of ayahuasca, thanking their diet plant (Noya Rao) in the acknowledgments. Academic and psychedelic communities overlap historically as evidenced by the influence of Timothy Leary, Carlos Castañeda, and Jeremy Narby, to name a few. The academic community holds a lot of power over what happens next in the global ayahuasca journey. If we see this "second wave" as a second chance, what can academics do differently this time? Ayahuasca already seems to be showing the way, as a range of culturally hybrid social controls proliferate around her, highlighting the importance of community and relationships

³ Ayahuasca is often translated as "vine of the dead" from the Quechua aya (corpse) + huasca (vine).

amongst humans and between humans and nature. Ayahuasca invokes ceremony as she pushes people to grow with others, in interspecific and reciprocal ways. Examining Shipibo shamanic hybridity in Chapter 2, we will see how ayahuasca thrives in the spaces in between cultures and beings. The lived diet practice at my field site which draws on Shipibo and New Age shamanic practices, but exceeds both, provides a further example of the kinds of practices and ontologies that flourish with ayahuasca and can support healing together.

Academics are already very much a part of the dialogue about the material and structural worlds of global ayahuasca exchange. They are doing important work participating in legalization battles (De Loenen et al. 2017) and running research and public education institutes to “promote reciprocity in the psychedelic community and support the protection of sacred plants and cultural traditions” (Chacruna Institute 2020). Academic interpretations of ayahuasca tourism have immediate, real-world consequences on the ways that tourists learn about shamanism and interact with indigenous peoples. At this point, it’s not whether or not people will go to the Amazon to consume ayahuasca, but how they will go about it. Anthropologists are well-poised to be a part of that discussion. Anthropologists have long pointed out that while anti-tourists may strive for “authentic” experiences, cultural “authenticity” is an illusion (Bruner 2004; Bodinger de Uriarte and Di Giovine 2021). But while “authenticity” is a pipe dream, earnest engagement and transformation are not. Some cross-cultural (and cross-species) engagements are positively transformative for visitor and host, others are not. When literature about ayahuasca tourism dismisses the potential for authentic, positive, and reciprocal engagement between foreigners and indigenous people, there is a missed opportunity to engage with the future direction of such interactions. There is therefore a need for differentiating between *extractivist* ayahuasca tourisms and *reciprocal*, transformative engagements. I think it’s

a problem when people take ayahuasca in Peru and leave with the psychedelically induced feeling that they have changed, without having done the work to actually change. This dissertation documents the uneven, highly individual transformative process at Inkan Kena, providing an example of one kind of transformative world-making that proliferates at one particular site and time within the broader ayahuasca world.

In the next few paragraphs, I will review what I see as three successive but overlapping waves of academic interpretations of Amazonian ayahuasca tourism, explaining how my approach differs.

The first wave of ayahuasca tourism critique attended to “drug tourism,” loss of indigenous culture, and the tragic commodification of ethnicity (Dobkin de Rios 1994; Dobkin de Rios and Rumrill 2008; Labate and Cavnar 2014a). Scholars heavily criticized the commercialization of ayahuasca and resulting cross-cultural exchanges, warning of loss of indigenous knowledge and the dangers of contamination of traditional shamanism by foreign elements (Dobkin de Rios 1994; Dobkin de Rios and Rumrill 2008; Vitebsky 2003). These authors were “critical of both Westerners who naïvely perceive the performance of shamans as authentic and the shaman who is transformed into a ‘clown in a New Age circus.’ [Joralemon 1990: 109]” (Fotiou 2020: 385). This perspective was untenable, as scholars accused tourists of fetishizing and imposing a false authenticity upon indigenous healers while doing the very same thing themselves. Furthermore, the cultural hybridity of the practices they described were already evident. Dobkin de Rios (1994), for example, was investigating urban mestizo shamanism. These kinds of arguments demonstrated scholars’ unease with and mocking dismissiveness of other travelers as they tried to enforce the distance between themselves and other foreigners learning from local indigenous and mestizo healers, a tension which continues through today.

In the second wave, which still predominates most of the scholarship, anthropologists began to recognize this tension, and their arguments point out important nuances in the features of ayahuasca tourism. However, they remain preoccupied with concerns of authenticity. There is a growing recognition of hybridity, as various authors show that ayahuasca is a quintessentially hybrid practice historically fueled by cross-cultural contact (Gow 1994; Shepard 2014; Brabec de Mori 2014; Bianchi 2005). Disrupting the popular narrative of ancient ayahuasca practices, they posit that ayahuasca only became widespread in the western Amazon following the disruption and contact of the rubber boom of the late 1800s (Gow 1994; Brabec de Mori 2011). Some conclude that shamanic tourism is not a modern anomaly, but consistent with historic shamanic practice (Fotiou 2020). While eschewing ethnological purity, many authors continue to focus on commodification and appropriation, taking a political economy approach (Davidov 2010; Homan 2017; Peluso 2017). These authors point out the inequalities inherent in ayahuasca tourism and the “sanitization” of shamanic practices for tourists, such as the frequent omission of darker practices such as witchcraft and attack sorcery. They liken the commercial circulation of ayahuasca to previous commercial exchanges of Amazonian commodities such as rubber and quinine, even while recognizing differing levels of violence and exploitation. Davidov’s “Shamans and Shams” (2010) provides a nuanced description of “new” shamans and traditional shamans, focusing on indigenous critique of the new shamans. Brabec de Mori (2014; 2013) argues that the “real thing” is not attractive to tourists, resulting in a cultural reinvention through a variety of “lies.” Thus, authors begin to illustrate the complex cultural production in the contact zone of ayahuasca tourism, but the language they use continues to reflect latent concerns with untouched authenticity.

There have been some recent scholarly efforts to portray foreign visitors with greater nuance.

Visitors are now spiritual seekers, not just drug tourists, and their visits are framed as pilgrimages (Winkelman 2005; Fotiou 2020). Authors mention the proliferation of heterogeneous mediators and acknowledge that visitors engage with local spirits and recognize the agency of plants (Fotiau 2020). Although there are now calls to move beyond the commodification of ethnicity to describe the world in-depth, most authors conclude that visitors are not ontologically moved; their experiences are tied to their misunderstandings of local contexts and their identities as “neoliberal subjects” (Davidov 2010). Gearin’s (2017) notion of ayahuasca as cultural critique and Dawson’s (2017) discussion of retraditionalization are important contributions that try to make some sense of what is going on by taking up the meaning-making in Westerners’ ayahuasca worlds. However, they present these worlds as if unmoved by their encounters with indigenous peoples, as Westerners play out Western dramas on indigenous stages. Dawson argues that the features and ritual exigencies of the “new middle class” motivate processes of detraditionalization and retraditionalization, shifting ritual power from the corporate/collective toward the subjective/individual. Gearin’s Australian interlocutors see ayahuasca as an agent, but he argues that they adopt ayahuasca and indigenous shamanism as a cultural critique of their own worlds; the shaman is a projection screen for Western dreams and anxieties.

Many writers of the second wave began to turn to Viveiros de Castro’s (2004) idea of “controlled equivocation” as a way of explaining the productive misunderstandings between indigenous people and outsiders. However, this often pivots on the “misunderstanding” aspect of controlled equivocation, rather than the “productive” part. Westerners are consistently depicted as mistakenly psychologizing and universalizing local practices (Gearin and Labate 2018; Vitebsky 2003). Overall, this second wave is characterized by the assertion that “shamanism is appropriated and lived out in Western terms of truth and belief, thus undermining any possible

dialogue with a different indigenous standpoint” (Colpron 2013: 375).

The third wave of ayahuasca tourism interpretation starts to play with letting the agency of ayahuasca enter into the academic project, along with messy interpersonal, intercultural, and interspecies relationships. As Calavia Sáez (2018: xiii) says, “the tension between tradition and invention has lost its edge” given the ever-proliferating expansion and muddling of hybrid forms of ayahuasca use, often aided by indigenous shamans’ openness to hybridity. Mesturini Cappo (2018) asks “what does ayahuasca want?” and Dev (2020) investigates how the agentic affordances of ayahuasca shape how it travels through the world, though she ultimately argues that plant agency is constrained by global capitalism.

In Mesturini Cappo’s approach to cultural difference, “the opposition of Western and Indigenous has become obsolete” (2018: 59). She describes, in the course of her research, moving from the periphery of ayahuasca tourism networks to the center, where she finds Western, indigenous, and mestizo people committed to sustaining a long-term relationship with the living being that is ayahuasca. Ayahuasca transforms from a singular entity at the periphery to a way of life at the center: a relational space of entanglement where people and plants’ historic encounters meet and become inextricable. She notes that what was previously, on the part of the Westerners, a desire for “contact with nature,” becomes a wish for “‘connected becoming’ where the divide between the human, vegetal, and animal realms becomes an actively experimented crossover space” (2018: 160). Mesturini Cappo invites attending to ayahuasca internationalization as something happening by ayahuasca’s choice, calling for an accounting of the pluralities that support ayahuasca’s agency.

Dev (2020) also engages with ayahuasca as agentic, figuring ayahuasca as a complex boundary being with heterogenous relationships with humans. She investigates the more-than-

capitalist nature of ayahuasca commodity networks and how ayahuasca's agency interacts with commodification. For example, looking at intermediaries who buy ayahuasca in Peru and sell it in the U.S., she finds that ayahuasca's features shape how these intermediaries interact with it. They profit from ayahuasca but also resist solely commodifying it. They care about sustainability and balance profit with a desire to share ayahuasca with people. They use the funds they make from selling ayahuasca in the U.S. to travel back to Pucallpa and continue shamanic diets. However, she concludes that the reductionist and material frameworks of commodity exchange and the individualizing demands of consumers restrict the agency of ayahuasca. The result is a humanization of power and instrumentalization of plants. Plant spirits are constituted as resources and plants and Shipibo are robbed of power which is increasingly transferred to the consumer. She demonstrates how ayahuasca tourist centers often control and restrict ceremonies to meet consumer demand – for example, by restricting chaotic uses of *ikaros*, the healing songs used by ayahuasqueros,⁴ and hampering the freedom of shamans to act as they please in ceremonies. She also shows how outsider perceptions about Shipibo have material impacts on which shamans receive financial support, citing one example of such a perception by an American man who brings tourists down to Pucallpa:

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. (Dev 2020: 170)

The affordances of my particular field site – owned by a Shipibo man and focused on training Western healers rather than catering to tourists – allow distinct forms of difference, chaos, and tension to bloom from those at the center that Dev references. It is more removed from Shipibo

⁴ Shipibo *ikaros* are often sung simultaneously, loudly, and cacophonously, but centers catering to tourists might instruct healers to reduce the intensity and amount of people singing discordant tunes at the same time.

land, culture, and networks than most of her research, which focuses on Shipibo communities. While Dev (2020) provides a rich account of indigenous critique and restricted agency of plants, my research focuses on what is created anew among a particular group of foreign individuals, Amazonian plants, and one Shipibo family. While she examines how people change plants, I am looking at how plants change people. I examine how foreigners who deeply engage with plant diets open new ontological possibilities. While recognizing that other scholars have provided a crucial perspective on the material effects of ayahuasca as commodity exchange, I focus on diet affordances for harmonious (if cacophonous) relating, collective embodying, and ontological disturbance. While my work does not collapse the categories of Western, indigenous, and mestizo, it does heed the call to account for a plural entanglement and attend to what is created in productive, interstitial spaces. I see this dissertation as contributing to the work of a third wave of ayahuasca tourism literature and critique which recognizes the emergence of a lively interspecies and intercultural relating in the world of ayahuasca. What sort of worlds are they (foreigners and locals) making down there in the jungle as they sit in the dark, singing and tripping and puking together in ceremonies for hours upon hours, multiple days a week, months on end? Like Mesturini Cappa, I am interested in collective becoming. To understand what is created through “controlled equivocation,” we also need to attend to embodied experiences – the physical proximity of bodies (human and non-human), the sharing of space and bodies, and the exchange of bodily substances. The spatio-temporal aspects are important as well – the length of time spent and the cyclical, durable aspects of relationships that span the globe and yet are rooted in repeated encounters situated in a concentrated geographic space.

This dissertation is about more-than-ayahuasca. Despite the proliferation of academic studies on ayahuasca and human-animal relations in the Amazon, scholars agree the related study of

plant diets and plant-human relations in the Amazon is underdeveloped (Fotiou 2017; Gearin and Labate 2018). I agree with Brabec de Mori (2014) and others (Gearin and Labate 2018) that anthropologists and other outsiders have overemphasized the importance of ayahuasca to local cultures. While the foreign gaze has drawn indigenous and mestizo attention increasingly to ayahuasca, prolonged participation in the ayahuasca community has also expanded foreign attention to Shipibo diets. Although the Western informants I worked with remain committed to ayahuasca and ayahuasca is what drew them in, they often downplay the importance of ayahuasca and echo Don Enrique's assertions that diets are the most important piece of their practice. This focus allows my interlocutors to move beyond the tantalizing affordances of ayahuasca to root themselves in strong reciprocal relations with plant spirits who teach them how to relate to others and themselves in new ways.

Project Overview

This project sits at the intersection within anthropology of an “ontological turn” toward reality and a “phenomenological turn” toward embodiment.

The ontological turn is best understood as an expansion of anthropological analysis beyond the cultural construction of reality to opening the black box of reality. No longer content to make claims about how people interpret reality, ontologists have endeavored to make claims about reality. Relatedly, they have pushed the scope of anthropology beyond the human to the more-than-human. Descola (2013) and Viveiros de Castro (1998) have analyzed Amazonian animism as a separate ontology from Western worlds, rather than mistaken beliefs about a singular world. There is a moral imperative behind the ontological turn to rethink the world and how to live well with other beings, how to listen to them, and recognize our co-constitution with them. Haraway's

(2008) “response-ability” is a good example of this with its explicitly normative argument for an ethics and politics of understanding and being with Others. Ontological anthropologies, Povinelli (2016) argues, are symptomatic and diagnostic of ecological concerns. Kohn (2015: 315) calls it “a response to a conceptual, existential, ethical, and political problem—how to think about human life in a world in which a kind of life and future that is both beyond the human and constitutive of the human is now in jeopardy.” Ontological anthropologists are also concerned with asymmetries between the West and the Rest, stressing the need to take seriously the perspectives of our interlocutors (Holbraad 2012; Viveiros de Castro 1998). Jane Bennett’s (2010) “vibrant matter,” Kohn’s (2013) “semiotic selves,” and Latour’s (1993) “actor-network theory” are all theoretical contributions to recognizing and understanding the agency of non-human others.

Although we have many ontological theories, we don’t have many accounts of how people might learn to become animists and what that might have to do with healing. This project examines lived and learned ontological stances as people seek out ways to reconfigure their relationship with nature, but also with Others of various kinds, in order to heal. In response to the critique of Amazonian-based ontological arguments that they reify the difference between indigenous and non-indigenous (Bessire 2014; Turner 2009), this work shows how animist ontologies circulate cross-culturally. Moved by many of the same dissatisfactions and ecological concerns of academics, dieters engage in intentional ontology-shifting practices. Furthermore, they do it through their bodies.

The other turn that this project contributes to is a phenomenological turn. Phenomenology has already been summoned by ontologists to do the work of breaking down boundaries between humans and non-humans (Ingold 2000). Around the same time, anthropologists focused on the

body have rejected symbolic interpretations of the body as object for a focus on embodiment and the body as subject. Some have presented this as a turn from representation to represented (Csordas 1994). However, scholars working on embodiment have contributed to the undoing of boundaries underway with the ontological turn, noting the porosity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy of bodies along with their ontological capacity to exceed the representation/represented divide (Shapiro 2015; Chen 2012; Mol 2002). Again, this project contributes by illustrating how people learn to intentionally curate their porous bodily boundaries to manage relationships with others.

With regard to the world of ayahuasca, New Age spirituality, and psychedelic science, this dissertation contributes by providing an account of plant diets and a rich account of a cross-cultural world that is created inside the larger world of ayahuasca. As discussed in the previous section, the ayahuasca and neo-shamanism literatures often do not adequately examine togetherness or transformation at ayahuasca sites, focusing instead on how foreigners consume indigeneity without changing their pre-existing views. Furthermore, the homogenization and universalizing tendencies of neo-shamanism have sometimes leaked into its critical analysis; critics of neo-shamanistic universalisms are themselves sometimes guilty of the same. This work is one rich example of how the broader milieus of indigenous and neo-shamanic traditions influence a particular cross-cultural place and time and how learning occurs at that site. As Western applications of ayahuasca and psychedelics grow and Western psychedelic advocates (such as Rick Doblin) attempt to integrate psychedelics into Western culture, this account can help shape the future direction of ayahuasca and psychedelic use in the West. Don Enrique says that diets are necessary for anyone who is consuming lots of ayahuasca or working with ayahuasca – without the diets, ayahuasca will dry the body out. Thus, to integrate ayahuasca

positively and sustainably into Western bodies and societies, ayahuasca practitioners must look beyond the substance as psychedelic to the broader cultural practices that support its use. Understanding the role of cultural context in ayahuasca healing is an important but neglected piece of psychedelic science.

This dissertation is based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork between 2021 and 2022, during which time I conducted 67 interviews, participated in four two-month courses and over 50 ayahuasca ceremonies at Don Enrique's center Inkan Kena, and collected recordings of over two hundred hours of classes given by Don Enrique and the facilitators and over a hundred hours of ayahuasca ceremonies. This project also builds on a month of ethnographic research on ayahuasca tourism in Iquitos in 2016 and over 15 years of visits to Iquitos and other parts of Peru for other research projects, language study, tourism, visits, and volunteering. I participated in an ayahuasca ceremony in 2007, the first time I ever traveled to Peru. Ever since, ayahuasca ceremonies in various places sporadically punctuated my trips to Peru. I sat in about 10 ceremonies between 2007 and 2021, before I decided to dive into this project after discovering plant diets in 2021.

The main focus of the dissertation is plant diets and the implications of foreign dieters engaging in intimate and durable relationships with Amazonian diet plants for the purposes of healing themselves and others. It is also about the relationships that are formed among people at the site – Enrique and his family, the facilitators, and the students.

Plant diets, otherwise known as *dietas* in Spanish or *sama(bo)*⁵ in Shipibo, are ritual processes to abstain from food, sex, and other stimulants and distractions to create space in the body, mind, and soul for a plant spirit to enter and impart healing lessons and abilities to the

⁵ Sama is singular, while samabo is plural.

dieter. The word diet, as used at my site, may refer to the process or the product of the process, especially when used with a possessive marker (e.g., “my diets are strong”). Relatedly, dieters use possessives in reference to their specific diet consciousness (e.g., “my diet told me...”), in contrast to the plant more broadly. At Inkan Kena at the time of the research, there were five main diet plants – Noya Rao, Bobinsana, Chulla Chaqui, Marosa, and Chiric Sanango – none of which has hallucinogenic properties of its own and each of which has specific, characteristic lessons and powers it can impart.

Throughout the dissertation, I describe the diet practices at Inkan Kena, emphasizing the experience of foreigners who are dedicated to this path, especially facilitators, and how Shipibo terms and concepts about healing and spirituality are translated and taught in the course. Through the diet process, dieters engage in perceptual attunement and bodily techniques taught by Don Enrique and his apprentices to achieve hybrid plant-human bodies. I examine the kinds of bodies, selves, and worlds that foreign dieters create by dieting and hosting Amazonian plant spirits in their bodies as they intentionally develop what I identify as four skills or values – attunement, discipline, reciprocity, and discernment. I posit that the diets at Inkan Kena are a practice of learning animacy – or learning to interact with non-humans as subjects. Dieters negotiate and establish a unique kind of relationship with a plant spirit that lives inside them and is both them and not them. This unique interpersonal/intrapersonal relationship and the patterns and practice of interaction within it offer a valuable addition to the study of posthumanism. Additionally, learned animacy through the embodiment of Others is an integral part of the healing process for dieters.

The dissertation works toward an underlying argument throughout about different ontological stances toward Otherness. I organize approaches to boundaries or difference into three

overlapping and unevenly distributed meta-ontological options, or strategies for understanding reality: 1) division, characterized by dualism, reification of boundaries, and differentiation, 2) unity associated with monism and the collapse or erasure of boundaries, and 3) what I call relative-ity, characterized by interrelational multiplicity, multisubjectivity, and play at boundaries.

Confronted with difference, laypeople and scholars alike tend to focus on some combination of or choice between 1) separating, contrasting, and putting things into categories and 2) joining, drawing similarities, and undoing boundaries. In fact, the two options represent opposite sides of the same issue – an inability to move beyond the duality of similarity and difference. The instrumental rationality of Cartesian dualism represents the dualistic end of the pole and New Age spirituality with its tendency to absorb difference into universal unity is on the other.

Plant diets enable a different kind of conceptualization of Otherness and boundaries between various dualities such as subject/object, spirit/matter, nature/man, self/other, and indigeneity/whiteness⁶. Rather than encouraging dualistic tendencies of reifying difference or monistic tendencies of undoing it, the practice of embodying Others through the diets teaches “good relative-ity,” or the ability to constantly shift positions and manage boundaries based on attunement to the individual and the collective. I am calling it good relative-ity in a nod to Haraway’s (2008) response-ability and because it encapsulates the notion of combining a perspectival relativism with an ethical imperative to be good relatives to non-human Others. Good relative-ity is both an ontological stance and a learned skill, laden with moral import, that

⁶ Note that throughout the dissertation indigeneity is opposed to both whiteness and Western identity, reflecting a common and useful conflation prevalent in scholarly and common usage. I do not consider either category to be bounded, exclusive, or permanent, nor do I consider them perfect oppositions of each other (I do not mean to reduce indigeneity to a racial category; indigenous could just as easily be opposed to settler or colonist – but those are not in common use at my site). Rather, I intend to draw attention to the oppositional categories as used in the field and literature. My Shipibo and foreign interlocutors fluidly draw on whiteness and Western identity as oppositional categories to indigeneity.

requires constant attentiveness. As such, I see it as a goal that is immanent in the teachings at Inkan Kena. It is also a real-world example of the academic striving to break free of the inherited ontological traps of the Western tradition (set by Descartes?).

The five chapters of the dissertation are designed to mirror the process of establishing a close relationship, especially with a diet plant – calling, meeting, merging, negotiating, and integrating. They also very loosely correlate with ethnographic introduction, history, practice, discourse, and theory.

The first chapter, [Calling] Inkan Kena, the Call, the Pilgrim, introduces the field site and the foreign dieters while explaining the historical, spiritual, and ontological conditions that have led to people around the world feeling called by and to Amazonian plants. Introducing Don Enrique, I relate how the Shipibo healer perceives his calling to heal and teach foreigners. Presenting some of his foreign students, I summarize how they perceive the calling. The section also explores how the intersection of charismatic Christianity, New Age spirituality, and psychedelic therapy and the attempts of each to address Western dissatisfaction with modernity help explain the calling to the jungle. All three movements have influenced the circulation of ideas and practice in the West which set the stage for Westerners to be open to perceive a call from the jungle. They also, in the ways they have fallen short at addressing dissatisfaction with separation from Others, have laid the foundation for other approaches to finding and connecting with human and non-human Others.

The second chapter, [Meeting] We Meet at the Wound: Histories of Hurt and Healing, is about histories of encounters in the Amazon. These encounters are framed as hurting and healing at the juncture of Otherhood – between Westerners/whites and indigenous people and between people and nature. The chapter juxtaposes Western imaginaries of indigeneity and nature in the

Amazon with indigenous resistance. It also introduces foundational concepts of Shipibo shamanism and portrays the heterogeneity of Shipibo culture and shamanism. Throughout, I contrast extractivist logics which rely on the reification of difference with romanticist logics which erase difference, only to show that both are implicit in colonialist imaginaries as alternate sides of the same coin. I argue that ayahuasca and Shipibo shamanic theory present alternative approaches toward Otherness based on relational embodiment of Others.

The third chapter, [Merging] Plant-Human Hybrids or How to Merge with a Plant Spirit, describes the diet practices and presents the diet as a unique kind of embodied merging of the dieter with their diet plant, explaining the implications for cultural conceptions of the self. Focusing on ethnographic data, I describe the bodily processes involved in the diets and how foreign dieters develop sensitivities and attune their bodies to receive messages from their diet plants. I also begin to explore how dieters navigate selfhood as newly hybrid beings. First, I describe what the diet is, placing it within the historical context of Amazonian diets. Next, I explain how dieters make and maintain space and a habitable body to host the diet plant. I examine the perceptual rearranging and increased sensitivity that result from hybridity by reviewing narratives about how dieters “listen” to their plants and experience communication from their diet plants. Lastly, I discuss how dieters talk about achieving hybridity of their selves and consciousness, placing their practices and beliefs within historical perceptions on unbounded, hybrid selves.

The fourth chapter, [Negotiating] Crossing and Dominating the Plants: Negotiating with Non-human Others, explores cases of conflicts between people and plants and between students and teachers (facilitators or Enrique) with a more in-depth discussion of discourse at the site and how people negotiate difference across cultural, interpersonal, and species lines. In this chapter, I

discuss how dieters navigate tensions around following the rules of the diets (messages conveyed by the healer and facilitators), messages from their diet plants (presumed to be directly received from the plant spirit), and their own inner knowing (asserting their own individual will and selfhood). Dieters ultimately learn to balance “dominating” but not “crossing” the plants – i.e., asserting their will enough to properly take charge of the relationship without crossing the line and thus upsetting and provoking punishment from the plants. By closely examining teachings about and narratives of experiences with “dominating” and “crossing” the plants, I explore how dieters listen to or push back against themselves, human others, and non-human others. I show how those negotiations at the boundaries of self and other are an integral part of the process of healing and transformation as dieters adjust to their new hybrid human-plant bodies.

The fifth chapter, [Integrating] Becoming Good Relatives, describes how dieters settle into their new, transformed state. It discusses the experiences of dieters integrating their experiences into their day-to-day lives and examines the implications of framing the diet as a healing experience. This chapter also further develops how indeterminacy and flexibility are important aspects of becoming good relatives. Lastly, this chapter integrates the arguments of the previous chapters into a substantive critique and theoretical extension of existing theories about animism, posthumanism, and embodiment.

A Note on Self/Methods

To do this research, I spent hundreds of hours in ayahuasca ceremonies, and many hundreds more on diet, which meant fasting for days and foregoing salt and oil for months. My thinking and moving slowed down with my digestion and sodium-deprived nervous system. I turned off my analytical mind and turned my energies toward connecting to the plants. In the midst of a ceremony, I could not analyze what was happening while also participating. Following what I was told by Enrique and the facilitators, I needed to quiet my thoughts and not hold on too tightly to any particular understanding. In order to perceive messages from plants, like when I learn a language such as Shipibo, I fuzzy my brain. I don't try to hold onto the words, I absorb them in their rich relationality, I record them as chunks and replay them in my mind and aloud until they start to vibrate with meaning. I spit them out and see how they dance with others in that moment.

Completing the diets myself was integral to my methodology. I held onto a timeless anthropological notion that I had to experience the world for myself before turning it into a scientific object. But this had consequences for the academic project, which required me to switch back from "shamanic brain" to "academic brain," or rather, as I interpreted my task, to succeed at producing an acceptable academic document while allowing the world I studied to leak in and shape the product. While learning shamanic practices that bridge the world between plants and people, I was simultaneously attempting to turn myself into a shamanic ethnographer, a bridge between academic notions and my site. As we will see throughout the work, the diet is a process of hybridizing oneself with a plant. My interlocutors talk about themselves as part-plant. Having dieted, I am now part-plant myself. I am not only myself anymore, if I ever was. And it is not easy to write a dissertation as part plant – to know if, when, why, and how to let the

“weird” out. Here, I will explain some of my thoughts about how my experience has shaped my methods (and my methods, in turn, my experience).

In the field, I attempted to balance my two imperatives – immersion and analysis – through cycles. I would spend intense periods of two months at Inkan Kena, filled with ceremonies, diets, and classes, interspersed with trips to Pucallpa to study Shipibo and gain some distance to reflect. However, both at the site and removed, it was challenging to ever separate myself from the work, since the diets initiate deep emotional processes. While at Inkan Kena, I was indistinguishable from the other participants except I participated slightly less (for sustainability) and conducted interviews. Interviews provided a marked space to interact with people differently. I mostly listened and let the interviews unfurl as appropriate, collecting primarily life histories, diet narratives, and opinions and beliefs about the diets. I also used them to ask research participants about events that occurred, collecting accounts from multiple angles, such as from a participant, a facilitator, and Enrique. The cyclical motion of leaving and returning to the site, of participating and then putting on my interview hat, and of witnessing events then asking about them in interviews, allowed me to slowly layer experience into interpretation. Although reading is not often discussed as a method, reading books before, during, and after fieldwork highlighted for me how influential reading methodology is to the result. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, reading books is generally discouraged during diets and when you do read, the book, just like any other stimuli, is woven into your diet. Reading a book while dieting and pondering the lessons of a specific plant is very different from reading a book for a class and planning a précis for a professor. The plants speak through and in dialogue with the books. Even long after ceremony, ayahuasca aids and morphs your interpretations as you digest theory; it was an interesting experience returning to Taussig’s *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*

after the field and sensing the presence of ayahuasca in his writing style.

In a lab meeting recently at the University of Chicago, we discussed the importance of systematic methods of data analysis in anthropology. Although in the past I have always been a proponent for more explicit methods instruction in anthropology, I found something in me resisting, wanting to defend unknowability, mystery, and secrecy. Don't get me wrong, I still find the idea of more explicit and organized methodological discussion laudable, but I was thinking about a lesson from my field site: sometimes leaving visions unexplained is beneficial to allow their meaning to proliferate rather than remain frozen. What unnoticed repercussions might there be to more analysis, more systematization, and more efforts to render the “unspeakable world⁷” into written speech, the most static of forms? What hidden potential might less control, rather than more, hold? Anthropology is always an endeavor to translate the untranslatable, but those working on questions of embodiment must wrestle bodies and feelings into disembodied thoughts and words. Applying posthumanist principles, I have attempted to let Others, from the plants to the pages of this document, be a part of the process of writing and data analysis, and allow a certain fluidity and indeterminacy to guide my steps, intentionally making space for other agencies and voices.

For example, in analyzing my data, I allowed the people and the topics of the interviews to lead me from one interview to the next. Along the way I incorporated the practices from my site into my practice of writing. In moments of low motivation, I sang an ikaro to my diet plants, asking to clean and straighten my jumbled thoughts and guide my tongue. In moments of desperation, I would soplay⁸ myself, and even my computer. During writing and especially editing, I noticed that my voice changed when writing about different people or authors. I

⁷ Alfred Korzybski's term, which I know of via Alan Watts (2004).

⁸ A cleansing ritual explained in the glossary, see Chapter 3 for a more extensive description.

struggled to separate my own voice from others' but embraced the slippage to a small extent as a performance of channeling and hybridity. I intentionally chose to use words and wording from my site when possible, and as used (e.g., "in ceremony," "open up," "feel into," "hybrid"). To my initial dismay, I found I often adopted repetitive patterns of speech, but then wondered why an expansive vocabulary is so unquestioningly prized. In revising, if I noticed an orphaned line of text, I took it as a cue to consider whether more or less words were needed. I experimented with letting the materiality of the text influence my decisions – for instance, the table of contents naturally, independently of my designs, emerged as a visually interesting shape, which I then maintained through intentional choices. Throughout the writing process, I experienced an unresolved tension between exerting control over what I wanted to say and letting meaning emerge and transcend my expectation.

I do not claim to have succeeded in the clearest channel – it is sticky. I so play it here and there. This document is part of the integration of my diets – a piece of myself combined with others and an artifact of my attempt to make meaning out of my intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal/interrelational challenges. This work is my integration, and so, like my integration, is an ongoing process (perhaps also reflected in the chapter on integration).

This work is about white people, like me, melding with plants. So, it is an academic product but also, in some ways, a performance of the very merging it describes. The message of the plants, just like the stories told in this dissertation, are only captured through my own perfectly imperfect vessel. And this place I'm writing about is one perfectly imperfect place where many perfectly imperfect people are trying to sort out how to remake themselves, their relationships to self and other, and the world.

In acknowledgment of how deeply this work is intertwined with my self, I feel I should

provide some context on who I am and how I got to this particular moment and location of striving and interactions between people and plants. So, I will narrate some of my life experiences which led me here.

When I was little, I wanted to know the spirit of plants and animals. I wanted to talk to them. I spent most of my days outside, playing with trees, dirt, leaves, and bugs. As I grew older, I began to recoil from the earth, wary of mud and creepy crawlies. I still wanted to believe in the magic and animacy of the world around me, but it became dull before my untrained eyes. When I traveled to the Matsés community in the Peruvian Amazon in 2011, I wanted to study ecocosmologies for my undergraduate thesis. I had taken an ethnobotany class and was entranced by what I read of indigenous ways of knowing plants. Ambitious, I asked an elder to teach me about medicinal plants as soon as I learned who among the community specialized in plant medicine. However, as we walked through the jungle my eyes became oversaturated. I saw leaf after leaf meld together into a green blur as he explained plant after plant and their uses. They all looked the same to me after the first few. I couldn't remember anything, and my notes started to jumble into meaningless fragments. Lacking the patience to catalog each plant and eager to jump from minute monotony to grand patterns of meaning, I shifted my focus to the more legible (for me) realm of human interaction. I wrote about encounters between Matsés and outsiders, drawing on interviews with both sides of each interaction to illuminate the misunderstandings.

The choice was fitting. After abandoning an outdoorsy focus quite young, I became obsessed with cultural difference and conflict due to cultural misunderstanding. I was interested in the meeting point, especially between indigenous people and outsiders. As a young person, I shared the Western fantasies of romanticized indigeneity that I describe in Chapter 2. Reading a novel about a Maori woman who could communicate with whales was a formative experience of my

childhood. However, as I grew older, I learned about the harms of romanticizing indigeneity. Also, through my interactions with indigenous people, I saw the complex individuality of their lives. As an undergraduate I challenged the romanticization of indigeneity. As a graduate student I began to encounter (in undergraduate students) another growing trend of oversimplification in the historic evolution of indigenous/outside relations – the tendency to homogenize indigenous people under a singular political lens and blanketly condemn white foreigners, such as ayahuasca tourists or anthropologists, who engage with them. On the other hand, I found myself at my field site explaining to white men with childhood trauma that they could be both victims and perpetrators.⁹ In both situations, I see a dearth of ability to understand others and a tendency to conceptualize power as black and white. The Shipibo people do not hold homogenous beliefs and certainly cannot be understood entirely within the same frame as, say, the indigenous peoples of North America. The relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people cannot be reduced to one frame or another; they are constantly evolving and require ever more nuanced frames of analysis, just as interpersonal relationships are charged with complexity. The world needs people who are trying to bridge divides and grapple with difference that confounds generalization, whether they be shamans or anthropologists. This work is my effort to understand others and one contribution toward recognizing the humanity (with both its individuality and collectivity) and positive potential of people who try to understand others.

When I first attended the course that is the object of the study, I was impressed that it provided clear instruction on what I yearned for all those years prior – how to connect with the spirits of plants. The plants were no longer opaque to me because I knew them personally; they were inside me. When I attempted to learn from the Matsés elder, I was blind to the individuality

⁹ The participants and facilitators at Inkan Kena come from diverse political orientations, but I definitely encountered more people who stray from U.S. progressive positions than I do at UChicago.

of plants. After dieting, I no longer struggled to remember names. I began to notice the individual qualities of the plants around me; they were no longer a faceless, green blur. This is the foundation of the learned animacy at Inkan Kena, recognizing the personhood of plants through the embodied experience of their personalities and effects along with a framework for developing the discipline and other skills needed to communicate with them. Furthermore, the approach at the site satisfied my urge for a messy relating, that didn't paint over pain and yet gestured toward hopeful possibilities.

So, full disclosure, I am a person who was looking for a positive story of connection. I also wanted to believe that plants are talking to people; that has shaped my orientation. I am intellectually committed to an anthropology that embraces fluidity rather than asserts a static truth. I wanted the dissertation to assume rather than interrogate, justify, or explain the agency of the plants, because I think there are plenty of academic works who assume that plants or God or spirits do not have agency, and are not real or material. Reading Abram (1996) while dieting, I was inspired by his assertion that he would make an argument that purported to have some truth, rather than *the* argument with *the* truth. My orientation is the same.

Chapter 1 – [Calling] Inkan Kena, the Call, the Pilgrim

Introduction

Why are people from around the world drawn to a little corner of the Peruvian Amazon to spend months in contemplation listening to plant spirits? What compels these foreigners, Shipibo healers, and Amazonian plant spirits to convene in the dark, three nights a week, for hours on end, to sing and purge together?

This chapter introduces my field site and its people while addressing the spiritual and historical forces that bring people together at this site. There are three sections in the chapter. The first, Inkan Kena and Don Enrique, is a portrait of the place and the man behind it, emphasizing the spiritual import of the location. It is further divided into three subsections: the first focuses on Don Enrique's calling, the second relates the founding myths of the camp, and the last provides sensorial impressions illustrating the partial and cyclical connections among humans and non-humans at Inkan Kena.

The second section is about the calling. It provides a historical overview of the intersection between modern charismatic Christianity, New Age spirituality, and psychedelic therapy that continues to shape ayahuasca tourism. Connected through a shared originary moment in 1960s California, all three evince cultural dissatisfaction with the perceived disconnection and isolation wrought by Western modernity. These previous efforts to alleviate this disconnect and fix what's wrong with the West are the background for the call my interlocutors feel from Amazonian plants. They provided the conditions and preparation that enabled Westerners to hear Amazonian plants calling to them. And they influence how the dieters at Inkan Kena perceive that call and their purpose. I argue that the shortcomings of ayahuasca tourism's predecessors provide an opening to rectify some of the issues with previous approaches to Otherhood, especially in

mystical experiences.

The third section introduces some of the facilitators and dieters at the site who will show up throughout the dissertation, emphasizing their stories of calling.

Don Enrique and his apprentices feel strongly that they are meant to be at Inkan Kena, and that their presence, rest, and labor are a part of Noya Rao's (and/or God's) divine will. People create relationships and partial connections with Others as part of their sacred pilgrimage to this epically mystical place. Those relationships are cyclical as people come and go in a divinely orchestrated dance of intimacy and separation. The calling to Inkan Kena is a call to encounter Otherhood in all its forms. At Inkan Kena, difference is not obsolete, but it is not inflexible either. Community and individuality are constantly at play and in tension. The place resists not only the constraining isolation of dualistic rationality but also homogenizing monistic romanticism.

Inkan Kena and Don Enrique

Don Enrique is fond of saying “mi cara es fea, pero mi corazón es muy grande (my face is ugly, but my heart is big).” He also likes to remind us that he will give us, his students, 30% of his energy. He stresses that no other *maestro* will be so generous, contrasting himself to other, stingier (according to him), indigenous shamans who work with foreign apprentices. Don Enrique is an indigenous Shipibo man in his early 50s who has been working as a *curandero*, or healer, since he was 21 years old. He began to work as a healer after twelve years of dieting. Originally from the Shipibo community of Roaboya, he now spends most of his time in a different part of the Peruvian jungle, in or near the jungle city of Iquitos, where he dedicates himself to providing shamanic apprenticeships to foreign visitors.

Almost every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday night, he holds ayahuasca ceremonies at what he humbly refers to as his *campamento*, or camp. Enrique spends his days driving the road from Iquitos to Nauta,¹⁰ back and forth between Inkan Kena and his house in Iquitos. He brings food and supplies from Iquitos to camp, offers ayahuasca ceremonies, classes, and healing consultations for the foreigners staying there, and often departs in the early morning, even leaving at 6 AM on only a few hours of sleep after singing till 3 AM in ceremony. His concrete home in Iquitos and the *mestiza* housekeeper who cleans and cooks for his family are evidence of the financial success of his camp.

Don Enrique's success is tied, in part, to his close relationship with an American man, Carlos Tanner. Enrique is also unique in that he and Carlos brand him as a teacher, more than just a powerful healer. Carlos owns his own ayahuasca center where he runs ayahuasca retreats, frequently presided over by Enrique's brother, Rono. However, his organization, the Ayahuasca Foundation, also offers two-month ayahuasca shamanic initiation courses, held at Inkan Kena. For eight months out of the year, Enrique hosts groups of about fifteen foreigners who come not only for personal healing but also to learn to become shamanic healers themselves. The arrangement between Don Enrique and the Ayahuasca Foundation is unusual. Enrique hosts the students, providing classes, ceremonies, and other important healing and learning rituals and medicines. However, the Ayahuasca Foundation provides three to four facilitators for the course who are responsible for translating, providing their own classes and interpretations, assisting Enrique with ceremonies and other activities, organizing the schedule, and making logistical arrangements. These features put Inkan Kena and the Ayahuasca Foundation course in a category of their own, unlike other centers which are either run by indigenous healers themselves or by

¹⁰ A city south of Iquitos. See Map 2. Many ayahuasca centers are located on the road from Iquitos to Nauta, including Inkan Kena.

foreigners who hire indigenous healers for ceremonies and other services.

The facilitators I met at Inkan Kena are from South Africa, France, New Zealand, Scotland, Canada, the U.S., Australia, and Denmark. Students tend to be from Europe or the U.S., although some are from places as diverse as the Philippines, the highlands of Peru, the Middle East, or the Caribbean. However, they always speak English and have lived or studied in the U.S. or Europe. Students arrive with a variety of shamanic backgrounds. Some have never even taken ayahuasca before, but most have. Many have a background in alternative healing modalities or mindfulness practices such as yoga, reiki, massage, or breathwork.

Students are often surprised and challenged by the course. Of an average of 14-16 students on any given course, one to three typically leave before the end, exhausted by grueling physical practices of fasting and purging or disappointed in the beliefs and practices they are learning – disabused of romantic notions of indigenous shamanic practices. The people who stay, however, are often committed. They frequently come back after the course, continuing their teachings for a couple weeks to a couple months annually or coming back to facilitate. They sometimes complain but also consistently express appreciation for the messy imperfections of the place that resist romanticized notions but open up possibilities for learning. As one facilitator evocatively illustrated in a speech encouraging students to stick with it: “I like my *maestro* in his underwear and my ayahuasca in old coke bottles.” She likened the experience to eating a delicious but plain looking cake, compared to a tasteless one with fancy decorations – thus comparing Enrique’s informal practices which sometimes resisted foreign expectations to a shaman with all the tempting aesthetic frills but less power as a shamanic practitioner.

Most significantly, while many participants expect to learn about ayahuasca, they commonly do not realize until they arrive that the main focus at Inkan Kena is on plant diets. Students

undergo plant diets in order to learn from the plants, especially how to heal. Despite the marketing of the course as an ayahuasca training course, ayahuasca is surprisingly under-discussed at Inkan Kena. The word ayahuasca is infrequently mentioned explicitly. It is customarily referred to as “the medicine” or indirectly alluded to through “the *mareación* (the effects of ayahuasca)” or “ceremony.” Even though most think of ayahuasca as a sentient being in her own right, her role at Inkan Kena is primarily as a tool to connect with the five main diet plants, which themselves are not typically psychoactive. And while Enrique opens the connection to the plants, giving his students his diet energy as mentioned above and teaching students how to connect, the plants do most of the teaching. In addition to participating in classes and ceremonies and taking plant medicines including many purgatives to induce vomiting, students complete two plant diets during the course.

In the following three subsections, I will paint a picture of Don Enrique and his camp. Beginning with a depiction of Enrique’s beliefs about the plants and his mission as well as his interactions with and perceptions about foreigners, I will then recount the founding myths of Inkan Kena and Noya Rao. Lastly, I will invite the reader to imagine the sensorial experience at Inkan Kena and how it joins human and non-human bodies together.

1. Don Enrique’s Don

I first interviewed Don Enrique in Iquitos in 2016, before I knew I would end up returning to his camp to study diets. When I asked him why he thinks he is good at teaching, he told me it was the work of the plants and of God, painting himself as a mere messenger: “esos ya son mensajes de Dios, mensajes de las plantas. Dios me ha dado un don. (Those are messages from God, from the plants [not me]. God gave me a gift.)” I asked him if he was Christian and he said no, but:

Creo bastante en dios porque ha creado muchas plantas. Nosotros como indígenas, nuestros abuelos nunca han tenido una posta, un hospital, pero nuestros hospitales eran nuestro¹¹ tremendos bosques que hemos tenido, teníamos fe con dios y cuando se enfermaba un niño, las madres se metían al monte a conversar con las plantas y dios.

I believe a lot in God because he has created many plants. We as indigenous people, our grandparents have never had a post office, a hospital, but our hospitals were our tremendous forests that we have had, we had faith with God and when a child got sick, the mothers went into the forest to talk with the plants and with God.

The God that Enrique believes in is deeply intertwined with the plants, especially Noya Rao. He sometimes switches between them as if they are interchangeable, but here he presents God as the creator of the plants. Ayahuasca is his tool and partner in healing, in fulfilling God's gift and plan for him. It is not a cure-all, but the guide to other medicinal plants and practices. He uses ayahuasca to converse with the plants/spirits and God in order to learn how to cure:

El ayahuasca no es suficiente para curar toda la clase de enfermedades, para mi es más como diagnosticar su enfermedad, cuál es, dónde empezó y además el ayahuasca por medio habla con que plantas puedes curarte, porque hay muchas enfermedades que nunca he visto ni escuchado, eso me asusta. Para eso está el ayahuasca – para ver, aunque sin saber su nombre, espiritualmente me habla y yo curo eso. Además la planta, por medio de la mareación, sigue superándome. Los espíritus nos guían, nos hablan.

Ayahuasca is not enough to cure all kinds of diseases, for me it is more like diagnosing your illness, what it is, where it started and also ayahuasca talks about what plants you can cure with, because there are many diseases that I have never seen or heard of, that scares me. That's what ayahuasca is for – to see, although without knowing the name of the illness, spiritually it speaks to me and I cure that. In addition, the plant, through the ayahuasca state, continues to make me better. The spirits guide us, they speak to us.

I asked him what he thought of his foreign students. He told me he liked working with them

¹¹ Note that Enrique is not a native Spanish speaker and sometimes uses Spanish irregularly – such as incorrect conjugation of verbs, gender of nouns, or matching of gender. In many cases, his use of Spanish reflects local patterns, translations from Shipibo, or his individual mode of expression. Throughout the dissertation, I have chosen to preserve the speech of Enrique and my other interlocutors to maintain their original expression, only removing excessive repetitions. Though I adhere closely to the words spoken, my translations of Don Enrique reflect my understanding of his intended meaning, rather than the literal translation. I have based that understanding on many hours of hearing his lectures and facilitator translations, as well as many years of speaking Spanish with people from the Peruvian jungle and several months of speaking Shipibo with other Shipibo people in Ucayali.

as patients because they followed the rules he would give them. Shipibo and mestizo people, on the other hand, he said, would often not follow the plants' rules. Both plants and people would punish him for the consequences, so he would have to ask forgiveness of the plants and suffer complaints from people:

Yo no trabajo con indígenas ni mestizos, ni peruanos. Porqué? “Ah, Enrique es mentiroso.” No lo soy – el problema es que el paciente peruano no cumple con su reglamento, porque yo puedo salir a hacer otra cosa y el está comiendo escondido. Y se empeora su enfermedad. Es por eso, no es porque no quiero. Después la planta viene contra mí, me discute porque yo le he convidado a la persona, luego tengo que pedir perdón a la planta. Ese es el problema con los peruanos. Con los americanos es distinto, verdaderamente quieren curarse.

I don't work with indigenous people or mestizos or Peruvians. Why? “Ah, Enrique is a liar.” I am not – the problem is that the Peruvian patient does not comply with the regulations, because I can go out to do something else and see he is sneakily eating. And his illness worsens. That is why, it is not because I don't want to. Then the plant comes against me, it argues with me because I have invited the person, then I have to apologize to the plant. That is the problem with Peruvians. With Americans it is different, they really want to be cured.

Enrique's responses about indigenous or outsider patients and students are ambivalent and hard to pin down. He told me his *abuelos*¹² advised him not to mess with healing indigenous people, because they won't follow proscriptions. However, in his ceremonies at Inkan Kena, he did occasionally host visiting Shipibo family members and, very rarely, mestizo staff. He also thought foreigners were slow to understand and learn, unlike indigenous people. Furthermore, he complained repeatedly about foreign students who just wanted to eat good food and drink ayahuasca but didn't understand the importance of the diets. To those, he would say “la ayahuasca no son para americanos, son para los indígenas (ayahuasca is not for Americans, but for indigenous people).” He also frequently says that God created the plants for indigenous

¹² Grandparents or elders.

people. But later, he proclaimed “para mí no me importan las razas ni colores, siempre y cuando sean iguales y quieran aprender a curar (for me, I don't care about races or colors, as long as they are equal and want to learn to heal).” Although he sees foreigners as more compliant patients and indigenous people as more naturally skillful apprentices, he appreciates those of either background who take the plants seriously. He repeatedly stressed that he wanted us to learn the Shipibo language and healing songs, the *ikaros*. Greeting him in Shipibo or running into him while walking back from the tree¹³ would earn a nod of approval. In a later interview, at the end of my time at Inkan Kena, I asked him whether he thought his foreign students were any good at healing. Somewhat exasperated, he likened learning to heal to learning to fix cars: “if you study with a mechanic are you going to know all that he knows from so many years of fixing cars?” “But,” he added, “that guy who was singing last night knew what he was doing, the guy next to you, what was his name?” He was referring to someone who was a past student of the course who had come back for a short visit.

The fact that he didn't know the man's name yet had respect for his healing capacities through his mastery of the plants and the *ikaros*, is emblematic of the kind of material and spiritual intimacy (and at times respect) that Enrique shares with his students. Many do not speak Spanish and rely on the facilitators and the few others who do (including myself) to translate. In many ways they know each other intimately, spending hours singing and puking and working together in the spiritual world, in the dark. However, except for with the facilitators, he maintains his distance. He often doesn't know the names of all the students. When at the beginning of my stay the dining area was in his house at camp, he would ordinarily sit at his desk to eat, separate from students and workers alike. In a good mood, he might make playful jokes with those of us

¹³ One of the Noya Rao trees on the property – see the next subsection on the meaning and myth of Inkan Kena.

who spoke Spanish. Other times, he was curt. The new communal kitchen and dining area was separate from his house.

Many students and facilitators struggled to interpret his changing moods and statements. One month he might tell a student they couldn't eat something while drinking a plant extract and the next he might tell another they could. Was it a test? Changing messages from the plants? Cultural rules about what could be said when and to whom? A misunderstanding of the question? A misleading response to appease the foreigner in the moment? Probably all play a role. I witnessed one student who spoke Spanish grow increasingly irate as he attempted to find out what was in the medicine Don Enrique gave him. With each query Enrique would smile and attempt to brush off the question, telling the student not to worry. The student in return would try again more insistently. Finally, a facilitator walked in and asked the question. Enrique responded immediately, to the student's consternation. In another situation a student had asked Enrique, translating through a facilitator, if she could adopt a dog from camp, and Enrique had declined. Later, with me translating, he acquiesced, leaving the facilitator nonplussed. In these situations, foreigners are perplexed by changing answers. They commonly expect straightforward, consistent rules and information and they can be pushy about it. But transparency is not always the best shamanic or pedagogic practice from Enrique's perspective. He doesn't like to tell people what is in the cure before they take it since it might contain odious ingredients (including, urine, feces, or in the case of one steam bath treatment I underwent – mothballs!). Once, Enrique told me he had removed the diet of a particularly recalcitrant dieter without telling them.

Nevertheless, he had several foreign students he considered his disciples who really knew what they were doing. Years later, when I came to Inkan Kena, I saw some of those disciples, including a facilitator who had worked with Enrique for a decade, work together in ceremony

with Enrique. Enrique presides over the ceremony, singing his ikaros, or healing songs, to open the diet connections and heal participants in the ceremony from physical, mental, or spiritual ailments. The facilitators help, joining in when they can or as needed. Sometimes, Enrique's voice falters. He struggles under the weight of jealous sorcery attacks from other Shipibo shamans or his own personal or physical struggles. He vomits uncharacteristically. In those cases, I have seen his foreign disciples turn to him and sing, joining in the cultural spiritual battles of entanglement as his apprentices.

During our 2016 interview, he articulated a vision of why he does what he does, and how he understands his mission as teaching foreigners how to become healers:

Hay muchos, que yo en mi ceremonia veo, que en los países grandes están muriendo muchas personas con simple enfermedades a veces los médicos, farmacéuticos mismos les matan. Veo bastante porque converso con extraterrestres. Entonces nació una idea mía, o habrá sido voluntad de Dios, que yo debe enseñar a las personas que quieren aprender de las plantas medicinales y esa personas que vaya a ayudar a las personas que están muriendo. Yo soy indígena, no se hablar inglés, yo para irme es muy difícil. Yo no sé qué es visa, que es pasaporte, no sé nada. Pero yo les enseño a los alumnos que quieren aprender. No exijo, les enseño como debe de ser. les enseño los ícaros, mi idioma, y lo traduzco en español y otro guía lo traduce en inglés. Entonces yo le traduzco para que mis alumnos me escuchen que estoy haciendo – con quien estoy conectando, con cual espíritu estoy conectando. Me gustaría que ellos entiendan que yo estoy haciendo – yo no mezquino mi sabiduría. No soy como otros maestros.

There are many that, in my ceremony, I see that in large countries many people are dying with simple illnesses, sometimes doctors and pharmacists themselves kill them. I see a lot because I talk to aliens. Then an idea of mine was born, or it must have been God's will, that I should teach people who want to learn about medicinal plants and those people who will help people who are dying. I am indigenous, I don't know how to speak English, it is very difficult for me to leave. I don't know what a visa is, what a passport is, I don't know anything. But I teach students who want to learn. I don't demand, I teach them how it should be. I teach them the icaros, my language, and I translate it into Spanish and another guide translates it into English. Then I translate so that my students can hear what I'm doing – who I'm connecting with, what spirit I'm connecting with. I would like them to understand what I am doing – I am not stingy with my wisdom. I'm not like other teachers.

Otros maestros mezquinan las cosas.

Other teachers do not share things.

Don Enrique sees it as his mission to teach foreigners from the West who can then go back and heal people in their own countries. From his perspective, the West is sick, far sicker than Peru. Through messages he received from plant and alien spirits, he saw this illness and came to the realization that it was his role to address it. He differentiates himself from other curanderos who do not teach. He worries about the safety of tourists who study or drink with other curanderos who have not trained sufficiently and treat ayahuasca like a panacea. He routinely tells us we must learn so that other healers cannot dupe us: When they present a plant, we will know what it is. If they say they have Noya Rao, we can ask them to show us the tree and know that it is not Noya Rao. When they sing, we must know if they are singing a song to entrap or attack us.

Inkan Kena represents the fruits of his labor. He presents everything that happens at camp as under the dominion of the plants, including the people who arrive. He announced once that he was installing metal roofs instead of palm thatch on some of the new *tambos* (small huts to house students), because the plants told him to for increased spiritual protection. In his lectures he would regularly scold and cajole, attempting to inspire us to hang in there. Such speeches included comparisons to Shipibo customs. He would complain that foreigners want to eat chicken, whereas Shipibo dieters would only eat a tiny fish and one plantain a day – and for much longer diets! He exhorts us to participate in the healing: “sing! If you see your compañero is suffering, sing to them! If you see I am singing to them – help me!” Commonly, he would talk about how people sometimes “receive” messages from the plants telling them to go home – “but those are just tests from the plants!” He reminds us, it’s never easy to diet the plants (“No es fácil! [It’s not easy!]”). But we were there for a reason, guided by God and the plants, just like him. We just needed to be strong enough to stay and tough it out: “Uds. están en voluntad de

Dios, no están Uds. en su propia voluntad. Dios ha escogido a Uds., saben porque les ha escogido? – porque Uds. tienen mejoras memorias, mejoras energías (You are at the will of God, you are not [here] because of your own will. God has chosen you. You know why he has chosen you? Because you have better minds,¹⁴ better energies.)”

2. The meaning and myth of Inkan Kena

Inkan Kena can be glossed as ‘calls the Inkas,’ but it has many meanings. Literally, it translates to ‘the Inka calls’ in Shipibo since the -n at the end of Inka makes it the subject of the transitive verb to call. However, Don Enrique translated it as “calls the Inka spirits.” It is also the Shipibo name¹⁵ of Enrique’s wife/partner, Wilma Mahua, pointing to her spiritual power as a healer. An interview with Wilma published on the Chacruna Institute website quotes her as translating Inkan Kena as “a hospital or healer who carries Inkan plant medicine.” At camp, it is often explained to be a nickname of Marosa, one of Wilma’s main diet plants, since Marosa’s magic opens up the world of the Inkan doctors. So, the name of Inkan Kena holds multiplicities, appropriate for this dissertation. It refers to a person (Wilma), a plant (Marosa), a place (camp), and the spiritual power of each that comes from their ability to call in others (Inka spirits). The name also holds power by virtue of its ability to summon the power of its namesakes; the power of each reverberates into the others. Further apropos to this chapter, it evokes the dynamic two-way nature of the call, ambiguously alluding to spirits who call and people who call spirits.

Despite the connection of its name to Marosa, Inkan Kena revolves around Noya Rao. She is

¹⁴ I have translated memorias as minds, reflecting my understanding of the intended meaning. Don Enrique frequently uses memoria as a stand-in for the Shipibo word shinan, which can be translated as mind or thoughts. Similarly, he uses energías or energies to express the Shipibo niwe, which has a culturally specific meaning but could be translated as airs (discussed further in Chapter 3).

¹⁵ Many Shipibo people have both Shipibo and Spanish names. Enrique’s students also sometimes have Shipibo names, revealed to him by the plants in their student ceremony – when, near the end of the course, students preside over their own ceremonies.

the central plant at camp, to the extent that “the tree” is synonymous with the Noya Rao tree. Noya Rao, meaning “flying medicine,” is an important tree within Shipibo mythology but is no longer present in Shipibo lands to the point that some Shipibo deem it merely mythological. There are two main Noya Rao trees on Enrique’s property and his students spend hours at a time sitting by them, praying, singing, and leaving offerings. A night-time walk to the tree on one of the first nights of the course reveals what for some is a surprise: her fallen leaves glow at night. On a moonless night after recent rains, if you turn off your flashlight the forest floor around the tree becomes a black sea with brilliant, teardrop-shaped stars of light.

Enrique often tells some version of the origin and disappearance of Noya Rao. On one occasion, he drew a figure of a tree on the whiteboard in the maloka¹⁶ and began the story with a booming voice: “Noya Rao Dios sembró cuando el mundo estaba nuevo, especialmente para los indigenas shipibos (When the world was new, God planted Noya Rao especially for the indigenous Shipibo people).” According to Enrique,¹⁷ the curaca, or leader of the Shipibo at that time, had four wives. The curaca was the only person who believed in God, and he was the first to diet Noya Rao. Even though God sent Noya Rao for the Shipibo, they didn’t believe. They didn’t know how to appreciate this tree. Enrique took a break to draw a representation of the community on the board: “Mira! – Koman Kewe Jiwi. Era el primera comunidad (Look! – *Koman Kewe Jiwi* [Embroidered Shihuahuaco Tree] It was the first community).”

He continued, explaining that the curaca joined all the indigenous people together to talk to them about Noya Rao, but nobody believed: “se burlaban de curaca. ‘De dónde escucha curaca

¹⁶ A traditional Amazonian longhouse and the central ceremonial and class space. They are ubiquitously used for ayahuasca ceremonies throughout Peru. This one is circular, tall, with a palm-thatch roof, elevated off the ground with wood plank flooring. The bottom half of the walls are wood planks, and the top half is mosquito netting.

¹⁷ In this paragraph and the next, I tell Enrique’s story, paraphrased and translated into English, peppered with direct quotations and illustrations of the context. I have made an effort to retain some of his turns of phrases and style of speaking, producing a hybrid voice of his and mine as I retell the story I have heard so many times.

para que nos diga estos mensajes?,’ decían la gente (they made fun of the curaca. ‘Where did the curaca hear these messages to tell us?’, the people said).” God spoke to the curaca, he clarified, because the curaca had dieted Noya Rao. God sent the plants because the indigenous Shipibo did not know how to speak Spanish or write or anything. But the Shipibo were very rebellious. God spoke to the curaca, exclaiming, “you have to look for medicinal plants because I will send an epidemic without a cure.” At this point Enrique faltered: “la enfermedad se llama...pucha...chami isin (the sickness was called...shoot...chami isin¹⁸).” He proceeded, describing how the curaca brought the people together, saying “brothers we have to look for medicinal plants.” But they didn’t pay any attention. Many Shipibo died. God sent the sickness because the people were very rebellious and didn’t believe. They didn’t believe in Noya Rao. Thousands and thousands of indigenous people died. When many had died, God called the curaca again and gave him a cure from vulture’s broth. This saved many people who drank the broth. However, after this, God took Noya Rao back: “Lo que había muchos Noya Rao existía muchos antes, Dios quitó estos plantas. Recién la gente buscó y no habia, ya no existia, no hay Noya Rao, recién buscaban, buscaban, y no encontraban Noya Rao (Where many Noya Rao existed before, God removed these plants. Only then did people search and there was none, it no longer existed, there is no Noya Rao, they searched and searched, and they did not find Noya Rao.)” After Noya Rao disappeared, Shipibos lied to each other, saying they had found Noya Rao, but for many years none existed.

In another telling of the story, some of the details changed or information was added or removed. The curaca now had six wives, instead of four, and he had dieted Noya Rao for fifteen years to gain his connection with God. Enrique added that God gave the indigenous people plants

¹⁸ Smallpox.

because they were “muy marginado de los gobiernos (very marginalized by the government).” He now called the community Koman Kewe Jema¹⁹, the last word changing from tree to community/place. Most significantly, in this telling a curious woman tried a test to see whether she should believe the curaca. She scraped the bark of Noya Rao, put the shavings in a pot, covered them with water, then spread the Noya Rao water around the perimeter of the community. She then went to the middle of the community and announced to everyone: “Don’t go anywhere, not even to the fields or to fish so we can see if we should believe the curaca.” One young man didn’t listen. He went to the lake to fish. Starting at one in the afternoon, the whole community began to levitate. That young man, seeing the community 50 meters above, called to his uncle: “ea biwe koka! (pick me up, uncle!).” They threw out a rope, but it didn’t reach. The young man turned into a bird who calls out: “eabiwekoka.” Only when that happened did people begin to diet, without knowing what medicine was. But without Noya Rao, “total salieron puros brujos, no sabían como agarrar la medicina de las plantas medicinales (all of them became witches, they did not know how to take control of the plant medicine.)”

Wrapping up, he told us that many Shipibo wonder why he, Enrique, has received Noya Rao now, when it has been lost to the Shipibo for so long. He concluded that it was because of us, and his mission to teach us:

Ahora la gente preguntas unos a otros porque Dios le ha hecho encontrar a Noya Rao a Enrique. Eso es la pregunta grande de la gente. [...] Dios me ha hecho encontrar Noya Rao para enseñarles a Uds. Porque en sus países de Uds. están muriendo mucha gente.

Now people ask each other why God has made Enrique find Noya Rao. That is the big question the people have. [...] God has made me find Noya Rao to teach you. Because in your countries many people are dying.

Enrique urged us to ensure that those claiming to have Noya Rao were telling the truth,

¹⁹ In both cases the name of the community ends up getting shortened by Spanish speakers to Koman Kaya, a community Enrique says still exists today.

blaming other healers in Pucallpa for erroneously offering Noya Rao diets and lying about having access to a Noya Rao tree. Adam, translating, added that many Shipibo still don't believe there are Noya Rao trees. Instead, they pedal eucalyptus disguised as Noya Rao. Adam interpreted for Enrique, adding his own perspective:

He says for example in Pucallpa there are many people offering diets with Noya Rao, if you go there, you can diet with them. And you will start to wonder in your diet, why am I not seeing Noya Rao? Why is there no Noya Rao tree? Why is it not in my visions? That's because it's not Noya Rao, it's Eucalyptus. And I can vouch for this. I've seen people selling Noya Rao in Písaq and I can tell you that it is a very different color than the Noya Rao here. And people do not have these experiences.

Enrique, perhaps hearing Písaq mentioned, added “Me fui a Cusco y estaban hablando de Noya Rao. Noya Rao? Dónde? (I went to Cusco, and they were talking about Noya Rao. Noya Rao? Where?). Noya Rao, Enrique expounded, “Ilumina. Te va a abrir tu memoria. Ya que Uds. han tomado su extracto, a su memoria va a llegar muchos mensajes, va a llegar los ikares, las palabras de dios. Tus memorias, tus lenguas, tu mano van trabajar. (Noya Rao enlightens. It will open your mind. Since you have taken her extract, many messages will reach your mind, the ikares and the words of God will arrive. Your thoughts, your languages, your hand will work.)”

In my experience, Noya Rao is indeed both revered and absent in Shipibo territory, though no one I spoke to in or near Pucallpa claimed to have access to her. My Shipibo instructor in Pucallpa nervously asked me for a picture of the tree and, nearly in tears, told me he would hang it in his room to look at every day. He also told me a story from many years prior when Noya Rao still existed in Ucayali, the lands of the Shipibo. In the story, a white man died after bathing in Noya Rao water because he was curious about dieting her power but didn't respect its magnitude. Only indigenous people succeeded in obtaining it. The situation today is almost inverted in that now foreigners are the ones who have more access to Noya Rao. This sacred tree with healing powers is lost to the vast majority of Shipibo. Enrique and his family are one

Shipibo family who have access to her on their private land in Loreto and they use that access to provide diets to foreigners who come and are able to enjoy the tree that my Shipibo instructor longed to see.

So how did Enrique reach Noya Rao long after she receded from Shipibo territory? The origin myth of Inkan Kena begins with Wilma's father, Benjamin Mahua, a curandero from a family of renowned curanderos from Paoyhan.²⁰ He continued the legacy of Noya Rao after her physical disappearance. He used a pipe made from Noya Rao to diet her and to give Noya Rao diets to others. The facilitator who has worked with Enrique the longest, Reed, says that he heard from Benjamin that he had a spiritual Noya Rao child through the pipe diets:

This child became his right-hand dude, and through him [the spirit child] would come into his body and he would give transmission diets of Noya Rao, and he gave it to his family, to his brothers. And prior to these trees, that's how Noya Rao was propagating and that's how Noya Rao diets were given through energetic transmission.

Enrique found Noya Rao through dieting her. To hear the facilitator Peter tell it, Noya Rao led him to the tree in the middle of the night while he was dieting:

When he did the dieta, that led him to the tree that we're going to go to tonight, which is pretty cool. Because at that time, this was not a camp at all, just like maybe a house here and the road, there was just a tiny trail that you had to cut almost every time with a machete it was like wild jungles. And he was out here to diet for about a month. So complete fast, and no water, just that extract. And then during that dieta, he was in the middle of the night, he was led by Noya Rao down this, this path, you know, with no light, down to find the tree.

Afterward, Benjamin confirmed that the tree was Noya Rao. Reed, talking about Benjamin, recounted a time that Benjamin was wearing the flower of life, confirming for Reed the transcendence of Noya Rao:

This fellow that I'm talking about is kind of a lineage holder prior to Enrique finding these trees. He had, you know, he was here. He'd been here a few times. And he had on

²⁰ A well-known Shipibo community. Of all Shipibo communities, it is the second most popular as an ayahuasca destination for foreign visitors (after San Francisco), largely because it is home to the Mahuas, a famous lineage of curanderos.

one of his cloths, he had the flower of life. And I was like, wait a minute, I really don't think this dude is reading Drunvalo Melchizedek.²¹ You know, he's not reading about sacred geometry in his spare time. What he told me is like, Noya Rao has this many planets associated with Noya Rao. And he said, on one of the planets is a flower. And the head of the flower is the flower of life, which is the entire blueprint for our whole existence. So, they say it's a Genesis tree. The tree was instrumental to bringing... I'm getting crazy goosebumps all over! Pardon me, I'm just tripping out over here... The tree was instrumental to bringing life onto this planet.

He then told us that Benjamin had a vision revealing Noya Rao trees on every continent, though they might be different species. According to Reed, the first tree found at Inkan Kena had glowing roots and it looked different from the others. But it died a few years ago. Nobody seems to know how to propagate them: "Once they were successful for a little bit, but then [Enrique's] brother posted it on Facebook. And then it died the next day. And [Enrique] was like, you can't post this on Facebook. Anyone that has an impure heart looks at it, it'll die." At first, Enrique did not share photos or information about Noya Rao online, but that has changed in the last few years as he has become more confident in the connection.

3. Sensory Impressions and Circulations

It rained last night. Now, orange clay squishes between my toes while the sun burns the top of my head, and my scalp starts to itch with sweat. I decided to walk barefoot to camp this time but now I'm regretting it. How did Dan make it look so easy? My feet struggle to find traction in the mud. Last time I wore shoes but as I walked the mud layered too thickly onto my rubber soles until my boots were so heavy I struggled to lift my feet. Now, I've traded one problem for another. At least I won't have to worry about staining my boots or rinsing them off upon arrival only for mold to grow when the daily rains prevent them from drying out completely in the sun. (From my field notes)

The path to Inkan Kena from the road is paved over with cement in parts, but much of it is still mud, reflecting the general state of partial development that meets visitors to the camp. When it rains, sometimes people have a hard time. More than one visitor has been carried by

²¹ A New Age thinker famous for his work on the flower of life.

staff, who regularly spend hours trying to get the *moto furgón* (a motorcycle-driven trailer) unstuck. When individual visitors arrive, they often drive up to camp in a private taxi, mud conditions allowing. When people arrive for the course, however, they come together on a bus south from Iquitos. Dropped off on the side of the road, they load their luggage into the furgón and begin the forty-minute-long-or-so hike. The hike is an important moment for some, marking the entrance to a new space and a new journey.

The first time they arrive, they don't know yet about the tree and they pass by the smaller path into the jungle leading to Noya Rao without a second glance. Returners like me often stop by and greet her, dropping little bits of tobacco at her roots in offering.

The last part of the walk is cement, and I cover it more quickly. I pass under an archway that reads, "Welcome al Fundo Inkankena,"²² decorated with Shipibo designs, and descend to camp – the central area features a few wood buildings with metal roofs, a cement kitchen/dining area, Enrique's cement house, and the main *maloka* – circular and tall, with a conical thatched roof.

Today, camp is mostly empty. The first person I see is a white man, an American, sitting on the porch of Enrique's house strumming a guitar. He tells me he dreamt of a blue-haired girl arriving. I am a blue-haired girl. Other than the people on the course, most of the visitors are previous course participants who come back independently and directly through Enrique instead

²² Note that Inkankena is spelled differently here than how I've spelled it in most cases in the dissertation (Inkan Kena). The sign combines the two words. Enrique and others from camp spell it differently at different times. In earlier drafts, I switched from one spelling to the other in different chapters. In editing the dissertation, I decided to choose one and standardize my choice throughout to meet some perceived expectation of professional presentation and clarity. However, reflecting that this sort of expectation of consistency is a cultural artifact directly opposed to the fluidity that my site represents, I've gone back and added a few anomalous spellings back throughout in a small act of rebellion. Many words from my site, especially Shipibo words, are not spelled consistently one way or another. Shipibo has undergone recent orthographic changes that explain some of the inconsistency (for example hua, hue, sh, qui, and que have become wa, we, x, ki and ke). Tensions between Spanish, English, and Shipibo spellings explain other differences. For example, Marosa is sometimes spelled Marusa since Shipibo only has only one sound between u and o. I have used Marosa, following the convention in Shipibo orthography. In future works, I am interested in further exploring the potential of orthographic fluidity and how the tolerance of fluidity at Inkankena can inform my academic work.

of the Ayahwasca Foundation. In between courses, there are often only a few people at camp at a time. People come and go, periodically returning for a couple of weeks to a month. When I first returned to the field site for instance, I joined two people I knew from the first time I completed the course. Throughout my stay, I would meet new people and reunite with returning friends I met on previous courses. In one coincidence, which illustrates the cyclical feeling of community, I ran into a man who seemed very familiar. I realized that I had interviewed him six years before in Iquitos! I was looking forward to a follow-up interview when I found out he had left early, abruptly and unexpectedly. It happens.

Staff come and go as well, as do Shipibo relatives, often for temporary work. Although there were some Shipibo staff during my first course, mostly the women doing the cooking, cleaning, and laundry and the men doing yard work, construction, and driving the furgón were mestizos. There were rarely Shipibo people other than Don Enrique, Doña Wilma, and Wilma's son Wilder – who is also a curandero/apprentice. The three of them would sometimes preside over ceremonies together, but it was always a surprise when Wilma or Wilder would show up. When Shipibo women visited, they would sit outside embroidering clothes. Once, when I struck up a brief conversation in Shipibo with two visiting women, they asked to take a picture with me. Later, when scrolling Facebook, I saw the picture of us on a friend suggestion. She had made it her profile pic.

I traveled to Pucallpa and Paoyhan to study Shipibo and get a better understanding of the connection between Inkan Kena and the Shipibo community. Sitting in a ceremony with Enrique's nephew at the nephew's center outside of Contamana,²³ I was surprised to find that Enrique's daughter was joining us and to hear her sing the *ikaros* Enrique teaches on the course.

²³ A town at the Northern edge of Shipibo territory.

Inkan Kena is a satellite location with partial connections to several other sites in Peru and abroad, including the Shipibo community and many other ayahuasca centers run by his relatives. The specificity of these connections is largely opaque to many of the visitors at Inkan Kena, although those who are more involved are more likely to learn more and become more entangled with other Shipibo people. I sensed that those entanglements made Enrique and Wilma nervous; they benefit from separating the gossip and jealousy of Shipibo relatives from their students. Those dieters who knew the gossip mostly tried to keep it to themselves rather than contaminate other dieters' perceptions.

In addition to social and spatial separation, virtual disconnection helps maintain the isolation and protection of the container that is Inkan Kena. For the most part, there was no phone or internet signal. Though some people would walk to the road to grasp a weak signal to send messages home, facilitators highly discouraged it. Freed from technological distractions, dieters are able to attend more closely to their senses.

Inkan Kena is quiet and loud at the same time. To me, it feels like a break from urban sensory overload. But everything from the heat to the sounds of animals to constant insect bites can be overwhelming to people who are new to the jungle. In one interview, a dieter told me she was having a hard time sleeping because it was like sleeping in a pet store. When I first arrived in 2021, the camp used solar-powered lights in the evening, though most people preferred their candles anyway because the lights attract too many bugs. However, as time passed, the solar panels diminished in efficacy till the sound of a gasoline-powered generator filled the early evening air before ceremonies. During the day, the sounds of staff arriving and departing in the moto furgón set off frantic barking from the dogs at camp. The staff are frequently working on some construction or maintenance project or another, hammering and buzzing. Chickens cluck.

The jungle joins in with its chorus of frogs, birds, and insects. The loud but quiet ambient sounds of the jungle persistently pervade us. I always thought coming back to town was startling because of the sudden onslaught of noise. But maybe it was just as much the absence of it – the way the jungle dampens the sounds of roosters, dogs, and engines. In the city, every mechanical and mammalian sound echoes in an empty echo of itself.

There are human sounds, too. People singing, practicing ikaros together, strumming a guitar. The occasional scream in the middle of the night which let you know someone was having a very difficult process. The occasional yell during the day – “agua!” – when water has run out in their tambo. One of the workers would turn on the pump, filling up the water tank at the top of the hill until water streamed out. Unless it was the dry season and the creek had dried up, which meant we had no water in the tambos at the top of the hill. No more cool showers to stave off the heat unless we walked down to Enrique’s house.

The heat, the humidity, and the itchy bug bites are what most people notice first; the bland food gets to them next. Bodily discomfort is often what pushes people to leave. Those unlucky enough to be chigger magnets spend the whole time scratching their pocked legs and seeking refuge inside their mosquito nets. The heat is most oppressive at communal lunchtime when our soupy, hot bodies consume steamy stew and sweat together under the kitchen’s tin roof. What a relief when a cool breeze blows before the rain! Sometimes, the nights are chilly. Fasting, and later eating without salt and oil, our bodies slow down. Constipation is ubiquitous. We drag our faint bodies weakly up the hill to eat or go to the maloka for class or ceremony. Sometimes in class, the exhaustion from fasting is evident; everyone lays listless on their mats barely able to raise their heads as the facilitators write new Shipibo words on the whiteboard. After a while, even unseasoned food entices. What a treat to tiptoe into the kitchen at 3 AM after a ceremony

for a warm bowl of oats and hot water – subtly sweet and satisfying after a night of puking. We can only dream of the mouthwatering addition of (salty! greasy!) peanut butter at the end of the diet.

Other pests and creatures remind us we are not alone. Cockroaches crawl on exposed toothbrushes. Dangerous tarantulas enter tambos. A porcupine liked to visit one tambo nightly to lick the wood in the shower. Bats pee and poop over our beds and heads; it is not uncommon to feel a trickle of liquid on an unexposed leg in the night or sweep droppings off of the top of mosquito nets on a daily basis. In one horrifying incident, a participant was shocked in the middle of a ceremony to experience animal excrement falling onto their face from the rafters. After the camp cat died from rat poisoning, the rat population exploded, chewing holes through suitcases with food inside and, in the absence of food, eating our dirty underwear. Enrique eventually brought a new kitten. But the kitten tormented the cook and ignited tension between the dieters and the staff when she locked him in a closet and the dieters who spoiled him protested.

Of course, the ceremonies themselves are sensory buffets. Arriving one by one, everyone quietly and solemnly takes their place on mats, formed in a circle around the maloka. They light their candles and prepare themselves for the ceremony in silence by blowing smoke and rubbing perfumed water, *Agua de Florida*, over themselves in what is called a *soplay*. The students wear *kushmas*, large tunics covered in Shipibo designs that are given to all the students on the course. Enrique enters with a plastic coca cola bottle filled with ayahuasca and sits in the middle of the room with the facilitators. After blessing it, he serves the ayahuasca, pointing his red headlamp in a circle around the room, inviting one participant after another up to drink. We each kneel or sit in front of him and take the cup he pours, occasionally whispering our preferred quantity,

before he blows smoke over the cup and hands us the bitter brew. After everyone has been served, we blow out the candles. The ceremonies range from visible in the moonlight to pitch dark. People heading to the bathroom or elsewhere try to walk lightly and use only a weak red light pointed downward to guide them. With skill, many learn to walk without a light, using their other senses instead. After waiting for the *mareación*, the effects of the ayahuasca, to come on, Enrique begins to sing. It continues for several hours. People vomit. They make other sounds too such as crying or burping, though they try to avoid talking and loud outbursts if possible. People sing as called to by the plants. On a particularly active night, many singers might join with separate tunes, in a cacophony that is jarring at first and invigorating for those accustomed to it. Those who want more ayahuasca can approach Enrique to ask for more – he hands you the whole bottle to take a swig.

Ceremonies smell like a mix of tobacco, acrid post-ayahuasca spit, sweet *palo santo*,²⁴ and vomit. One time early in my stay, deep in ceremony and joyous reverie, I found myself possessed by the urge to spread my own medicine throughout the space. I danced silently making my way in circles through the dark around the space, delicately feeling my feet over the floor to find my way without vision-disturbing light, dexterously balancing my weight to avoid any vision-disturbing creaks. I waved my pipe lovingly, concentrating on emanating light, joy, and protection. Halfway through my dance I realized that my other arm still carried my puke filled bucket. In trying to spread the sweet airs of Noya Rao I had also unwittingly been spreading the sickly-sweet aromas of my own vomit! I chuckled and made my way back to my mat, humbled.

Inkan Kena is a teaching place with structured classes, practices, and hierarchies. But it is also a shifting social collective of plants, animals, and humans tied together in sensorial as well

²⁴ A sacred wood burned throughout Latin America as incense for spiritual cleansing and protection.

as social connections. This subsection has painted a picture of some of those connections and how the shared sensorial landscape draws attention to the blurred boundaries between self and Others.

The Calling

On a recent phone call with Adela, one of the students from the course, she told me “I feel this call to the *selva*.”²⁵ She was thinking of going back to Inkan Kena, feeling a familiar perennial tug pulling her back to the jungle. Visitors to Inkan Kena often speak about a call. One night in the dark, early hours of the morning after ceremony, I whispered about it with another dieter. We pondered: How do people all around the world receive this call from Noya Rao? Does it travel through the air? Through the ground? Maybe, it travels from tree to tree to people’s hearts. Or maybe, as Adam proposed, it was a specific vibrational frequency from Noya Rao’s heart to those who could feel her. The calling to Inkan Kena is clearly influenced by the concept of the Christian calling and the related New Age calling. But unlike Weber’s (2002 [1905]) protestant calling to work and material success, this is a call to healing through rest. Furthermore, dieters experience the calling as a literal call – a message that emanates from the jungle, reaching out to them and drawing them near like a magnet. It is a beckoning, as well as a purpose.

In this section, I will talk about the roots of the calling. The pilgrims at my site are the inheritors of various legacies, including Christianity, New Age spirituality, and psychedelic culture. I will provide an overview of the historical set of circumstances that have led to a point in history when people want to hear the messages of our planty companions on this earth. The world that is being created at Inkan Kena builds on the lessons and discontents of these legacies. Although this section largely centers on American history, the changes I describe reverberate

²⁵ Spanish for jungle.

globally. Overall, I argue that the societal changes that led to the growth in New Age spirituality, psychedelic exploration, and charismatic Christianity reflect Western countercultural currents against rationalistic, dualistic worldviews. Fleeing the isolation and separation of dualism, Christians, New Agers, and psychonauts alike have looked to mysticism and monistic unity. In the case of charismatic Christians, they dip their toes in while still attempting to maintain boundaries. In the case of New Agers, they often jump off the deep end. However, this monism has led to justified accusations of simplistic romanticism and narcissistic solipsism. Charismatic Christians, too, find themselves in self-referential loops or caught on dualism. Furthermore, the societal, psychological, and ecological problems motivating these movements remain. I see the dieters at my field site as continuing the search for other ways to conceptualize boundaries and connect with Others.

1. Christianity and Talking to God (Friend and Therapist)

After returning from Inkan Kena, I read Luhrmann's (2012) book *When God Talks Back*. I was astounded by some of the similarities between how the evangelical Christians in her book talk about learning to hear God speak and how people at my field site talk about learning to hear the plants. Around the same time, I had a conversation with an evangelical Christian about my research. I told her it was about a shamanic course in the Peruvian Amazon where people learn to interact with plant spirits. She didn't know what shamanism was ("I think it has something to do with tribes") but when I said plant spirits, her eyes lit up. "Plants don't have spirit?!" she said, incredulously, and then, a moment later, "well, you've given me a whole lot to think about!" Many of the same societal forces that Luhrmann describes as pushing Americans toward a charismatic Christianity have pushed my interlocutors to the Amazon to interact with plant

spirits. Many of the cognitive tools for connecting with spiritual Others are similar. However, the difference between developing a personal relationship with God and a personal relationship with an Amazonian plant is significant. Accordingly, the worldviews and theories of Self and Otherhood that Christians and plant dieters develop through their respective practices diverge significantly. Here, I will present some Christian history along with the key points of Luhrmann's arguments to help frame the call dieters experience.

Beginning in the late 1800s and continuing through the 1950s, much of America and the world reflected a tendency toward secularism and rational religion. Hanegraaff (1996) argues that Western culture has three predominant ideal types for finding truth: reason (truth through rationality), faith (truth through God), and gnosis (truth through inner revelation). In the early to mid-1900s, reason was winning. Christians rejected fundamentalist beliefs in the supernatural events of the bible for rationalist modern perspectives which took the Bible figuratively. Growing doubt in Christianity combined with growing tolerance of other religions. The secularization hypothesis posited that as society evolved, traditional religions would become obsolete as science and multiculturalism turned religion into a cultural choice rather than an explanation of reality (Popper 2013 [1945]; Luhrmann 2012: 332). Anthropologists claimed an evolution of humanity from magical animism to polytheism to monotheism to secularism and the end of faith in favor of science (Frazer 2012 [1922]; Luhrmann 2012: 334).

While atheism, a unique artifact of modernity, has grown worldwide, religions have not continued their trend toward rationalism. As Luhrmann says, "history tells us that the liberal Christian God has failed" (2012: 342). Instead, since the 1960s, American Christianity has experienced a mystic revitalization which emphasizes the supernatural magic of an intimate, personally real God. Interestingly, as Luhrmann points out, this modern evangelical Christianity

rose out of the counterculture movement of the 60s. Hippies seeing visions of Jesus while tripping on acid in California and the Christians who feared for their souls paved the way for a new wave of Christianity that addressed disillusionment with a distant and stuffy God.

The personal God that Luhrmann describes is an intimate friend and 24/7 therapist. He is a God of inside jokes and daily chats about what clothes to wear. One woman recounts her regular “date nights with God” and talks about telling God off when she’s mad at him. Citing studies that show that people who believe in God are happier and kids who have imaginary friends are more well-adjusted, Luhrmann asserts that this God salves the increasing disconnection and loneliness of people in modern society. He requires but also provides constant attention; this constant attunement makes Him more real to the believer. Some people see God as the perfect therapist who is infallible, always available, and knows when you’re lying.

Prayer itself is like cognitive behavioral therapy for Luhrmann’s interlocutors – restructuring their thinking in multiple ways such as allowing them to see themselves from an outside perspective and practicing gratitude and reflection through prayer. Her argument is mostly about the practices that people engage in to hear God. She finds that hearing God is a skill that can be developed. People have to work hard, she says, to believe in and experience an immaterial God when the material evidence they experience and all of modern secular society are working against that belief. They engage in serious play, practicing “pretend” interactions with God until He becomes real to them. And it works for many people. Though many continue to express doubt, or at least self-consciousness when they talk about their experiences. For example, when talking with one man about the images he receives as messages from God, Luhrmann notes: “sometimes he saw something as if it were real in the world before him, although he knew it was not materially present. When he told me this, he hesitated. He knew it was weird” (2012: 168).

Another woman when asked about how God talks to her, shyly says “it’s just goofy, it sounds just off the wall” (80).

Luhrmann interprets her informants as conflicted at times by the tension between rational materialism and their belief in an immaterial God that they can experience as material. To bridge this divide, she says they create a third kind of epistemological commitment – not imaginary or fictional, not material, but more real than real. To make sense of the way that this God violates their rational understanding of minds as private, they cultivate a new theory of mind that breaks the rules in some ways – God can enter their minds, but otherwise, their minds are not porous to Others. They work hard not only to make him real but to keep Him separate from themselves – external to the self but internal to the mind. Still, sometimes they recognize that the God in their mind is hard to distinguish from themselves. For example, when talking about why God is a good therapist, one believer said:

Obviously I believe that God is real. But there are a lot of attributes of God that are true but unreachable by me. So the God I chose to create, I think that has a lot to do with who I am. I think that when you get to know God, you’re really getting to know yourself. It’s almost like pure transference. (Luhrmann 2012: 146)

Like Luhrmann’s believers, the pilgrims to my field site want to know themselves through knowing and interacting with spirit(s). They, too, seek magic in a rational world and solace from disconnected isolation. Inkan Kena provides similar practices with similar goals and outcomes of learning to listen to spirits. They talk about discernment in similar ways (Chapter 4) and come to similar conclusions about the uncertainty needed to deal with spirit (Chapter 5). They also psychotherapize spirit(s), turning them into friends and therapists. Evelyn calls Chulla Chaqui her boyfriend (reminiscent of date nights with God). However, presented with some of the same tensions around distinguishing between Self and Other and material and immaterial, they arrive at different theories of mind and different ontological stances.

Luhrmann does not presume to take an ontological stance herself, yet her work includes an ontological assumption that God is not material. The material experience of life, she says, contradicts the belief in God, thus making it hard work to believe. She does not entertain the possibility that God might indeed be material, or that lived experience might lead to a belief in God rather than the belief leading to the experiences. Nor does she interrogate agency beyond the human: what if people hear God because God wants to be heard?

Although my project is also about how people learn to listen to non-human Others, the fact that the non-human Others are Amazonian plants rather than the Christian God shifts how I perceive the project. Luhrmann's framework ultimately relies on an underlying dualism because God is conceived as immaterial and separate from the self, though her subjects clearly struggle with that divide. Plant diets further trouble the divides between material and immaterial, self and other. Plants are undoubtedly material, and they materially enter the bodies of dieters through digestion. Relatedly, the attunement exercises that they engage in also have more of a material bent. In comparison to Luhrmann's account of an exercise in which people attempted through prayer to access knowledge about someone (when those who were praying gravitated toward thoughts about yellow object, the subject of their prayers concluded that God knew her favorite color was yellow), at Inkan Kena we engaged in energy reading exercises in which we slowly approached or stepped away from people to perceive their energy field.

Instead of a selective porosity of mind, dieters experience an expansive porosity to Others which they must learn to manage. Rather than learning to hold an external God internally in their mind, they find their minds, bodies and selves open to many others and their skills at hearing applicable to hearing many non-human Others.

The people at Inkan Kena do not feel called to Christianity, and instead seek out an

alternative personal mysticism, more countercultural and more viscerally tied to concern for the ecological earth. They, too, feel called to let go and let God guide their purpose and direction. Someone at my field site told me about how once they were driving home from work and heard a voice telling them to quit their job and go to Bali. They did – like Luhrmann’s Christians who obeyed voices telling them to stay in a city or leave a job. The call to the jungle, like the charismatic Christian calling, is a call to listen, to heal, and to relinquish a bit of the Self or soften the boundaries of the Self. Amazonian plants, however, unlike the Christian God, in their material grounding in the Amazon, more tangibly draw dieters into experiences and relationships which challenge the boundedness of the Self and the relationship between material and immaterial.

2. New Age Spirituality and Neo-Shamanism

The shift in Christianity in the 1960s mirrored a larger cultural shift from taught knowledge to experiential knowledge, heralding the emergence of New Age spirituality (Possamaï 2001). Returning to Hanegraaff’s ideal types, he described it as a turn from reason to gnosis. Hanegraaff associates Western science with reason, institutional Christianity with faith, and New Age esotericism with gnosis. He sees gnostic esotericism as a consistent Western countercurrent to the prior two (1996: 515-517). New Age spirituality, in this vein, emerged as a culture criticism heir to 1960s counterculture. Rejecting dualism (God/humans, nature/humans, spirit/matter) and reductionism (the fragmentation of organic wholes into mechanistic small components), New Age thinking developed in opposition to what was perceived as dominant Western culture.

But what is the New Age? Scholars have struggled to define it due to its amorphous nature. At best it has been called a bricolage, mosaic, or mystico-esoteric nebulae of heterogenous

groups (Levin 2022; Rush 2001; Champion 1995 cited in Possamai 2001), at worst a vacuum cleaner senselessly sucking up and combining eclectic practices and beliefs, too expansive to remain meaningful as a label (Rush 2001; Chryssides 2007). There is certainly a marked vagueness and lack of consensus within the various elements that make up the New Age, barring it from being accurately labeled a social movement. Rather, it refers to a loose constellation, a hodge-podge of practices and beliefs, often borrowed from diverse cultural origins (Levin 2022). Hanegraaff calls the New Age movement “the cultic milieu having become conscious of itself” in the late 1970s, referring to Campbell’s (1972) theory about a cultic milieu defined in opposition to the sectarianism of traditional Christianity (1996:17). The cultic, opposed to sectarian, is individualistic, loosely structured, tolerant, inclusivist, transient, and ephemeral, with undefined boundaries, fluctuating belief systems, and rudimentary organization (Campbell 1972). Through another lens (Sebald 1984), the New Age has been analyzed as an iteration of romanticism which elevates fantasy and imagination over facts and objectivity.

Some of the characteristics and activities that fall under the umbrella of New Age include: 1) channeling entities (on a continuum with developing intuition), 2) a focus on healing and personal growth which a) identifies health as the natural state of the world and illness as a product of society, and b) aspires to spiritual evolution of the individual in the interest of society, including through transpersonal experiences, 3) grand unified theories that are purportedly supported by science, 4) neo-paganism that revitalizes pre-Christian worldviews and blames Christianity for ecological crisis based on a lost relationship with nature, and 5) the millenarian belief in the spiritual evolution of humanity and the coming or presence of a new era (Hanegraaff 1996).

In my view, the unifying feature of New Age spirituality and healing is an ontological stance

toward monism and collapsing boundaries. This stance or strategy leads to universalizing and individualizing tendencies in the pursuit of cosmic unity. For example, diverse cultural practices are interpreted as having the same underlying principles. Mind and body are conceived as constituting the same whole, leading to an emphasis on holistic medicine. Furthermore, mind and reality become synonymous, bridging the divide between subjective and objective. These ideas provide the foundation for the power of positive thinking to shift reality, as well as the belief that illness is self-created. Influential New Age psychiatrist Stanislav Grof (1998) asserted that experience is synonymous with reality. Other New Age thinkers, including Starhawk (1989) and Michael Harner (1990), anthropologist-turned-neo-shaman after drinking ayahuasca with Conibo (of the Shipibo-Conibo) people, made similar arguments that altered states of consciousness can be understood as objectively real.

In tension with the assertion that experience is the same as reality, but in support of the tendency toward monistic thinking, New Agers such as Ken Wilber have contended that the perception of separation is an illusion. All beings are incarnations of the same unified consciousness or universal mind.²⁶ We are all God. We only experience ourselves as separate. To heal the split of separation demands removing the illusion of separation. Accordingly, the goal of mystical experiences is to access true reality – cosmic unity with the universal mind, or God consciousness. Ken Keyes (1973) called it becoming one with the “vast Ocean of Oneness or the Ocean of Living Love,” and Chris Griscom described it thus: “when people go into soul experiences; they have no body. They are total light, they are everything, they are God; there is total oneness, there is no separation” (1993 quoted in Hanegraaff 1996: 296). The higher self is

²⁶ One example of this belief is known as the holographic paradigm, which New Age thinker Chris Griscom interprets as “the collapse of the three-dimensional spacetime continuum, and of all the conventional distinctions associated with it (such as subjective-objective, mind-matter, inner-outer, man-God, past-future” (Hanegraaff 1996: 149).

the part of the self that is aware of the true nature of reality and oneness and the conscious parts of the self might be able to interact with this higher self for guidance just as if it were any other divine entity.

Perceiving God within (and without) has at times led to concerns about solipsism. Shirley MacLaine's "I am God" proclamations are one example of New Age "self-religiosity" (Heelas 1996):

I was the only person alive in my universe [...] Therefore my New Year's resolution was to improve myself—which would in turn improve the world I lived in. [...] And while the others expressed their objections, I felt I was creating them to object, so that I could look at some things I hadn't resolved myself. In other words I was them. They were me [...] Would it also be true that I did nothing for others, everything for myself? (MacLaine 1987: 171-173).

MacLaine's interpretation of cosmic unity is not wholly accepted, as evidenced even in her story by the objections of others. Her perception of unity with others leads her to see others as herself, even though it could just as easily have led her to see herself as others. All too often, however, this self/other conflation has led to valid criticism of New Agers for self-centeredness. Although New Age individualism is equally tied to tolerance, it doesn't allow much space for changing your mind when confronted by different perspectives. For example, Sanaya Roman opined: "if you read something you don't like or don't agree with, don't accept it; it isn't true for you. It may be true for others, but you don't have to make it part of your reality" (quoted in Hanegraaff 1996: 233). Some New Age authors noticed the problem. David Spangler, for instance, acknowledged how while the New Age sought to right the wrongs of other paradigms in so doing it occasioned new vices. He contrasted the New Age to "the older, mechanistic paradigm, which appears to emphasize values of competition, exploitation, profit, centralization, and unlimited material growth at the expense of the environment" but noted that the mechanistic paradigm had its advantages and the New Age would have its shadows, already evident when

groups “in the name of wholeness trample on individual rights, or individuals who, in the name of self-realization and growth, conveniently forget their accountability to others” (1984:105).

Relatedly, New Age neo-shamans have been criticized heavily for homogenizing and appropriating indigenous cultures. Indigenous appropriation is central rather than collateral to the New Age movement, sometimes taking place with the blessing of indigenous people and sometimes in spite of their protests. Figures such as Carlos Castaneda, Mircea Eliade, Gordon Wasson, and Frank Waters were influential in fomenting interest in and idealization of indigenous cultures which exploded in the 1960s. As early as the 1940s, Waters was writing about Native Americans of the Southwest, proclaiming them prophets of a New Age and likening their practices to universal ancient beliefs and Asian mystical traditions that would be vindicated by modern science (Jenkins 2004: 138). Wasson’s (1957) reports of hallucinogenic mushrooms in Mexico piqued interest in psychedelics while presenting indigenous shamans as masters of the mind beyond the abilities of Western science. Eliade’s (2004 [1951]) anti-modernist writings favorably contrasted shamans to secular moderns living in a sad world where nature is dead. Castaneda (2008 [1968]) infamously stoked Western cravings for supernatural powers by portraying a shamanism that enabled actual feats such as flying. Jenkins (2004) argues that these authors and more were part of a larger cultural shift in the U.S. Whereas in early America, Native religions were demonized and Christianity glorified, a dramatic change occurred over time leading to the vilification of Christianity and modernity and praise of Native shamanism. White Americans flipped the script from wanting to eradicate Natives to wanting to emulate them. Concerned about the environment and dissatisfied with modernity, they turned to Native peoples who “offered a refuge from modernity” (Jenkins 2004: 139). Many associated Christianity with ecological crisis, such as in Lynn White’s 1967 speech which argued that “by

destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects” (quoted in Jenkins 2004: 165). What was a battle between good (Christianity) and evil (shamanism) became another battle between good and evil, simply with the positions inverted. Jenkins points out that heightened interest in native spirituality in the U.S. has coincided with periods of increased political and social dissatisfaction.

Although this turn reflects real and important critiques of modernity, proponents of neoshamanism often problematically oversimplify and homogenize indigenous beliefs. The presumed holism of native spirituality is what makes it attractive. The tendency of various authors has been to collapse boundaries, by either universalizing indigenous beliefs, drawing associations between Western science and indigenous culture, taking indigenous worldviews as proof of mind/body monism, or associating indigenous people with nature, arguing that Native people do not separate humans from animals. Some examples of the genesis of these beliefs are: 1) anthropologist Anthony Wallace’s claims, in 1958, that Iroquois had invented psychoanalytic dream theory, 2) sociologist Elizabeth Ferguson’s statements, in 1948, that “primitive medicine learned long, long ago what modern medicine is just rediscovering — that distinctions between the mind and the body are artificial, and 3) a Time Magazine article in 1958 which declared that Navajo medicine recognized no dichotomy between mind and body (Jenkins 2004: 149-150).

Because of this and other related concerns with commercialization, superficiality, and narcissism, the New Age, at least in name, has fallen largely out of favor. Since the 1990s, the term receded from popular use. Few people today resonate with the label. It doesn’t help that the prophecies of a new era failed to materialize. Possamai (2001) found that 71% of the people he interviewed under the auspices of his study on the New Age did not identify as New Age. Even famous New Age leaders are disappointed with how things have turned out. David Spangler

summarized the problems as follows, though he insists “the great majority of folk I have known have been very serious seekers after truth:”

The shadows of the New Age are alienation from the past in the name of the future; attachment to novelty for its own sake without a proper alignment to history and tradition; indiscriminateness and lack of discernment in the name of wholeness and communion, hence the failure to understand or respect the role of boundaries and limits; selfishness arising from misplaced self-development; a subtle surrender to powerlessness and irresponsibility in the name of waiting for the New Age to come rather than being an active creator of wholeness in one's own life; identifying the New Age primarily as an event rather than as a process; confusion of psychic phenomena with wisdom, of channeling with spirituality, and of the New Age perspective with ultimate truth.

Is there a valid spirituality within the New Age movement? I feel there is, and it is not always apparent on the surface. Here is where the glamor of channels, crystals, and past lives may hinder us; if the surface sparkles too much, we may fail to look beneath it, either in disgust or because we are too dazzled. Yet, if we are to gain the benefits that I feel the New Age has to offer to us, then we must go beneath this surface. We must learn to separate the real from the unreal, the meaningless from the meaningful. (quoted in Hanegraaff 1996: 360)

Even though, as New Age author Peter Russell said, “at least these people are putting their energies in the direction of furthering inner growth, rather than hunting whales, strip-mining, building arsenals of nuclear weapons or pursuing any other potentially life-destroying activity,” the New Age has troubling dark sides (quoted in Hanegraaff 1996: 361). However, just because the term has become unpopular, doesn’t mean the ideas have faded away. Instead, the New Age has in part become obsolete because of the extent to which New Age ideas have infiltrated mainstream Western religion and medicine (Levin 2022). The cultic milieu continues. New Age ideas influence both Westerners and Shipibo people in the ayahuasca community, as well as many others worldwide. With the growth of ayahuasca tourism, the ayahuasca community specifically, and plant medicine community more broadly, presents a powerful possible successor to the New Age movement. Within the ayahuasca community, the growing popularity of plant diets represents a deep engagement with local plants and Shipibo beliefs and practices. The facilitators at my site draw on a variety of New Ageic practices and theories, including

breathwork developed by Stanislav Grof. However, they are committed to the Shipibo tradition and their Shipibo and plant teachers. Given the universalizing and homogenizing tendencies of neo-shamans, the growth of this highly specific cross-cultural practice merits attention as a remedy to the previous missteps of the New Age.

3. Psychedelics from Counterculture to Therapy

Psychedelics, or entheogens, have been used for thousands of years by many cultures, from indigenous hunter-gatherer societies to ancient urban civilizations. They are so intertwined with human society that scholars go so far as to deem them a species norm, making Western culture the odd one out (George et al. 2022). The West is unusual in its underdevelopment and stigmatization of altered states of consciousness. One study showed that out of 500 cultures, 90 percent had institutionalized altered states of consciousness (Langlitz 2013: 100). Meanwhile, according to one of the most famous current advocates of psychedelics in the U.S., Rick Doblin, it's been 1600 years since Western culture last significantly incorporated psychedelics (MAPS 2016). His mission is to bring it back. He believes its countercultural flavor prevented it from gaining widespread integration into society the last time the West began to show an interest.

Western culture began to take an interest in psychedelics in the 1920s, leading to a boom in the 1950s and 1960s. The boom was associated with the anti-establishment counterculture movement. It also coincided with a major breakthrough in psychopharmacology – the discovery of serotonin's role in brain function and several pathologies including depression. The concurrent rise of the brain, the mystical, universalizing spirituality of the era, and countercultural politics led to a potent mix of pharmacospirituality and a “politics of ecstasy” (Langlitz 2013). The famously provocative statements of Timothy Leary, one of the movement's

most prominent leaders, encapsulate some of these beliefs. Leary preached a spiritual anarchist rebellion rooted in ecstatic, self-introspective, brain-based spiritual evolution and the abnegation of worldly politics. He famously said, “If you take the game of life seriously, if you take your nervous system seriously, if you take the energy process seriously, you must turn on, tune in, and drop out” (Leary 1965: 133). “Don’t vote. Don’t politic. Don’t petition,” he exhorted, advocating for a spiritual distance from and resistance to worldly politics (Leary 1965: 6). Dubbing LSD an acronym for “Let the State Disintegrate!” he said, “the choice is between being rebellious and being religious” (Greenfield 2006: 303).

Langlitz (2013) compares the religious ethics of Leary and his contemporaries to Weber’s mysticism, as opposed to asceticism. This world-denying mysticism struck at the heart of America’s capitalist protestant ethic. Langlitz quotes a countercultural activist saying: “Drug use signifies the total end of the Protestant ethic: screw work, we want to know ourselves. The goal is to free oneself from American society’s sick notion of work, success, reward, and status and to find oneself through one’s own discipline, hard work, and introspection” (quoted in Langlitz 2013: 35). While the ascetic values of the Protestant ethic vilify hedonistic drug use, mystics exalt contemplative ecstasy at the expense of materialistic goals. While for Weber’s calling, capitalism is pious, for the mystics, capitalism is an obstacle to spiritual evolution.²⁷

Leary saw the spiritual evolution he espoused as a “neurological revolution” (1983: 50): “The new bombs were neurological. You don’t blow up the Czar’s palace. You blow minds” (Greenfield 2006: 333). He tied the political problems of the age to psychology, and the solution was spiritual evolution on the individual level which would reverberate through the cosmos.

²⁷ Incidentally, some of Luhrmann’s Christians also renounce wealth and worldly pursuits, including a woman living with little, depending on God, who described her experience as “being like a prophet walking naked in the wilderness” (Luhrmann 2012: 305).

Displaying the characteristic universalizing monism we have tied to New Age spirituality, tinged with neurobiology, he pinned spirituality to consciousness expansion, located in the body and highly tailored to the individual (1965: 9). “Your brain is God!” he exclaimed (2001) echoing the occasional solipsism of New Age spirituality. In another case, he declared, “you must start your own religion. You’re God—but only you can discover and nurture your divinity” (1965: 7). Prefiguring and inspiring New Age perennialism, he saw his revolution as a cyclical, “recurrent transhistorical battle that every new generation had to fight all over again to recover the wisdom already possessed by Gautama Buddha two and a half millennia ago” (Langlitz 2013: 33).

Even though early studies suggested promising applications for mental health treatment, a number of factors led to waning interest in psychedelics in the late 60s. The U.S. classified LSD and psilocybin as Schedule I drugs, deeming them dangerous, liable to lead to addiction, and medically useless. Other countries, and other drugs, followed. Why? Political and moral panic over the counterculture certainly contributed, combined with changing regulatory policies and pharmaceutical companies losing interest.

After going underground for a few decades, psychedelic advocates began to gain ground in the 1990s. In 2006, the new psychedelic renaissance began with Griffith’s study of psilocybin, the first well designed placebo study in over four decades (Andrews and Wright 2022). The resurgent interest in psychedelics as psychotherapeutic tools has coincided with a psychopharmacological crisis. Amidst a burgeoning public mental health crisis, no significant new psychopharmaceutical development in decades, and dissatisfaction with the ability of antidepressants to bring side-effect free, long-term relief, psychiatric research has turned to psychedelics (Langlitz 2024). Psychedelics, in their holistic capacity to generate a variety of

results and their tendency to provoke spiritual experiences, are a radical departure from more traditional forms of psychotherapy. They resist mechanization and standardization. Because of this, scholars have called psychedelic medicine a paradigm shift portending a “new era in psychiatry” (Nutt 2019; Schenberg 2018; Andrews and Wright 2022; Langlitz 2024).

Despite claims of a new era, the studies assessing the therapeutic efficacy of psychedelics stubbornly treat them like other pharmaceuticals. Although most researchers believe that psychedelics are best used in combination with psychotherapy and most studies incorporate some type of psychotherapy, the studies themselves only interrogate the efficacy of the drug. So, there has been little effort to investigate the synergy between psychotherapy and psychedelics (Langlitz 2024). In fact, many researchers seem to think the features of the therapy is not important so much as that there is some. They ultimately ascribe the efficacy of the treatment to the drug or to the self, assisted by the drug (Langlitz and Gearin 2024).

In general, clinicians appear to interpret psychedelic treatment in terms familiar to Western psychotherapy focused on the self or psychopharmacology focused on the brain (Hendy 2022). In the first model, the chemical opens up an experience within the self that unlocks transformation. In the second, the chemical functions neurobiologically on the brain regardless of the subjective experience of the patient. In both, the mechanism lies in the self, neurochemically or psychologically. For example, psychedelic therapists maintain: “it’s not doing anything except releasing that which is within us” and “the most important thing about psychedelic drugs or plants is that they don’t give you the experience. The experience comes from inside yourself” (Hendy 2022: 9, 1). Even though patients might have spiritual experiences, clinicians do not typically see it as their role to foster that. They prioritize supportive, neutral, self-oriented environments where patients can create their own meaning. If patients mention spirits, therapists

avoid judgment but ultimately steer the patient toward psychological problems (Langlitz and Gearin 2024). In disavowing the role of meaning maker or moral arbiter, they often do not account for the meaning that might slip in. The framing they employ subtly suggests to patients that illness comes from inside the self rather than outside (in the form of spirits). Even small choices such as music can have an impact. Because of the nature of psychedelics, a therapeutic encounter can easily turn to spiritual evolution or philosophical quest. Langlitz and Gearin (2024) suggest that practitioners should recognize the ethical and metaphysical entailments of psychedelic facilitation.

Many psychedelic aficionados today, like Leary, see psychedelics as tools for “liberation from the cultural self” (Leary 1965). This point was recently brought home to me when I told Rick Doblin about my research. He seemed wary of the way that ayahuasca at my field site seems to facilitate entrance into a specifically cultural worldview, rather than individualistic and universalistic liberation. I would argue, however, that treating psychedelics as acultural tools is in itself cultural and normative rather than neutral.

Unlike Western psychotherapists, Ayahuasca shamans “conflate normative and therapeutic goals openly and deliberately. They administer ayahuasca for the purpose of living a simultaneously beautiful, healthy, and righteous life” (Langlitz and Gearin 2024: 4). Ayahuasca has been found to be efficacious for many afflictions, most notably depression and addiction (Labate and Cavnar 2014b). In trying to understand the mechanism behind this efficacy, scholars have proposed four, interconnected, models – biochemical, physiological, psychological, and transcendental (Winkelman 2014; Prickett and Liester 2014). The biochemical explanation revolves around ayahuasca’s action on dopamine receptors whereas the physiological focuses on neuroplasticity and ayahuasca’s capacity to rewire the brain. Psychologically, ayahuasca works

through its action on the self, aiding the patient's work through memories, revelations, trauma, and repressed emotions. Lastly, the transcendental is the least investigated in academic studies. The transcendental model proposes that improvement occurs through a mystical experience which changes the person's belief system, worldviews, and personal values. This dissertation contributes to this last, understudied category. However, all of these mechanisms focus on the change in the patient. They do not examine the agency of the substances or plants. Nor do they account for the belief that the spiritual work undertaken in the world of ayahuasca has an impact on the world outside of the individual, as is commonly believed by ayahuasca practitioners. When I spoke with a psychologist who conducts ayahuasca research, he expressed doubt about how to apply the Western psychological lens to really understand what is happening with ayahuasca retreats. For him, Noya Rao and the other diet plants were an important part of his personal spiritual experience. We wondered together to what extent the substance ayahuasca could be isolated from the social, cultural, and spiritual context – it seemed to both of us that the combination of the factors, as well as the presence and guidance of the plants, facilitated positive transformation in a way that could not be attributed solely to ayahuasca as a substance. Thus far, most of the studies on ayahuasca as a mental health treatment take the existing Western psychological and psychotherapeutic lenses of chemical, self, or both, following Rose's (2003) "neurochemical selves."

This is not to say that psychedelic scientists are not spiritual. As in the example of a research psychologist I spoke to, many researchers are spiritual themselves. Langlitz (2013) has described the spirituality common to this context as biomysticism or mystic materialism. Mystic materialism is a monistic framework which identifies spiritual transcendence with biological materiality. Langlitz's biomysticism aligns very well with the pharmacospirituality of the 60s

and the monistic mysticism of the New Age, which despite its opposition to the reductionism of Western biomedicine, in turn fits very well with Rose's (2003) notion of the neurochemical self. All of these trends cluster around a monistic materialist perspective equating the brain with the mind and the self and the biological with spiritual transcendence. Modern psychedelic researchers and ayahuasca tourists carry the legacies of the hippies of the 60s and the New Agers of the 80s and 90s.

The Western consensus around defining the psychedelic experience is telling. Most accounts of the subjective experience of psychedelics organize them into three kinds: visions, and good or bad ego dissolution. What Aldous Huxley (2009 [1954]) called heaven, hell, and visions has elsewhere been explained as oceanic boundlessness, dread of ego dissolution, and visionary restructuralization (Dittrich 1998). The focus on vision reflects the Western preoccupation with visionary stimuli and contrasts with the teachings at my field site, where visions are downplayed, even at times perceived as distractions. Framing the psychedelic experience as blissful or scary ego dissolution reflects Western concerns with the boundaries of the self and its violation. It makes sense, then, that those who encounter psychedelics often either pursue a monistic mysticism which breaks down barriers or otherwise reframe the boundaries of the self (such as through a continuing dualism with caveats such as in the case of Luhrmann's Christians and their modified theory of the private mind). The West has much to learn about Otherhood given our paucity of entheogenic history.

The 1960s represent a pivotal historic moment which illuminates the connections between the three cultural spheres of this chapter – charismatic Christianity, the New Age, and psychedelic science and spirituality. They all trace a connection back to hippies finding God and dissolving boundaries (between self/other, gods/humans, mind/body) through mystical

experiences, sometimes under the influence of psychedelics. They each reflect discontent and feelings of isolation attributed to modernity, a turn to mysticism, self-knowledge, and magic, and a psychotherapization of religion. I found all these elements at Inkan Kena. However, in subsequent chapters I will argue that the kinds of selves and the ontological stance that dieters develop presents a novel iteration of these trends since neither dualistic, nor modified dualistic, nor monistic approaches will suffice to make sense of their experiences of merging with Amazonian plants. Neither dissolving into cosmic unity nor mechanistically dividing the world, dieters must straddle the boundaries. Similarly, the call dieters experience is related to but distinct from the Christian calling, the New Age calling, and Leary's anti-Weberian psychedelic calling. Furthermore, the approach to ayahuasca at Inkan Kena has roots in Western psychedelic therapy and New Age spirituality but reflects a dissatisfaction with over-medicalized and over-universalized models alike.

The Pilgrims

Many of the facilitators and other dieters who are most committed to Noya Rao and Inkan Kena displayed similarities in the life stories they related to me. They commonly report feeling extremely sensitive as children. Misunderstood, this sensitivity combined with childhood trauma led them to illness and maladaptive behaviors in young adulthood. Recognizing that something was wrong, and dissatisfied with Western medical solutions, they turned to plants and alternative medicines which eventually led them to ayahuasca and/or the jungle. Many report a eureka moment, often during their first ayahuasca ceremony or near to it, in which they received a message from Noya Rao or ayahuasca notifying them that this is their path, they are home, or they need to go to the jungle. They are particularly attracted to the Shipibo ikaros. Many have

extensive travel experience and live a nomadic lifestyle before and after choosing the path of an ayahuasca medicine worker. They often live off savings and sporadic income through healing work. In this section, I introduce some of the foreigners/Westerners at my site, occasionally highlighting the aspects of their accounts related to the calling.

Claire is 45 or 46 (“I’m not sure,” she said) and she is from different places, including Canada and Africa. During her unconventional upbringing, traveling in different countries, she witnessed significant “intergenerational trauma” in her family. From a young age, she was very introspective. Although she “didn’t call it healing at that point, it’s basically what it was.” From the time she was 17, she was living on her own. She became homeless and struggled with drug addiction. Although she always sought out plants and psychedelics for healing, she said “I was also so fucked up that I just kind of was like, ah! it’s too hard. Give me more drugs!” After ten years of drugs and putting herself through university she embarked on a healing journey of 18-20 years of full-time intensive healing work “like it was my full-time job.” She did 12-step groups and tried medication, CBT, and somatics, and she did heal.

Unlike many others, she did not come to the jungle for healing, nor did she come for ayahuasca. She came because she was enticed by what she read about the Shipibo – that they were very auditory. She saw *kene*, the distinctive Shipibo designs said to represent ayahuasca visions, and heard the *ikaros* and was immediately enamored. After all her hard work, there was still a missing piece for her to live in power and understand who or what she was and what she was meant to do; she thought, “These people can tell me that missing piece.” “I have this strange skill set,” she told me, “To me, it felt like a skill set. But to everyone around me, especially in a Western culture, it seemed like a weakness or like I was overly sensitive.” She described a photographic kind of auditory memory that enabled her to go back and count how many times a

ball was dropped a moment ago. She sensed her abilities and life experiences fit together in some way that she couldn't yet see.

Claire is one of the most serious dieters I've met. She was a student at the second course I attended, and, by the end of my stay, was training to become a facilitator. During her diets, she often observed complete silence and followed the strictest possible food restrictions. I watched her shrink from 95 to 70 pounds; her safety concerns with the weight loss were overshadowed by her trust in the plants and herself. She nearly always sat perfectly straight in and out of ceremony, portraying consummate control. Her calling, she believed, was to be a "*guerrera*," a "warrior." In one of her early ayahuasca ceremonies, she received what she perceived to be a call, "which was we need people who are not afraid of the darkness [...] and who are prepared to die for this if necessary." And she felt a sense of recognition: "I felt like I have always been waiting for this. And I have always known this, like something in me has always known this, and known it completely." In ceremony, she observed a battle between good and evil, even though she had always been a moral relativist. Her experience illuminated her path:

I got to another sort of understanding that was, like, there's going to be a time of just pure darkness, where it seems like the light is gone, there will be no world. [...] Everything seems like it is gone. And we need people who can hold the song on their tongue, not be afraid of the darkness, not lose faith, and when the moment is right, open their mouth, and have the song come out and the world will be reborn. [...] It was like, whoa, this feels like a very important mission. I mean, I'm happy to devote my life to this. And it was very vague, right, like, and who are willing to die for this...die for what? I don't know. What does that mean? But it just, I was like, yes, this is the thing! This is what my skill set is for.

She sold her stuff and returned to Peru, hoping to stay indefinitely. However, starting to diet at another ayahuasca center with another shaman, she soon had a spiritually confounding experience, provoking trust issues. When she arrived for the course, she was mistrusting. Almost a year later, however, she trusted Enrique "95%" and felt "what Enrique has done here is really powerful and wise in ways that I'm just starting to grasp." She was referring to the social and

interpersonal features of Inkan Kena diets, unlike most other diets offered to foreigners by Shipibo healers.

Jade, an indigenous woman from Las Vegas, is 28 years old. She works as a massage therapist, yoga teacher, and jewelry maker. She was one of the facilitators-in-training, although she ended up not continuing after friction with the other facilitators. Jade's childhood was traumatic; her mother died from drug addiction and her father was absent or abusive. In her words, "I come from a history of craziness, as most people in this realm do." Now, her posture and her words exude strength and confidence. She speaks eloquently with slow, even force – no filler words. Another dieter once told me that Jade was wise beyond her years.

She took the course in 2019, where she first drank ayahuasca. Even though she was steeped in psychedelic culture and knew many ayahuasca aficionados in the states, she hadn't partaken because: "Most people I know who have tried Ayahuasca have not taken the leap of discomfort to go to her, but instead brought her to them. [...] But to me, it always felt impure. I should meet the entities and the beings in the realm of which they come from, so they don't have to travel so far." She had also heard about dieting, but didn't yet take it seriously:

Dieting can be quite hip amongst certain crowds. And those tend to be the crowds that I run around with. And so I had awareness of it at parties, which now I think is pretty funny. We'd be at parties, and there'd be this sweet girl there with her little jar of rosemary extract, telling everyone how she's dieting rosemary. And so, I don't think I had like a clear perception of the seriousness of the diet. But that it was something that was becoming mainstream. So, I had a little bit of a clue, that it was bringing the plant entity into your being so that you are more than yourself.

After a breakup, looking for what to do next, she stumbled across the Ayahuasca Foundation randomly online. Seeing Enrique's face in a photo, she knew she was meant to work with him.

Before drinking ayahuasca, she understood ayahuasca would open worlds to other entities and cause a natural purge and that because "it was from an indigenous culture, it would not be beautiful or easy." Through the purge, we rid ourselves of the plastics and metals that have

infiltrated our bodies in our Western societies. The plants help us purge in a way we can understand, she added, but “one day, we won't need to purge, we will be able to see the metal within our not-so-solid being and just pull it out.” Solidity is an illusion, even scientifically, but “I’ve been imprinted by the people trying to take my medicine that it is[n’t].”

I asked her about her mission, the perspective of the plants, and her perspective as an indigenous person. Jade told me that the plants want their medicine spread, but not abused. While “they don't really want everyone to run around calling themselves shamans, they [do] want the medicine spread, because they believe in us, I feel they believe that if they touch the right people's hearts, the medicine will be spread in the right way.” She saw part of her job as helping people reclaim their own ancestry and renounce the scourge of whiteness:

True people are all indigenous people, regardless of their skin color, and the entity that we have labeled and become known as the white man is not a white man. It is an entity that is here to dissolve people of their connections so that they don't have their power. [...] We were all indigenous at one point before this white man stepped in who wants to devour. If you think of the color white, it's encompassing of all colors – who wants to devour all of these colors and make it into nothing, so that people can't call on their guides. They can't call on their gods, their land. [...] Part of my work here is to help awaken all of the people who call themselves white, so that they can start reclaiming themselves and find where their origin actually is. To reawaken their gods. Because when we reawaken the land, the white man will die.

Reed, 35, is from South Africa. He is one of the facilitators who has worked with Enrique the longest and is one of the most important figures in the creation of the course. For someone of almost legendary reputation at Inkan Kena, he is surprisingly down to earth and soft-spoken. Quietly bubbly and playful, he is prone to rambling metaphysical expositions that hop from pop-culture references to esotericism. He worked for the Ayahuasca Foundation full-time from 2011 to 2019 and was facilitating again for them in 2022 when we met. Since 2019, he has spent his time traveling (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Europe, South Africa) and performing ayahuasca ceremonies, clarity breathwork, intuitive readings, and energy psychology.

As a teenager, Reed was curious about psychedelics and began to experiment at 16. He was interested in meditation, music, and holding transformational space for people from an early age. After he graduated high school, he went to Peru at 18 for his first ayahuasca ceremony.

Before the course, he didn't know about diets, but after the course (only six weeks at the time instead of eight), he was hooked; he stayed and dieted for a couple of months before beginning to work. He began dieting with Enrique even before Enrique had discovered and dieted Noya Rao, witnessing how Enrique's practices changed over time. He told me about the first time he saw the tree:

[Enrique] took me there, right? And he showed me. And he was like, he said, "The diet is one year and you can only eat rice." And I was like, well, I'm never gonna do that. I'm not gonna eat rice for a year. So that's that. And then like, I don't know, a week later, he gave it to me.

The Noya Rao diet blew his mind. It was incomparable to his previous diets. He thought it was a "karmic thing" – that he had a previous connection to the plant, such as from another life. Whether she had chosen him or vice versa, he didn't know, but the resonance was immediate and profound. She "literally kicked out" a bunch of his other previous diets, removing *ayahuma* and *catahua*²⁸ from his body/soul, declaring "This is mine. Nobody come near." For ten years, he thought his Chiric Sanango diet, too, didn't exist anymore, because he didn't see the spirit for ten years. From that point on, 90% of his diets, about four a year, were with Noya Rao. Similarly, he felt that Noya Rao chose Enrique specifically to disseminate her message and that his generosity in sharing her was unparalleled. For him, Noya Rao's light was evidence that she contained her own sunlight, and by extension the energy of Jesus, or God energy incarnate (or should I say implantate?).

²⁸ Two diet plants known for being very challenging, powerful, and laden with *shitana* (dark energy). They are not commonly dieted at Inkan Kena at this time.

When I asked him about his resonance with the Shipibo tradition, he gushed that the *ikaros* were a fluid conversation with the plants in real-time, allowing a symbiotic relationship between plants and people: “People need plants, obviously, but the plants also need people to direct the healing.” He contrasted the Shipibo *ikaro* style of improvisation to a famous ayahuasca retreat in Costa Rica where shamans queue a playlist. He was concerned about the spiritual safety of a playlist: “It just boggles my mind because like number one – safety. Like, what do you do if a whole legion of demons enter this room? You put on a different song? You know, you put on like Beyoncé and see if they're going to Beyoncé out of there?” He told me that oftentimes people perceive that with the Shipibo *ikaros*, “the medicine gets deeper into them, and more like medical, it's more like surgical, it's going in there. [...] And people will often comment that that's initially uncomfortable because they're used to the medicine just kind of being on a more surface level.” Although ayahuasca has her own spirit and is her own doctor, the songs matter. Other traditions, often in Spanish, can feel more superficial – beautiful and heart-opening, but not digging and extracting as deeply. That is jarring for visitors at first; their first ceremony they complain, “Oh, my god, I wish the singers would just shut up.” But even after a weekend, the *ikaros* work on them, removing a “layer of truth” and they start to love it.

Adam is a 34-year-old photographer and ayahuasca worker from Canada. He was the main facilitator on my first course and the reason I began to take Noya Rao seriously. He is the first white man with dreadlocks I have met who approaches the world and everyone around him so kindly, humbly, and openly that it melts political divides and preconceptions. He began his ayahuasca journey in Canada in 2012 to tackle depression. Since then, he has sat with ayahuasca some 300 times, and since 2015 when he first took the Ayahuasca Foundation course, visited Peru for a couple of months annually. When he first drank ayahuasca, ayahuasca told him, “I’ve

been calling you here.” He also felt it was telling him that he would learn more if he went to Peru to work more with it. He thought maybe the calling was “a frequency that these plants are working with that can connect with certain people more than others. And so, they’re bringing those people to them in order to more firmly ground that frequency in their being and then go back home, throughout the world and affect change whether they know it or not.” Noya Rao, he theorized, has a frequency. When people activate that particular frequency in their hearts, she could “unbeknownst to our conscious experience, call us from a long distance to come to a place where this frequency is very strong.” This further grounding in the frequency of those already inclined is “aligned with the greater intentions of this plant.” When I asked him what the plant’s intentions are, he likened the frequency to other evolutionary strategies of survival. Additionally, “her consciousness, or her being, seems to hold the belief, in my experience, that we as human beings are capable of living in a completely different way than we are, [which] would facilitate a healthier, healthier state of being for the entire Earth.” While he believed that the plants do call white people directly, he didn’t see that as a justification to ignore seeking permission or proper training from indigenous people. He believed he had an obligation, “on the human side” to carry the medicine in ways that are culturally sensitive and recognize the rootedness of colonialism.

Evelyn just turned 50 in 2024, but she doesn’t look it. She is from the Philippines but has lived most of her adult life in the U.S. An explosive, tiny package of exuberant energy, Evelyn was at camp for half of the time I was there, and her presence shifts the entire place. She knows everyone and everyone knows her. Her positivity is infectious and, for some, overwhelming. “Life is delicious!” she reminds us with a big smile. She often narrates the tale of the time she hurt her leg practicing yoga; she recovered so quickly and miraculously, it shocked the doctors. She is both generous and demanding – massaging my stomach when I was ill and snapping at me

when I changed our dinner plans. At restaurants, she asks me to translate her off-order requests. At stores, she buys one of everything, with custom modifications. After suffering physical abuse as a child which left her deaf in one year and multiple near-death experiences as a child and young adult, she has carved a remarkable life for herself, working in New York and abroad as a yoga teacher and sound healer. She found ayahuasca in 2003. Since 2007, she has traveled to Peru twice a year to diet for a couple of weeks each time. After around 150 ceremonies and many diets, she finally found Noya Rao which revolutionized her journey. She experienced her first exorcism in ceremony and Noya Rao told her:

You're going to the jungle and you're going to diet with me. [...] And then the plants told me you're gonna get rid of your apartment and you're gonna let go of New York and you're going to the jungle. And then you're gonna diet me, then they called me. Yeah, I didn't plan the course. I didn't even know that exists. I was only going to be there dieting Noya Rao, and then all of a sudden, oh, we have this eight-week course.

After completing the course in 2021 (unofficially since she arranged her participation through Enrique, rather than the Ayahuasca Foundation) she has returned multiple times. She asked Noya Rao to guide her to where she can be of service to others. She has been traveling since, listening to Noya Rao and bouncing from place to place as her healing power is needed – such as channeling the plants and singing ikaros to a friend who was dying of cancer.

Adela is a 38-year-old woman from the Peruvian Andes who has lived the second half of her life in the U.S. After working for years in tech start-ups in New York, she recently decided to leave her job to travel, learn yoga, practice art, and focus on healing herself. Suffering from anxiety and depression since a series of events precipitated by Covid-19, including the death of her father and the illness of her mother, she turned to acupuncture and various therapies, but eschewed anti-depressants. Although she grew up hearing about ayahuasca, she only began to consider it amid her mental health crisis. Her body led her to the jungle:

I felt like I've been in a deep, dark hole underneath the earth. [...] And I was just trying to

get out of it. And I was just so exhausted, but I just needed to get out. [...] I decided to listen to what my body would say. Just like that. And one of the things that my body always told me since I was very little, it was to come to Iquitos.

Adela had never experienced psychedelics prior to arriving at Inkan Kena, which she chose after researching Carlos, sensing she could trust him. She was the first Peruvian to do the course. Carlos seemed excited, Enrique somewhat apprehensive. Very shortly after her arrival, it became clear that she would act differently from the other students. She often sat with the staff at mealtimes, warmly engaging them in conversation and encouraging their inclusion in events at camp. She loved the sounds of the jungle but was frightened of walking to her tambo at night, so she moved into Enrique's house with the cleaning ladies. Burning massive quantities of palo santo for protection, she was frightened when one evening the smoke swirled unexpectedly, indicating a spirit's presence. Chulla Chaqui, one of the diet plants known for being a trickster, repeatedly tried to entreat her. Fearful, she pleaded him to go away. Participating in her first ayahuasca ceremony, she started out with a small amount because she knew she was sensitive to substances. Even though the ayahuasca tasted like chocolate to her, the experience was too overwhelming. She was unusually perceptive and open; she saw inside everyone around her and clung to Peter for protection. After that, she remained at camp for the entire course but never participated in another ayahuasca ceremony, often hanging out with me instead on nights when I didn't participate.

Ida and Peter are a couple – each 30 years old – from Denmark. They have been working at Inkan Kena for the past three (Ida) and four (Peter) years. They were the facilitators presiding for two of the four courses I observed, and are also the strictest of any of the facilitators in my experience, except maybe Dan. Both, like Claire, are deadly serious about the diets. I would trust the clarity of their diet connections more than anybody. Ida is a powerfully eloquent teacher – I found that her quotes were the ones I gravitated toward as I prepared this dissertation, peppered

with Peter's powerful anecdotes and silly jokes. Her wisdom guided me through some difficult times. Peter, who reminds me of a tall, gentle, forest-dwelling spirit, impressed me with his command of the Ikaros and his openness and self-aware reflection in conflict.

Ida had the opportunity to travel a lot when she was a child, in part because of her father, a geologist. At 11, she attended a children's event designed to promote world peace and had the formative experience of participating in exercises designed to teach children about cycles of revenge and conflict resolution. Struggling to integrate her experiences in places such as Ghana with the sheltered world of Denmark and feeling isolated from her peers, she went through a rebellious stage in her teens, filled with drugs, clubs, and punk activism. After beginning to suffer from severe psoriasis and being told it would be a lifelong burden, she decided to change her lifestyle in her early 20s.

Leaving behind drugs, she started working with plants through natural pharmacies. Connecting with nature and plants, she also learned about shamanism and plant communication in Scandinavia. She experienced her first ayahuasca ceremony while traveling in India. Although she didn't experience any visionary effects of the medicine, she received a strong message: "I just got told in a very strict voice, 'you come to where we grow! If you want anything to do with this, you have to go where the plants have spirit. Like who do you think you are that you're looking this energy here?'" Although she had been interested in plant communication, this was the first time she received "direct voiced communication." She took the message seriously and went to Brazil, then attended a retreat held by Wilma.

After working for several years with ayahuasca in Portugal with other Ayahuasca Foundation facilitators, she took the course in 2019. At the time of the interview, she had worked on seven courses. Ida had always wanted to be of service to others. The Ayahuasca Foundation gave her

the opportunity to “respond to an invitation by something greater and grander than myself [...] that something is not just coming from within me.” She threw herself into it and gave it her all for the first time in her life; she gave up everything and it all worked out with divine serendipity. In retrospect, she felt that she already knew Noya Rao before meeting her and that the meeting was a recognition of what had been missing in her life. Along the path, she felt herself changing without any big process – her limiting patterns “without any effort falling away.” She also found the perfect teachers in Enrique and Wilma. The ikaros felt more intimate than she had experienced in Brazil. Of Wilma she said, “I remember when she started soplaying, and I was like, something's happening inside my body. And it's not medicine²⁹ yet. What's happening? And then when she started to sing, it's the songs, and I can feel them inside my body. I'd never [felt] that before.” In Enrique she sees a special combination of power and love that “just made [her] stop looking.”

Peter wanted to come to Peru to study since he was 22, after drinking ayahuasca for the first time in Canada. He was traveling, living on his bicycle when a woman complimented him on the prayer flags on his bike. The book, *One River*³⁰, fell out of his bag. She liked that, too. When she asked him where he was staying and learned he didn't have any plans, she invited him to stay at her son's house. The son turned out to be a medicinal plant guru, who helped him explore mushrooms and other plants. He then moved into a psytrance collective in Copenhagen for several years, where he began holding DMT³¹ ayahuasca-analogue ceremonies. He loved holding space and helping people, but he felt the spirit of the medicine was missing since the chemical was removed from the plant. He knew from his psychedelic experiences that he wanted to work

²⁹ Here medicine refers to the ayahuasca, and specifically its effects.

³⁰ A book about the Amazon written by Wade Davis, a famous ethnobotanist and one of the pupils of Richard Evan Schultes, the man who first scientifically described ayahuasca.

³¹ A powerful psychedelic which is considered the main psychoactive chemical component of ayahuasca.

with plants in some capacity. After a challenging ceremony in which a participant wanted to kill himself, Peter realized he needed proper training if he aimed to continue holding space.

He attended the course in 2018 because he wanted to diet. He had always struggled with uncertainty and suicidal thoughts laced with uncertainty. In one of his ceremonies, he encountered Death who forced him to decide to stay or leave. Once he decided to stay, he had to fight for life. Although Peter didn't feel that he had been directly called, he felt a strong sense of homecoming, like he was supposed to be here (at Inkan Kena). All of his life experiences – his confusion and strong intuitions, especially around suffering – suddenly made sense as preparations for this role. He recalled feeling: “we [the facilitators] have always been doing this. We're just doing it again in this way. But we've always been doing this. [...] Doing the plant work, bringing them in, being a pathway to the plant spirits.”

Liora, 30, grew up in New Jersey and Israel. She is a professional musician, medicine ceremony facilitator, and provider of one-on-one mentorship and shamanic healing with a somatic-oriented trauma-informed approach. One of the most talented singers in ceremony, I am always blessed to hear her other-worldly ikaro melodies. She began working with ayahuasca eight years ago seeking help for “what the West calls panic disorder,” but what she perceives as more spiritual and energetic in origin. Her panic attacks were sometimes supernatural – she would leave her body and travel to different realms, but she didn't know how to control it. Anti-depressant medications such as SSRIs, she felt, were a Band-Aid. In her first ayahuasca ceremony, she received profound insights about her disorder and decided to become a student of the medicine.

The first time Noya Rao came to her in ceremony was life-changing: “Noya Rao came to me and basically informed me that I had signed a contract with her a long time ago and that she was

my teacher. And she would be teaching me and guiding me for the rest of my life and then imbued her consciousness into my cells. It was like a DNA cellular upgrade; it was very painful.” Before she dieted Noya Rao, she felt the diet enter her energetic field, via contact with someone else who had dieted Noya Rao. She immediately was aware of a sensation of co-existing with another being, though it was confusing: “It was like this confusing process where I would be like cutting an apple or cooking and I’m not alone.” When she finally dieted Noya Rao she felt it was a finishing of what had already begun. Through the diet, she felt “the gates of [her] dharma opened” to reveal her soul’s mission. It was a choice not to choose, but to surrender to a higher power (“the divine or to God, whatever it wants to be called”). Anyone called to diet, she said, is the “receiver or an antenna of consciousness” that will come through in whatever they do to help “bring the world from a state of suffering and duality into a state of freedom of liberation.”

Liora believed that the calling was to work toward harmonious relating and to fulfill a planty agenda to spread their consciousness. She believes that primordial beings: “seeded the consciousness and hid them inside the plants that are waiting or have been waiting for the appropriate time for the awakening of the planet.” Plants, thus, “want to be dieted at certain times. [...] There are specific moments in our evolution for certain intelligences and certain consciousnesses to seed onto the planet” to fulfill a “benevolent agenda to liberate life and to liberate creation into its natural border and into its harmonious relating.” Plants have consciousness, just like all living things. The agenda of the plants is to “permeate, pollinate, to expand itself, all consciousness wants to expand.” Accordingly, they want to diet us and pollinate through us. Although she didn’t want to label plants as benevolent or malevolent, she recognized that some carried energies for different purposes. Noya Rao specifically wants “a

restoration of divine expression,” in which every expression of life is wholly an expression of its unique self. However, it is a collective process. When one of her co-facilitators diets Noya Rao, it amplifies the diets of the others in a collective dieting process. Furthermore, she sees the works they are doing as potentiating healing beyond the individuals being worked on, reverberating to the entire planet. She has worked on collective trauma within families and even governments.

In summary, many of these dieters perceive their work with the plants as fitting into a planetary mission, marrying the will of the plants and/or God with their specific sensitivities and abilities. Through their own healing journeys and travels as they searched for a cure for their ailments, they encountered ayahuasca, the Shipibo, and/or Noya Rao and felt some connection reminiscent of coming home or being called. Like Luhrmann’s Christians, they emphasize surrendering to and learning to attune to the will of the divine. Mirroring New Age tenets, they might portend a coming moment of planetary awakening or be interested in the spiritual evolution or salvation of humanity (Liora, Adam, Claire). They also draw on diverse traditions from Western science (Jade, Adam) to Indian religions (Reed), but they also emphasize the specificity, locality, and respect of committing to these particular plants and their Shipibo teachers (Jade, Reed, Adam, Claire, Ida). In their pursuit of the universal, they find the resonance of the particular. Talking to plants and committing to a specific shamanic lineage (the Lopez-Mahua lineage with Enrique and Wilma) is particularly important to them. Furthermore, they are actively aware of the need to manage the tension between difference and similarity as they draw connections without erasing boundaries. Liora’s harmonious relating and Jade’s anti-whiteness endorse self-expression in the interest of the ecological whole.

Chapter 2 – [Meeting] We Meet at the Wound: Histories of Hurt and Healing

Introduction

“We meet at the wound.” The words formed in my thoughts as visions of people and plants stretching toward each other twirled inside and outside of me. Under the psychoactive influence of ayahuasca and guided by lessons from plant spirits and human facilitators, all of my mental, emotive, and sensory faculties sang with the realization that planted itself in my body and mind. I saw the world as constructed through micro and macro relations of love and pain. I saw individuals and whole societies mobilized by their love and pain to timidly lean or violently crash into each other, matching up their complementary wounds like puzzle pieces and enacting both healing and new traumas at the point of contact. I perceived the vision and the words to be a message from a plant spirit I was dieting, interpreted of course through the particularities of my own vessel and thus necessarily shaped by the cultural milieu in which I found myself as well as my own personal and cultural background, including my theoretical leanings. Motivated in part by this message, I am taking up “meeting at the wound” as a starting point for understanding the cross-cultural and cross-species meeting point that is my field site.

Framing ayahuasca tourism as a “meeting at the wound” captures the fraught histories of Amazonian encounters between indigenous and non-indigenous people, characterized by material and ideological violence and unequal power relations. But it also gestures toward the hopeful ways that people inhabit places at the wound and figures the meeting point as a place of incredible life-giving and world-making potential. Wounds are places of healing and change, though they might leave scars. In this framework, wounds motivate action, change, and growth in ways that exceed black-and-white moral reckoning. I allude to how both individual, interpersonal trauma and systemic, intersocietal trauma play a role in drawing people to the

wound and accordingly, the ways in which the encounter potentiates healing and trauma at both levels. The people at the core of my investigation are heterogeneous, complex individuals who strive in the borderland, the contact zone, who “stay with the trouble” in messy ways (Haraway 2016). Drawn to the trouble as they reach for their worldly wound counterparts, they grow (in various directions) through the friction at those contact points.

This chapter is about histories of hurting and healing at the juncture of Otherhood in the Peruvian Amazon. It frames this meeting at the wound within the historical context of encounters among Westerners, indigenous people, and non-human others. The stories of these encounters and the way Otherhood is figured in those encounters draw attention to disruption and uneasiness of boundaries. The Amazon is a meeting space characterized by both heightened Otherness and fluid hybridity and heterogeneity – a place that dynamically reifies and blurs boundaries between self/other, nature/human, and whiteness/indigeneity. The wound refers to the ways Otherness has been historically mobilized across those lines to enact hurting and healing.

The first section of this chapter outlines historic frictions in the Peruvian Amazon and even the Amazon more broadly, especially around extractivism and appropriation. It consists of three subsections which can be loosely understood as providing three different perspectives of encounters: outsider, indigenous, and plant. In the first subsection, I outline how Westerners, taken broadly to refer to a wide range of non-indigenous people from Peruvian nationals to Europeans, have historically conceptualized the Amazon as either hell or paradise, with both conceptualizations recruited to the task of objectification and exploitation of the land and its people. In the following subsection, I summarize indigenous resistance to outsider extractivism as well as outsiders’ over-simplified conceptions of indigeneity. Lastly, leaning heavily on Taussig’s (1987) tales of terror and healing in the world of rubber and ayahuasca, I pose a

rubber/ayahuasca complex that rests on creative manipulation of Otherhood.

The second section more specifically focuses on Shipibo culture, serving as an introduction to the Shipibo people and Shipibo shamanism in dialogue with outsiders and Western culture. I emphasize hybridity and heterogeneity, and Shipibo perspectives on the good and bad that come from contact with Westerners. I also present an overview of Shipibo shamanic theory as learning to inhabit both Selfhood and Otherhood. Healing requires developing and maintaining proper multisubjectivity, as opposed to the objectification of Others. I end this section with a discussion of the political stakes of animism, especially in the context of extractivism and relationships between whiteness and indigeneity (plagued by the dangers of reification of boundaries on the one hand and ignoring difference on the other).

In thinking through these histories of Amazonian encounters and conceptualizations of those encounters from different perspectives, I have found it helpful to identify three underlying and overlapping strategies for approaching Otherness: separation, unity, and relative-ity (defined in the introduction). When confronted with Otherhood, Western culture is most adept at the first two. As we will see, extractive colonialism in the Amazon relies on dualistic imaginaries that separate humans from an objectifiable nature and civilization from conquerable savagery. On the other hand, Western countercurrents fantasize about the unity of man and nature and romanticize indigeneity as this link. While the first mostly correlates with logics of separation and the second concerns itself with unity, both draw heavily on both approaches. For instance, Peruvian nationalist narratives that paint indigenous people as irreconcilably Other argue for assimilation through the destruction of their culture. And romantics may universalize humanity in the same breath as idealizing the separation of indigeneity from “modern people.” Impulses to separation and unity are two sides of the same coin. However, indigenous and planty perspectives from the

Amazon suggest a more sophisticated framework for approaching Otherness which is at the core of the teachings of my field site. This relative-ity requires moving beyond separation or unity to developing dexterity at the boundary, skillfully embodying Self and Other, and dancing between differentiation and collapse (of boundaries). Ayahuasca herself is a pivotal mover in this direction as she draws people together at this particular cross-cultural and cross-species wound to learn to embody Otherness.

Amazonian Encounters: Histories of Extraction and Appropriation

Ayahuasca tourism in the Peruvian Amazon is haunted by ghosts of violent, extractive, colonial encounters. In this section I will briefly review the major waves of encounters between Western outsiders and indigenous people in the Peruvian Amazon, before exploring Western imaginaries of the Amazon, indigenous perceptions of outsiders and resistance to outsider imaginaries, and the relationship between shamanism and extractive histories (and specifically ayahuasca and rubber). Throughout, I will focus heavily on the underlying frames of Otherness and the emotive resonance of those conceptions, highlighting the interpersonal nature of encounters just as they represent intersocietal contact.

Since the Spanish conquistador Francisco de Orellana traveled the Amazon River in 1541, the region has been beset by waves of foreigners enticed by dreams of adventure and economic prosperity. Orellana's voyage was documented in the chronicles of Dominican missionary Gaspar de Carvajal, and his stories of wonder and danger initiated an enduring literary trend of painting the Amazon as an Edenic "El Dorado," an intimidating "Green Hell," or both simultaneously (Martínez-Pinzón and Uriarte Centaño 2019). Amazonian imaginaries seduced and horrified Western audiences who traveled to the Amazon to conquer land, people, and their

fears. The mid-1600s to mid-1700s saw the often-violent incursion of missionaries such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Adventists who sought to convert and assimilate. Violence intensified during the rubber boom from 1890 to 1920, when rubber barons, such as the infamous Peruvian Julio César Arana, enslaved indigenous laborers, displaced communities, and inflicted shocking atrocities against indigenous people. The town of Iquitos experienced a golden era of prosperity at the expense of an indigenous holocaust (Pineda Camacho 2000). The next era of indigenous Amazonian encounters with outsiders began in 1945 when the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), an American missionary organization, first came to Peru collaborating with Peru's Ministry of Education. Over the next several decades, SIL worked strategically in tandem with the Peruvian government and military to contact, pacify, settle, educate, and acculturate many indigenous groups of the Peruvian Amazon. Maintaining their base in Yarinacocha in Shipibo territory from 1949 to 2004, they had a strong influence on Shipibo interactions with and understanding of outsiders. Many subsequent resource booms have shaken the Amazon, building upon the material and immaterial legacies of the rubber boom. Timber extraction consistently remains a deep-rooted and deeply contested concern. However, oil has been the next most significant resource to attract extractive, harmful practices to many communities beginning in the 1970s and continuing through today. In the following subsections, we will see how these extractive encounters, from early expeditions to modern corporate oil interests, have shaped figurations of Otherness, indigeneity, and whiteness in the Amazon and beyond.

1. Paradise/Hell: Colonial Imaginaries

This subsection provides a brief overview of significant outsider depictions of the Amazon, especially the Peruvian Amazon, from the early 1900s to the 1980s. As such, it is concerned with

the legacies of the rubber boom, and other extractivist projects before and after, on Western imagination.

Throughout this dissertation, I use Western and white very loosely to refer to a range of actors, from American and European corporations and travelers, South American scholars and nation-states, mestizos in jungle cities, and even at times indigenous people alienated from their communities. This reflects the actual slippage of the concept in the Amazon. Like in other parts of Peru, racial categories operate as symbolic categories, albeit materially potent ones. That is to say that racial categories can be seen as marking cultural, rather than biological, categories and stances related to morality, class, and education (de la Cadena 2000). Furthermore, whiteness becomes tied to Western cultural commitments. The opposition of white/Western to indigenous is useful to understanding how lines of difference are drawn in, about, and around the Amazon, though those categories are far from closed wholes. They are shifting relational categories. Thus, while a European can stand in for whiteness vis-à-vis a Peruvian from Lima, that same Peruvian can represent whiteness in relationship to an indigenous Awajún man living in the city, and he might come to represent whiteness because of urban living and lost connections to his community. In a text co-written by a Shipibo woman (Valenzuela and Valera 2004), whiteness (in Shipibo *joxo jonibo* and in Spanish *los blancos*) is attributed to a wide array of people associated with the disruption of traditional lifestyles, including, for example, Andean peoples.

This section takes up the perspective of whiteness, especially through literature and film, to show how Western imaginaries of the Amazon have hinged on the dichotomy between paradise and hell, and the related push and pull between union and separation. Stories about the Amazon embody Western anxieties and ambivalences about capitalism, anguished fever dreams that betray a conflicted desire to either dominate nature, and by extension, indigeneity, or become it

(Slater 2002; Hecht and Cockburn 2010). Both tend to lead to extraction and appropriation fueled by the objectification of indigenous and natural others. Overall, Western imaginaries about the Amazon display a deep uneasiness with difference, whether it be in the form of indigenous culture or mysteries of the jungle. In reaction, some focus on defining the boundaries of self/other, human/nature, and civilized/savage, often demonizing the latter, paving the way for capitalist and assimilationist conquest which forces that which is different into unity. On the flip side, those who romanticize nature and indigeneity idealize the union of humans and nature as Edenic. Along the way, they often pigeonhole indigenous people into a category separate from modernity which is then appropriated and consumed by people who claim the same unity with nature. We can see the romanticism of the Amazon's radical Otherness in writings contemporaneous to and closely following the rubber boom:

It is entirely impossible in the Amazon to take stock of the vastness which can only be measured in fragments; of the expansiveness of space which must be diminished to be appraised; of the grandeur which allows itself to be seen only by making itself tiny, through microscopes; and of an infinity which is meted out little by little, slowly, indefinitely, excruciatingly. The land is still mysterious. Its space is like Milton's, it hides from itself. Its amplitude cancels itself out, melts away as it sinks on every side, bound to the inexorable geometry of the earth's curvature or deluding curious onlookers with the treacherous uniformity of its immutable appearance. Human intelligence cannot bear the brunt of this portentous reality at one swoop. The mind will have to grow with it, adapting to it, in order to master it. To see it, men must give up the idea of stripping off its veils. – Euclides da Cunha, 1907 (Hecht and Cockburn 2010: ii)

Oh, jungle, wedded to silence, mother of solitude and mists! What malignant fate imprisoned me within your green walls?... You are a cathedral of sorrows. . . . Let me flee . . . from your sickly shadows formed by the breath of beings who have died in the abandonment of your majesty. You yourself seem but an enormous cemetery, where you decay and are reborn. – Eustacio Rivera, 1924 (Leal et al. 2018: 116)

Writing in the early 1900s, the Brazilian Euclides da Cunha and the Colombian José Eustacio Rivera both contributed to Amazonian literary imaginaries of Green Hell and El Dorado which seeped into the public consciousness of South American nation-states dyed by economic interests. The fictional and non-fictional travelers in their accounts epitomized the romantic

dichotomies that permeate Amazonian literary traditions – the jungle represents extremes of hope and despair, freedom and slavery, life and death. Their romantic portrayal of Amazonia as a fantastic land of riches and dangers was intimately tied to national projects of development, expansion, and exploitation. Although both are most widely known for their writing – Rivera for his novel, *The Vortex* (1924), and da Cunha for his essays and historical chronicles – they were also state functionaries charged with traveling to the Amazon to negotiate international boundaries (Martínez-Pinzón and Uriarte Centaño 2019). Their works marry their own experiences of illness and hardship in seemingly untamable remote lands with an ideological commitment to a nationalist discourse of progress. Torres (2019) argues that da Cunha’s writing turns the Amazon from an alien land to an inalienable Brazilian land.

It was this romanticization of “savage” lands intertwined with the romanticization of the nation-state and its all-powerful capacity to civilize that emboldened violent men. In Peru, Iquitos elites celebrated rubber barons, such as Julio C. Arana, as upstanding, virtuous citizens with noble intentions, despite their heinous acts (Bernucci 2019; Cardemil-Krause 2019). Euclides da Cunha described the rubber baron as someone who dons savagery in order to overcome it: a paradoxical hybrid who embodies both civilization and barbarity, wearing “savagery [as] a mask that he puts on and takes off at will” (Bernucci 2019: 113).

The cauchero is in fact not just a completely new character in History; he is, above all else, antinomic and paradoxical. Even the most detailed ethnographic table has no space for him. At first glance he would seem to represent the common case of a civilized man gone native, in a terrifying backslide in which civilized characteristics are erased by primitive forms of activity. But that would be a mistake. He does not combine the counter-posed states to create a stable, defined activity that might be termed “hybrid”. He merely puts them side-by-side; he does not mix them together. He is a case of psychic mimetism: a man who pretends to be a savage in order to defeat the savage. He is gentleman and wild man according to circumstance... Or he may go directly from the most refined gallantry to the greatest brutality, leaving in between a captivating smile and impeccable manners; his gleaming knife in hand, he charges, with a bellow, the

disobedient cholo³² who dares cross him. (Euclides da Cunha cited in Bernucci 2019: 117)

When the violent excesses of the rubber boom only led to short-term excesses of wealth and economic promise faded into failure, Iquitos and other extravagant rubber meccas withered into decay. Henry Ford's Fordlandia, a rubber camp and planned utopic tropical suburbia founded in 1928 and abandoned in 1945, is one incarnation of Western colonial fantasies and failure. It "embodied a kind of hyper-masculine desire to tame into submission that which seemed unruly, and was infused with the early twentieth-century commonplace notion that a man's worth is proven when he overcomes great obstacles in the quest to do what would have been considered unthinkable years earlier" (Martínez-Pinzón and Uriarte Centaño 2019:13).

But capitalism's material ruins only fed the immaterial colonial dream of the jungle as it continued to circulate through the popular imagination of its would-be conquerors both inside and outside South America. In fact, the failures contribute to its allure, both for those who envision taming it and those who see it as a space of resistance. Martínez-Pinzón and Uriarte Centaño argue that the explorer's desire to settle into the Amazon as home, the settler's desire to "transform wilderness into a recognizable and productive space," and wildness's refusal to be domesticated are key to understanding Amazonian narratives: "the Amazon as Green Hell would not exist if it were not also conceived of—and often at the same time—as a possible home" (2019: 18). Wylie (2019) explores the concepts of home and failed home in Iquitos-born author Arturo Burga Freitas's novel *Mal de gente* (1943), which uses the Amazon to critique capitalism and the instrumentalization of nature, while simultaneously pulling humans and nature close in disquieting ways. In the novel, the narrator comes across rubber-era ruins inhabited by a living but unrecognizably-decaying indigenous man, who himself resembles a ball of rubber. The main

³² A word used in Peru to refer to indigenous people.

character is a European white man who similarly slows into a vegetative state, facilitating his exit from capitalist productivity and his union with (or coming home to) nature. The novel plays with the concept of vegetation, “not as a negative degenerative condition but as a form of organicism, whereby man is reduced to matter – not the reified machine of the capitalist system, but plant-form” (Wylie 2019: 187). In so doing, Wylie argues, it also portrays “going native” positively. So, while some dream of civilizing nature, others dream of yielding to its seduction. Both are tempted by the promise and refusal of an imagined home.

At stake in many of the so-called *novelas de la selva* (jungle novels), including *Mal de gente*, is who can call the Amazon home and what does coming home to the Amazon mean? Although many *novelas de la selva* criticize extractivist capitalism, Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa does not fit that mold. One of the most famous authors in Peruvian history, he has several novels inspired by, based in, and derived from Amazonian worlds. Those novels have heavily influenced Peru’s national perception of the Amazon and its indigenous peoples. However, he also used his platform to argue for the decimation of indigenous Amazonian culture in the name of national progress. Vargas Llosa sees indigeneity as incompatible with modernity and concludes that modernity’s greater ends justify the appropriation of indigenous lands and enforced acculturation of indigenous peoples. Ultimately, for him, the land is a resource that belongs to the Peruvian nation-state.

Should sixteen million Peruvians renounce the natural resources of three-quarters of their territory so that sixty or eighty thousand Indigenous Amazonians can peacefully carry on shooting each other with bows and arrows, shrinking heads and worshipping the boa constrictor? – Mario Vargas Llosa (2008 [1987]) *The Storyteller* (cited in Smith 2020: 1).

Indian peasants live in such a primitive way that communication is practically impossible. It is only when they move to the cities that they have the opportunity to mingle with the other Peru. The price they must pay for integration is high—renunciation of their culture, their language, their beliefs, their traditions and customs, and the adoption of the culture of their ancient masters. After one generation they become mestizos. They are no longer Indians. Perhaps there is no realistic way to integrate our

societies other than by asking the Indians to pay that price. Perhaps the ideal—that is, the preservation of the primitive cultures of America—is a utopia incompatible with this other and more urgent goal—the establishment of societies in which social and economic inequalities among citizens be reduced to human, reasonable limits and where everybody can enjoy at least a decent and free life. (Vargas Llosa 1990: 52, cited in Sá 2004: 251)

His novel *El Hablador* (1987) plagiarizes the myths of Machiguenga people to draw the reader into what feels like an ethnographic account, modifying those stories at will and without warning. It culminates in the reveal that the mythical stories, told by a supposedly Machiguenga specialist storyteller, have been told all along by a white Peruvian, gone native – a man who never felt at home in “civilization.” The specialist cultural role of the Machiguenga storyteller is Vargas Llosa’s fabrication (Sá 2004). The novel is dizzyingly compelling and enraging as extractive appropriation theater, especially when considered alongside Vargas Llosa’s political arguments. Also, like so many other Amazonian narratives, it hinges on the fantasy of “going native” and ventriloquizing the voice of native peoples.

Even those Peruvian authors who envisioned their jungle novels as anti-capitalist endeavors fell into the trap of extractivism. César Calvo Soriano’s *Las tres mitades de Ino Moxo y otros brujos de la Amazonía* (1981) has more critical and emancipatory goals than Vargas Llosa. Rather, he aims to resist Western, colonial logocentrism in favor of Amazonian worldviews. The genre-bending book is classed as fiction but is partially autobiographical and based on real people and interactions. Celebrated for its representation of indigenous views, it reads as a hallucinatory invitation into a radically alter world infused with ayahuasca’s hallucinogenic distortions of time, space, and the senses. However, Smith (2021) points out that the work epitomizes extractive literature which profits from unacknowledged, uncompensated indigenous knowledge and labor. Simultaneously, she notes, it opened paths for other outsiders to consume indigeneity both through the book and by encouraging ayahuasca tourism. Many aspects of both the book and Calvo himself illuminate these contradictory tensions. Calvo often claimed to be

born in Iquitos, but his real origins were famously elusive; his mother said he was born in Iquitos, but always wanted to be Loretano (from Loreto, the department of Iquitos) like his father (Smith 2021). The narrator of *Las Tres Mitades* seeks bodily and spiritual healing in Iquitos. He finds it with ayahuasca and interactions with Manuel Córdova – a white ayahuasquero. The real-life Córdova likely learned ayahuasca shamanism through his work as a rubber laborer, or minor rubber baron. But he instead made dubious claims about his past, erasing his involvement in the rubber trade by telling a tale of kidnapping as a child by indigenous Asháninka people. At one point in *Las Tres Mitades* he denies his whiteness, saying “Soy amawaka...Purírismo amawaka” (I’m Amawaka...Very pure Amawaka). At another point, the narrator’s skin literally turns dark (Smith 2021: 160-165). In the book, Córdova stands in for indigeneity and his indigenous teacher. The only indigenous people in the book are encountered through ayahuasca visions. The novel, while successful at critiquing and challenging Western norms, does so through the myth of the vanished Indian.

The memories of the rubber boom reverberated into global popular culture in the form of Werner Herzog’s film *Fitzcarraldo* (1982). Filmed in and near Iquitos, it reimagines Peruvian rubber baron of Irish-descent Carlos Fitzcarrald as a romanticized romantic who yearns to bring opera to the jungle. The fictional Fitzcarraldo is foolish, naïve, good-natured, and idealistic. He is a dreamer. To fund his opera dreams, he attempts, almost succeeds, and ultimately fails to claim some land and get into the rubber business. He enlists the help of indigenous people without violence after his crew abandons him. The real Fitzcarrald was undoubtedly not naïve. He was a successful slaver who increased the penetration of the rubber boom into the jungle, opening a steamboat route by hauling a deconstructed steamboat across an isthmus and reconstructing it on the other side. Shipibo people participated in moving the boat, according to

oral histories collected by Shipibo historian José Roque Maina (Myers 2004). Werner Herzog insisted that the same feat be reenacted for his film, but without deconstructing the boat. He hired and imperiled indigenous people – Asháninka – to labor on his dangerous dream, thereby performing and embodying the hubris of both his character and his real-life inspiration.

Fitzcarraldo's partner documentary, *Burden of Dreams* (1982), documents the many setbacks the film faced and how Herzog reacted to what often seemed like an insurmountable (and reckless) feat. In one monologue, Herzog riffs poetically about the horrors of the jungle, echoing the Green Hell trope:

Kinski³³ always says it's full of erotic elements. I don't see it so much erotic. I see it more full of obscenity. It's just – Nature here is vile and base. I wouldn't see anything erotical here. I would see fornication and asphyxiation and choking and fighting for survival and... growing and... just rotting away. Of course, there's a lot of misery. But it is the same misery that is all around us. The trees here are in misery, and the birds are in misery. I don't think they – they sing. They just screech in pain. *It's an unfinished country.*³⁴ It's still prehistorical. The only thing that is lacking is – is the dinosaurs here. It's like a curse weighing on an entire landscape. And whoever... goes too deep into this has his share of this curse. So we are cursed with what we are doing here. It's a land that God, if he exists has – has created in anger. It's the only land where – where creation is unfinished yet. Taking a close look at – at what's around us there – *there is some sort of a harmony. It is the harmony of... overwhelming and collective murder.* And we in comparison to the articulate vileness and baseness and obscenity of all this jungle – Uh, *we in comparison to that enormous articulation – we only sound and look like badly pronounced and half-finished sentences out of a stupid suburban... novel... a cheap novel.* We have to become humble in front of this overwhelming misery and overwhelming fornication... overwhelming growth and overwhelming lack of order. Even the – the stars up here in the – in the sky look like a mess. *There is no harmony in the universe.* We have to get acquainted to this idea that there is no real harmony as we have conceived it. But when I say this, I say this all full of admiration for the jungle. It is not that I hate it, I love it. I love it very much. But I love it against my better judgment. (Herzog in *Burden of Dreams* 1982)

The contradictions in his statement are revealing. He calls the wild land unfinished and prehistoric but then likens “us” – the moderns – to half-finished sentences. The jungle is both

³³ The actor playing the protagonist of the film.

³⁴ Italics are mine.

harmonious and harmony-less. In *Burden of Dreams*, what is clear above all is that *Fitzcarraldo* is a deeply personal projection of Herzog's virtues and pathologies. He is unwilling to give up, but also unwilling to see how his dream affects others. In one scene an engineer tells him that the project is not possible, that people can die. Instead of pulling the plug, he hires a new engineer. At times, he carried a forged document from the president to gain access to places (Lucero 2020). In another scene from the documentary, a young woman, presumably Asháninka, giggles with an actor from the film about how people told her the gringos would kill her, inject her blood with poison, steal her face, or extract her fat for airplanes, but that she wasn't afraid. This is one of the few moments in the film when we see what the Asháninka might have to say about all this. While many have criticized Herzog, Lucero (2020) provides the most compelling critique, suggesting that "Herzog's story is not really about Herzog. It is a story of multiple Amazonian peoples, projects, and forces that operate in ways far beyond Herzog's control" (2020: 4). This resonates with my experience conducting previous research with the Matsés community in the Peruvian Amazon; in narratives about "first contact" with SIL, they emphasized that they were fatigued with fighting and ready to establish peaceful relationships with outsiders. While it may be tempting to see the encounters as driven by white outsiders, indigenous decisions are often pivotal drivers of the event. As Lucero says, "(sometimes) white people are exactly where (some) Natives want them to be" (2020: 6).

Herzog had different relationships to different indigenous peoples. When Herzog first tried to film on Awajún land, they repelled him. Later, Machiguenga people allowed him to film on their land but declined participation. Asháninka people, on the other hand, were willing to travel to act in the film. Herzog and his crew frame the differences as a dichotomy between conquered, Christianized, compromised, and impure Awajún and free, noble Asháninka. In reality, each

group reacted to Herzog differently according to their own needs and politics at the time. Lucero (2020) recounts how burning down Herzog's camp and kicking him out was an important act for Awajún consolidation of political solidarity and identity. They saw Herzog as just another outsider and capitalist exploiter. For the Asháninka, accepting paid labor with Herzog enabled them to leave abusive settler employers in their own lands and exert some autonomy against their existing capitalist exploiters. Those settlers took revenge by sabotaging a plane transporting Asháninka people back to the set from home, resulting in fatal injuries, setting events into motion which led to the rise of an important Asháninka political leader, Miguel Camaiteri.

The stories here have demonstrated the personal nature of Amazonian encounters shaped by the hopes, dreams, pathologies, and pains of the specific people or peoples involved. I have reviewed some significant media moments, from early 1900s Amazonian literature concurrent with the rubber boom, to the decline of the rubber boom and transition into 1940s Peruvian Amazonian literature, finishing with 1980s media (novels and film) set in the Peruvian Amazon. Taken together, they repeatedly demonstrate the allure outsiders feel, drawing them to the Amazon and its potent meaning. The encounters are messy entanglings. Presented with profound Otherness, Westerners indulge in fantasies of transcendental harmony or the conquest of repulsive (or, worse, useless!) difference. But, as we begin to see in the case of the reality behind Herzog's encounters, Amazonian people have their own ideas.

2. Indigenous Critique of Extractivism

Jatíbitianra joxho jonibaon noa yoikanai
 Shipibo ponté iresbiresa niikamea inábo
 keskáribi. Ikaxhbi noa jaskarama iki; jake
 moatianbi non axhé. Moatian joxho jonibo
 joxhon noa keyonankeankana iki non jono,
 non yawa, non awá, non mari, non meskó

Many times, the white people tell us
 that the Shipibo live just like that, like
 the animals of the mountains. But that is
 not true, we have our culture since
 ancient times. In the past, white men
 came and almost exterminated our

keská mebiabo. Noa keyonanribikeankana iki jasin, manxhgan, koshori, xhgarára, nononbo, non yapabo; jainoaxhg non jiwibo. Jatian noakaya iki kikin nii ibo, non onanke niikamea jawékibo. Jaskara kopí non yoinabo aresbireskin non reteyamai, jawen iboyaboribi iketian.

Muchas veces los blancos nos dicen que los shipibos vivimos así nomás, como los animales del monte. Pero eso no es cierto, tenemos nuestra cultura desde tiempos remotos. Antiguamente los hombres blancos llegaron y casi exterminaron nuestro sajino, nuestra huangana, nuestra sachavaca, nuestro añuje, nuestros diferentes tipos de mono. De igual manera casi exterminaron el paujil, la garza, el cushuri, la sharara, los patos, nuestros peces; asimismo, nuestros árboles. Nosotros en cambio somos los verdaderos dueños del bosque, nosotros conocemos las cosas del bosque. Por eso no matamos a nuestros animales indiscriminadamente, pues ellos también tienen su dueño. (Valenzuela and Valera 2004: 216)

collared peccary, our white-lipped peccary, our tapir, our agouti, our different types of monkey. In the same way they almost exterminated the curassow, the heron, the cushuri, the sharara, the ducks, our fish; Likewise, our trees. We, on the other hand, are the true owners of the forest, we know the things of the forest. That's why we don't kill our animals indiscriminately, because they also have their spirits (owners).

In the text above, a Shipibo woman likens whiteness to the mismanagement of nature. Her assertion of Shipibo sovereignty on the basis of closeness to nature could be read as playing into the noble savage trope – either out of genuine alignment or politically motivated manipulation to gain currency in a world that only respects indigenous sovereignty when it is romanticized. However, she begins her statement by denying a white claim that Shipibo people are cultureless, like animals. According to her statement, Shipibo humanity, culture, and knowledge make them better stewards than whites, not their unity with nature. In the same text, whiteness is applied fluidly to various outsiders from Andeans, to non-Shipibo jungle residents, to national and international tourists.

The way outsiders, from European travelers to the Peruvian state, see indigenous people often puts them in a catch-22. If they strive for modernity, they risk losing the moral high ground

alongside claims to indigenous authenticity. But restricting themselves to outsider notions of idealized utopic relations with nature undermines their agency. This subsection focuses on the ways indigenous lives and perspectives resist simplistic outsider characterization. I start by discussing indigenous conceptions of outsiders before examining indigenous perspectives on the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), oil, and the commodification of indigenous spirituality.

In the previous subsection, I mentioned a woman in *Burden of Dreams* expressing some indigenous fears about gringos. Those specific fears – of face stealing or extraction of fat – are common throughout the Peruvian Amazon and Andes, including among the Shipibo. Indigenous stories are replete with white predators. For example, an Andoque indigenous song dating to the rubber boom included the lines “the tiger of the merchandise wants to eat me,” likening rubber traders to man-eating tigers (Martínez-Pinzón and Uriarte Centaño 2019: 22). Martínez-Pinzón and Uriarte Centaño argue that calling a rubber baron a cannibal is an indigenous commentary on the white penchant for accusing indigenous people of cannibalism to justify their own atrocious acts. The circulation of stories of white predators, sometimes with supernatural powers, have been analyzed in various ways by anthropologists. Talking about *pishtacos* in the Andes, white vampire-like creatures who steal the fat of Indians, Weismantel (2001: 265) argues that they symbolize “multiple unequal exchanges that feed the white body and drain the Indian one.” In the Peruvian Amazon, Santos-Granero and Barclay (2011) claim that the specter of *gringos voladores* (flying gringos) among Awajún, Wampis, and Asháninka people fits within Amazonian ontologies of negative reciprocity between predators and prey who compete for vital force in a zero-sum game. In contrast, Lewis (2021) maintains that Shipibo *pishtacos* are better understood not within Amazonian worldviews of Otherhood but as an indigenous critique of Western extractivism and objectifying othering that exists outside of life and typical reciprocity

across the boundary of Otherhood.

These authors agree that pishtacos and other white predator figures tie capitalistic violence to the violation and extermination of indigenous bodies. The circulation of stories intensifies around periods and places of elevated extractivism. The white predators who extract the vital force from or introduce harmful substances into indigenous bodies do so to turn a profit. They often use technological advances associated with Western modernity. For example, one Asháninka news bulletin warned:

Dear friends, brothers, colleagues, comrades, allies and public in general. Yesterday, an Ashaninka sister declared to us that in the Ashaninka territory of selva central, people (gringos) have appeared dressed in trousers, shirts, shoes, helmets and iron wings; the wings help them travel from one place to another; we believe they operate with some sort of fuel; no bullets can enter their clothing; they kill boys and girls without pity to extract only their eyes and hearts; up until now there have already disappeared several Ashaninka boys and girls; for this reason we alert all men and women who are not yet aware of this to remain vigilant. (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2011: 154)

Technology-aided extraction is not limited, however, to the commodification of bodily substances. Knowledge extraction is also a concern. Lewis (2021) describes the pishtaco as “a composite soldier-researcher-missionary-capitalist who can fly” (26).

American, SIL missionaries are among those foreigners accused, at times, of being pishtacos. According to Lewis (2021), some Shipibo people refer to SIL as “una organización de pishtacos” (an organization of pishtacos) (23). SIL specialized in extracting indigenous knowledge in order to transform indigenous people. They mostly focused on education as a tool of transformation, rather than direct force, deploying commodities, technology, and medicine to lure and to create dependency. SIL’s techniques of evangelization married capitalism with Christianity. They were instrumental in developing infrastructure in the jungle – an element of their campaign that pleased the Peruvian government while exposing those communities to other forms of capitalist incursions. Over time, they influenced communities by changing settlement patterns, introducing

foreign goods and belief systems, and weakening traditional beliefs and ways of life. They used the new needs of communities (i.e. medicine now in high demand due to rising illness due to larger, more densely populated settlements) to justify their continuous presence (Stoll 1982; Hern 1992). However, as Stoll (1982) points out, they also were often moving into areas already influenced by the rubber boom and its legacies of debt and patronage. In some cases, SIL, in its pursuit of free market capitalism, assisted indigenous communities in resisting local debt-peonage system. Certainly, many indigenous Amazonians are supportive of SIL, indicated in part by the high percentage who accepted Christianity. For example, in 2007 about 44% of Shipibo people considered themselves evangelical (Capredon 2021). Furthermore, many Shipibo became evangelizers themselves, for reasons ranging from economic opportunities, to a means to assert cultural and political power over other indigenous groups, to a way to take back power from foreign missionaries (Capredon 2021: 21-24). Christianity is an important aspect of Shipibo shamanic healing and indigenous conversion to Christianity can at times be interpreted as active appropriation, rather than passive surrender.

Compared with SIL, oil corporations have much more explicitly extractive practices. Since the 1970s, oil has provoked many conflicts between Amazonian indigenous peoples and the Peruvian state. In June 2009, there was a violent confrontation between Peruvian police and indigenous protestors in Bagua followed by a massacre of Awajún and Wampis civilians. At least 33 people died and 150 were wounded. The so-called Baguazo exemplified the explosive tensions between indigenous people and a state that views Amazonian lands as a resource and indigenous people as an obstacle. At the time, President Alan García portrayed Amazonian protesters as ignorant enemies of the state. With a logic similar to the arguments above of Vargas Llosa, he likened them to *perros del hortelano*, or dogs who defend a farmer's garden from their

livestock, oblivious to how it harms everyone. Indigenous people, however, rejected that essentialization of their position as ignorant, anti-development, or anti-modernity. They simply have different ideas about modernity and development that exceed a Eurocentric, extractivist, colonial project (Stetson 2012). For example, the indigenous organization AIDASEP retorted to Alan García that he was, in fact, the anti-modern one for his backward ideas about the environment. Many simply wanted to defend their right to economic opportunities on their own lands; a previous president of AIDASEP, Inoach Shawit, stated “the indigenous population is not some perro del hortelano. They defend their territories like a businessman defends his economic assets” (Stetson 2012). An Awajún woman told Alan García that he was the terrorist for exterminating his own people (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2011).

Other authors (Arsel et al. 2019) have similarly pointed out that indigenous Amazonian people often are not anti-oil or anti-timber. Although the state might present them as infantile environmentalists, their protests are often just as much about demanding that the government fulfill development promises as they are about curtailing development. However, indigenous people might be caught in a paradox born of limited options, acknowledging the harm of oil extraction while still choosing more oil due to lack of other economic opportunities.

When it comes to oil, as with other extractive encounters, individual indigenous people and different communities have diverse perspectives, but they tend to resist the simple dichotomy of extractive capitalist vs. environmental purist. The radionovela *Esta Nantu*, produced through a collaboration with many Peruvians of different backgrounds, including Awajún, Wampis and mestizo residents of Bagua, provides a hopeful retelling of what might have happened at the Baguazo if tradition and modernity could have united in a balanced way. In the radionovela, an Awajún doctor who has lost his connection to his community falls in love with an Awajún

woman, a traditional healer. Together, with the help of the psychoactive plant *Toé*, they bridge traditional and modern perspectives to prevent the Bagua violent encounter, along the way healing the doctor's relationship with himself, nature, and his heritage.

Maintaining or healing the relationship between people and non-human beings is often an important aspect of indigenous resistance and agency, but one that can easily be overly romanticized. For example, Wampis people affirmed that the agency of nonhuman beings was important to their experience of the Baguazo, but that they used generic conservationist language instead to appeal to a broader audience (Niederberger 2022). On the other hand, anthropologist Cepek (2016) cautions romantics and ontologists who would ascribe too simplistic a view to indigenous perspectives and thereby rob them of their agency. Although the Cofán people he works with became famous for believing that oil is the blood of a subterranean being within their mythology, he found that people exercised a range of opinions, but mostly doubt. His story illustrates how oversimplification of indigenous beliefs about the environment can be a problem for both modernity-bent politicians and well-meaning environmentalists.

Similarly, in the case of ayahuasca commoditization, some anthropologists betrayed a romanticizing tendency when rushing to criticize a Western based NGO which aimed to promote sustainable ayahuasca tourism (Fotiou 2016). In rightly pointing out that the NGO should consider ayahuasca use beyond touristic use, they also implied that indigenous ayahuasca practices existed outside of a Western, capitalist, market-based system. The situations led Fotiou to recall a Brazilian government official in a documentary advising Waiapi people to avoid violence to protect their status as victims (2016: 169). She notes that indigenous people often find themselves in a lose-lose situation – by becoming capitalists they lose the ability to claim romantic victimhood, but they reduce their agency by conforming to outsider imaginaries.

However, even under the constraints of spiritual extractivism and essentialism, indigenous people and the beings they work with still exercise agency. Marisol de la Cadena's *Earth Beings* (2015) provides an excellent example of how agentic non-human beings and the indigenous practitioners in dialogue with them interact with and push back against national narratives. She tells the story of the Andean shaman Nazario Turpo's invitation to perform a *despacho*, or earth payment, for President Alejandro Toledo's inauguration in Cusco in 2001. Nazario insisted on conducting the despacho with the help of Aurelio Carmona, an anthropologist from Lima who from Nazario's perspective was adept at making depachos, but whom the organizers did not want to include – de la Cadena speculates because of his whiteness and therefore “inauthenticity.” In the end, the organizers eliminated them both from the main despacho in favor of Q'ero practitioners, but Turpo and Carmona performed one for Toledo's injured foot. Q'ero people are famous in Peru for being the most traditional and authentic of Quechua speaking Andean people, potentially motivating the inaugural selection. However, Nazario found fault with the Q'eros, asserting that their despacho was not done correctly and would anger the earth beings, whereas his and Carmona's despacho properly pleased the spirits. De la Cadena and others criticized the entire act as performative, but later she realized that she had missed an important aspect – the presence and interaction with non-human beings. Like Herzog's story, this story wasn't (just) about Toledo or even Nazario. Even if Toledo's actions were performative and insincere, he still entered into a dialogue with earth beings through the ritual efficacy of his practitioners who may or may not have pleased them.

Just as participants in my field site enter into a dialogue with Amazonian plants that reaches beyond the human, the Amazonian encounters I have outlined also include non-human others. I turn to them next.

3. Rubber to Ayahuasca: Healing through Extraction and Appropriation

Mesturini Cappel (2018) asks: what does ayahuasca want? Similarly, I wonder, what does rubber want? Or rather, what did rubber want at the turn of the twentieth century? Some scholars have already suggested that studies of ayahuasca ought to entertain the “provocative suggestion that ayahuasca itself may have some agency in its recent global ascendance” (Tupper 2009: 131).

If ayahuasca and rubber are both drivers of a commodity exchange hotspot, how does that shift our understanding of the encounters in the previous subsections?

In this subsection, I examine how these plants, or conglomerations of plants (rubber being a family of trees, ayahuasca an amorphous brew), shape hurting and healing at the boundary of Otherhood. Just as rubber drew the separatists, ayahuasca now draws the monists. But the reality of ayahuasca, especially with her twin rubber, pushes more Otherness than monism allows. The Otherness of ayahuasca emphasizes the wounds of rubber. She draws attention to objectification, tantalizes us with unity and separation, but ultimately corresponds with relative-ity.

The history of ayahuasca and rubber are intertwined. The financial impact of the ayahuasca boom, like that of rubber, is significant. Ayahuasca entered Iquitos’s ecotourism businesses in the 1990s and grew from about 200 tourists a year in 2005 to 80,000 in 2015. It is challenging to quantify, due to its often-informal economy and spiritual motivations for secrecy (to avoid envy or access to information by would-be sorcerous attackers), but one study calculated that only ten Iquitos area retreats brought in 6.5 million USD a year (Fotiou 2020; Suárez Álvarez 2019).

Although some see ayahuasca as another extractive Amazonian boom (Homan 2017), I think it is a stretch to compare it to rubber too closely. While ayahuasca is tied to rubber historically, and I would argue they have a complementary relationship, the resemblance is more limited than an extractive commodity framing of ayahuasca implies. Rubber barons can be compared to

today's white ayahuasqueros only loosely without problematically trivializing the exploitation of the rubber boom. While they might dabble in similar megalomaniacs, ayahuasqueros do not inflict the same systematic violence. But scholars suggest that ayahuasca spread through the Amazon hand in hand with rubber (Gow 1994). As people bumped into each other because of the rubber boom, they shared ayahuasca. Rubber tappers such as Calvo's Córdova (in the first subsection of this section) sought healing with the indigenous laborers they fraternized with, apprenticed with indigenous healers, and brought those traditions back to their home communities. Out of rubber laborers' movement, interactions, search for healing, and cultural and bodily appropriations, emerged what later became known as urban mestizo *vegetalista* practices (Fotiou 2016; Beyer 2009). Those practices strongly resemble current Shipibo ayahuasca practices. Clues, such as the widespread use of Quechua terms in ayahuasca practices, hint that ayahuasca became what it is today through fraught encounters of cross-cultural trades and raids.

Rubber, like ayahuasca, drew people to the jungle, and thereby profoundly shaped the world. The man known for the first Western academic study of ayahuasca, Richard Evan Schultes, was also commissioned by the U.S. government during World War II to study wild Amazonian rubber for the war effort. He said about rubber: "this group of plants had become so vital to our civilization that neither peace nor war could go on without it" (Schultes field notebook 1952: 43 cited in Hettler and Plotkin 2019: 2). Calling it "the tree that changed the world in one century" he asserted its foundational impact on modern society: "few economic plants have more deeply affected civilization than the Pará rubber tree...the product of which has made possible present-day transportation and much of modern industry and technology" (1970: 197). Even today, natural rubber continues to be used for products from airplane and automobile tires to surgical gloves and contraceptives, although most now originate from Asian rubber plantations developed

from Amazonian seedlings (Hettler and Plotkin 2019).

Those plantations were developed in Asia to isolate them from South American leaf blight – the reason wild Amazonian rubber trees are spread out across the forest rather than clustered in bunches, a feature which shaped the movement of rubber tappers who needed to delve deep into the forest to find their prey. Rubber is harvested through cuts that drip a white latex, inviting analogies of tears or mother’s milk. When I think about how to interpret rubber’s agency and affect through my all-too-human lens, I think of all-too-human analogues. Perhaps, I think, rubber is like the curious and rebellious Iracema in the 1975 Brazilian Amazonian film of the same name. She wants to see the world, but in her seeking she subjects herself to the brutality, ignorance, and negligence of white capitalism. But of course, rubber is a tree, in fact many trees, not a human woman. Turning to what I have learned at my field site, I think about how plants do not accord with human morality (discussed in Chapter 4), but that some plants still have more spiny energy than others, which in human hands can turn into sorcery and evil. According to Enrique’s description of *shitana* – or dark energy – anything that has a protective quality in a plant or animal has *shitana*. According to the facilitator Ida, plants with histories intertwined with human violence have *shitana*. Rubber is indeed a product of the tree’s defense system against pathogens and, of course, human/rubber history bears the signature of *shitana*. This protective *shitana* has a resonance of separation.

But I only know rubber through superficial encounters and secondhand accounts of the rubber boom and its reverberations. Ayahuasca, on the other hand, I know well. Ayahuasca loves playing with the boundary between self and other. She draws people, via her synesthetic and metaphoric capacity, to inhabit Otherness. Sometimes this is translated as dissolution of the self. Ayahuasca, often translated as death vine in Quechua, brings “ego death” – the sensation of the

self dissolving into the cosmos. Accordingly, while many of those drawn to rubber tend toward dualistic, separationist modes of thinking many of those drawn to ayahuasca exhibit monistic, unifying modes of thought. Ayahuasca can be many things to many people. But my ayahuasca, the one coursing through this work, is one that brings people together for hurting and healing. She is drawn to wounds like a moth to a flame. She points them out. She sticks her fingers into the painful crevices. “Look there!” she says. “See yourself as archetype; now, see yourself as so much more than the archetype! See Others (loved ones or strangers) as archetypes; now see them in all their nuanced complexity! See how you are different, see how you are the same!” Others who have pondered the agency of ayahuasca have posited that ayahuasca has an environmental agenda to wake humans up from the destructive dream of modern industrialism and that ayahuasca pushes back against dominant Western modes of thinking in her teachings of non-human agency and inter-species communication (McKenna 2005; Narby 1998). I add that while many New Age influenced interpretations of ayahuasca take a universalizing monistic perspective, ayahuasca’s agency in combination with her complementarity with rubber can best be understood as a logic of embodiment of others which pushes against both dualistic separation and monistic unity.

To understand how ayahuasca and rubber together are implicated in hurting and healing in the Amazon, especially through the mobilization and embodiment of Otherhood, I turn to Taussig’s (1987) *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Taussig analyzes the rubber boom, and by extension the European conquest and colonization of the Americas, as a death space fueled by a culture of terror that turns people into things and things into agents of terror. In his account, savagery/wildness is the left-handed gift from the colonizer to the colonized, just as ayahuasca is the left-handed gift from God. Both open what he

calls the death space of signification, a space of transformation where patient and healer meet that enables life and healing as well as death and terror. While the conceptualization of Indians as savages enables colonizer savagery, it also is appropriated by the colonized for shamanic healing, in which the colonially inspired mythic object of the lowland shaman generates power which can be shamanically appropriated and manipulated.

While Taussig's work is most well-known for demonstrating how highland indigenous people appropriate the wildness of lowland indigenous people in order to heal, indigenous people in his account also appropriate whiteness. He refers to healing through the hallucinogenic creation of the antiself. The lowland Indian's visions of a Colombian army of gold provides him with powers to heal and exorcise while a white colonist heals through visions of tigers, Indian shamans, and devils. Throughout his work, he highlights the complementarity, mutual dependence, and sensory fusion of the exploiter and exploited:

The two visions are uncannily complementary, each pivoting on the glory of the antiself as colonially contrived, each thereby drawing its fund of magical potency. So perfect is this complementarity that we could think of it as a dream dialogue, underlying colonial reality. (Taussig 1987: 327)

This complementarity ties difference and power struggles, across the lines of class, race, and colonialism, to healing. Healers mobilize those above and those below. For example, a highland shaman sings: "Huitoto people: making a pact with the people below. Let the illness rest. I desire that the Other or the Others think well of me; That there will be friendship" (378). In explaining the song, the shaman likens the Huitoto to devils and dogs, but also spiritual power; though, he explains, they lack Christian morality and souls, they can see invisible spirits just as animals can. He continues to say "you have to make a compact with those above" as well (378). Taussig sees in the mobilization of Otherhood for healing "epic theater aimed not at overcoming but at alienating alienation, twisting the relationship between the extraordinary and the ordinary such

that the latter burns with a problematizing intensity in a world that can no longer be seen as seamless and whole” (329). He further finds it troubling for traditional interpretations of ritual:

How often we have been told that rites enforce solidarity, bringing people together affirming their unity, their interdependence, the commonwealth of their sentiments and dispositions. But what are we to make of rites such as this wherein the Indian heals the souls of the colonist? Surely the healing here depends far more on the existence, the reproduction, and the artistry of difference as otherness and as oppression than it does on solidarity? (1987: 327).

His interpretation focuses on the rending apart of meaning and the maintenance of difference. Wildness, he argues, is imbued with healing power through how it “pries open this unity [of the symbol] and in its place creates slippage and a grinding articulation between signifier and signified” (219). The hurting and healing that Taussig describes depend on a separationist Othering logic. Both colonizer and colonized draw power from boundaries.

However, what strikes me most about his ethnographic data is the swirling and mixing of people, the slipperiness of ethnic categorization, and the frequent embodiment of Otherhood. Throughout the book, Taussig weaves the drama of the white healer José Garcia and his family, friends, and acquaintances. Amid illness, poverty, and a haunting, José Garcia sought the lowland Ingano shaman from Sibundoy Valley, Santiago Mutumbajoy, who gave him ayahuasca (yagé). Overtime he also engaged the services of many other healers, card diviners, and spirit mediums of different backgrounds, who Taussig labels alternatively as white, lowland Indian, highland Indian, mulatto, Ingano, Cofán, and/or Huitoto. Furthermore, each practitioner works with various Others. For example, Sister Carmela is a white woman who divines and cures by channeling the spirit of Jose Gregorio, a Venezuelan doctor who died in 1919. Rosario, José Garcia’s wife, is ambivalent and disapproving of ayahuasca, Indians generally, and Santiago specifically. Yet as she seeks care from a Russia-trained medical doctor, she also sees a spirit medium, a white Brazilian woman, who channels an old Indian shaman spirit. Santiago, hearing

this, says: "Didn't I tell you that the Indian is more Christian than the white?" (170).

Santiago, at one point, becomes ill after refusing to sell ayahuasca to a highland Ingano shaman, Esteban, provoking his sorcery. Sister Carmela is the one who, at the behest of José Garcia, confirms that Esteban is the source of the illness. Behind the attack lay complicated sociopolitical and economic relations and two-way jealousies between highland and lowland shamans – highland shamans such as Esteban are financially affluent due to their cosmopolitan savvy and appropriative commodification of Indianness. While they marshal magical power through the figure of lowland Indians, they also have their own powers which in this case overpower the lowland shamans. They also rely materially on lowland Indians for their supply of ayahuasca. Santiago fought the attack with the help of his white apprentice José Garcia, and eventually is healed with assistance from a lowland Cofán shaman.

Over time, José Garcia learns from Santiago to become a healer. In fact, he must, because healing oneself from a severe affliction requires learning to heal and learning to heal attracts envious attacks, including from Sister Carmela, necessitating further healing and knowledge acquisition. He uses his own Catholic, Spanish tools but generally healed just like other shamans. He “could see into bodies and secret intentions of others. And just like an Indian shaman, when he took yage, [he] became delicate and open to attack” (149). His healing techniques Taussig sees as not a syncretism of Santiago and Sister Carmela, but as the manifestation of their complementarity. In one ceremony, finding himself positioned between Santiago and José Garcia, Taussig sees José like an Indian mask, “an active echo of Santiago – the ‘real Indian’- struggling to approach the Indian but also struggling to be itself” (411).

These histories of healing and relationships around ayahuasca highlight the fluidity and interpersonal nature of the healing. It is not just symbolic, archetypal Others who are invoked,

but also specific interpersonal Others. Healers rely not only on the category of Otherness but also the dexterous embodiment of Otherhood to enact healing. The death space of signification Taussig refers to could just as easily be referred to as a hyperspace of signification. The healing power of difference he refers to cannot be understood within frameworks focused on separation (or unity). Healers must become skilled at not maintaining nor dissolving, but selectively manipulating, the boundary of Otherhood.

The need to manage Otherness and the porosity of the Self manifest in the etiology of illness Taussig describes which explains “illness of the body [as] a bodily attempt at inscribing a history of otherness within the body that is the self” (168). Attacks of spirits, the sorcery of jealousy, and the implicit knowledge of social history all infringe upon the body. The dramatization of ceremony, such as Taussig’s ayahuasca vision between the “real Indian” and his “echo,” reflect the embodiment of interpersonal and intersocietal relations shaped by macro and microhistories. His account shows how histories of colonialism, and specifically legacies of the rubber boom, make themselves felt in bodies. The wounds affect both sides of the complementary pair of colonizer/colonized and the individuals who step into this wounded space often step into the roles afforded them by the existing patterns of Otherhood. Ayahuasca, too, steps into the spaces afforded by rubber, inviting people to appropriate otherhood and alternately reify and collapse boundaries in their pursuit of healing and sorcery.

Shipibo People and Shamanic Practices in Dialogue with Others

The Shipibo-Konibo-Xetebo, or Shipibo people, are estimated to be the third most populous indigenous group in the Peruvian Amazon and they are the most well-known in the ayahuasca tourism circuit for their powerful healing abilities as *ayahuasqueros*. According to the Peruvian

Ministry of Culture, there are 32,964 inhabitants of 153 Shipibo communities,³⁵ each with between 150 and 15000 residents (“Shipibo-Konibo | BDPI” n.d.; INEI Peru 2017). The Shipibo belong to the Panoan ethnolinguistic family, and their lands are located along the Ucayali River and its tributaries in the central-eastern Peruvian Amazon (see Map 1). Due to the relatively easy riverine accessibility of their lands, the Shipibo have a long history of contact, conflict, and fusion with outsiders. They have experienced sustained contact with missionaries since the 17th century and heightened economic enterprises and exploitation since the rubber boom in the 19th century (Morin 1998). Thus, Shipibo people have often inhabited the space of intermediary or broker between mestizos and other, more remote, indigenous groups. Even before the conquest of the Americas, they were connected to the Inkas and other peoples through vast exchange networks of goods and knowledge spreading from the jungle to the Andes and the Pacific coast (Colpron 2013). Today, Shipibo are familiar with a rotating cast of traders, loggers, missionaries, immigrants from the Andes and the Coast, government and non-governmental development agencies, and tourists passing through. One of the largest Amazonian cities in Peru, Pucallpa,³⁶ is at the center of their territory. Furthermore, as a result of the ayahuasca tourism industry, many Shipibo frequently travel to Iquitos and surrounding areas where they work and sometimes own land and maintain residences and/or ayahuasca centers. Despite, or perhaps in tandem with, all of this contact, the Shipibo language and Shipibo shamanic practices remain vitally important for Shipibo people.

In this section, I will begin to discuss Shipibo shamanic practices, especially in relationship to their history of contact with outsiders, a topic which will be taken up in more detail in

35 According to the 2017 census there are 34,152 people who identified Shipibo as their first language. However, only 25,222 self-identified as ethnically Shipibo-Konibo, highlighting the complexity of indigenous identity in Peru.

36 Population of over 300,000.

subsequent chapters which explore the circulation of Shipibo concepts and words at my field site. Here I will (1) discuss the four categories of Shipibo healing and magic specialists, (2) explore the cultural hybridity and heterogeneity of Shipibo shamans, (3) provide some Shipibo perspectives on modernity and foreigners learning Shipibo shamanism, and (4) then conclude with a discussion of the ontological politics of animism more broadly. I aim to demonstrate that Shipibo teachings, histories, perspectives, anxieties, and affirmations about hybrid identity and hybrid shamanic practices provide a theory of balancing inside and outside forces. As Shipibo and foreign individuals work together with plant individuals, they listen to, learn from, and embody various others (human and non-human) while developing a sensitivity to the self and the unique affordances of each individual and each cultural world. The “life-giving-good” (Best 2019) and healing potential of shamanic worlds comes from developing these abilities and feeding them into positive, reciprocal social relations with a wide array of others – from other individuals to other cultures to other beings (such as plants). The meeting and entangling are the point.

1. Four Specialists: Onanya, Meraya, Raomis, Yobé

Don Enrique frequently lectures on the four types of Shipibo specialists: *raomis*, *onanya*, *meraya*, and *yobé*.³⁷ *Raomis* is a person who specializes in knowledge of medicinal plants as remedies, but generally does not work in a shamanic way with ceremonies, ayahuasca, spirits, and *ikaros*. All of the healer types learn from and work with *rao*, the term used mostly to refer to medicinal and teacher plants or plants who have spirits. However, not all plants are *rao* and not all *rao* are plants. Plants that don’t cure or teach are called *raoma*, which literally translates to ‘not *rao*.’ *Rao* can refer to other powerful objects, most commonly animal fats (Tournon 2002).

³⁷ Also described in Caruso 2005 and Dev 2020.

The *onanyabo*³⁸ are shamanic healers of the contemporary ayahuasca ceremony; they engage in long diets to learn from plant spirits (*ibo*) how to heal through *ikaros* in ayahuasca ceremonies. The songs enable them to call on and transform into, or embody, other beings in order to appropriate their powers (Brabec de Mori 2012). Onanya initiation is through plant knowledge, rather than through human apprenticeships, but their domain extends beyond the natural and spiritual world into the world of human sociality. As Shipibo onanya, Don Mateo Arévalo, says:

El chaman es un líder. Es un guía espiritual. Es una persona que debe consultarse para resolver cualquier problema: incluso de la vida matrimonial y de la vida política de la aldea. Se ocupa de la organización de la gente y del respeto por la naturaleza; del trabajo agrícola y de la salud de su gente. Así, el trabajo del Onaya es mucho más que el de curar. (Caruso 2005: 79)

The shaman is a leader. He is a spiritual guide. He is a person who should be consulted to solve any problem: even in married life and in the political life of the village. He deals with the organization of people and respect for nature; with agricultural work and the health of his people. Thus, the work of the Onaya is much more than that of healing.

Onan, translated loosely as knowledge or wisdom, is more than knowledge about healing. It is a moral category. It is life-giving (Best 2019) Shipibo cultural wisdom based on the development of an intuitive intelligence that “involucra un cambio fundamental de actitud vital, una reubicación ontológica, un retorno a la unidad hombre-naturaleza (involves a fundamental change in life attitudes, an ontological shift, a return to man-nature unity)” (Tubino and Zariquiey 2007: 69). Becoming an onanya requires a long and arduous spiritual and bodily preparation to develop direct knowledge of nature in the service of human society.

However, their preparation is not as arduous as the path of the *merayabo*, considered to be the most advanced onanyabo and widely believed to be extinct. The *meraya* purportedly had

³⁸ Again, just as with “Shipibo,” my grammatical use of these Shipibo terms matches their flexible incorporation into other languages. The -bo makes the word plural in the Shipibo language but in Spanish, speakers fluidly shift between “onanyabo” and “los onanya.”

powers that onanya today cannot achieve, such as the ability to fly, materialize objects, visit the underworld, turn into jaguars or boas, make themselves omnipresent or invisible, turn rocks into gold or paper into money (Caruso 2005: 88-92). They could also visit the world of the *chaikonibo* or *chaikoni jonibo*, powerful spirit people (2005: 91). The plants that supported such skills have also reportedly receded, lost to modernity (Tubino and Zariquiey 2007: 71). Today, onanya such as Don Enrique call on the *merayabo* and *chaikonibo* in their *ikaros*.

Lastly, *yobé* are dark sorcerers. As far as I am aware, no Shipibo currently identify as *yobé*, but many accuse others of it. Don Enrique teaches that thinking badly of others can be a form of unintentional dark sorcery, referred to as *boman*. People who intend to be onanya might unintentionally become *yobé* without proper attention to human moral codes including abstaining from negative thoughts. Often, the work of the onanya against the *yobé* is framed as a battle between good and evil:

El que tiene un poder mental mayor gana.
Lo que quiero decir es que se trata de una
lucha de mentes entre el Bien y el Mal, así
se pudiera decir. Una mente malvada crea
desórdenes en las personas y la mente
benévola intenta dar un nuevo orden social
a la persona enferma. (Don Mateo Arévalo
in Caruso 2005: 245)

He who has greater mental power
wins. What I mean is that it is a
battle of minds between Good and
Evil, so to speak. An evil mind
creates disorders in people and the
benevolent mind tries to give a
new social order to the sick
person.

The opposition of lifegiving onanya and illness-causing *yobé* is central to common Shipibo teachings, but it is important to note that it is hard to disentangle the moral field of Shipibo shamanism from the influence of Christianity. In the wake of missionary interventions, many indigenous spiritual concepts become demonized. It is possible the *yobé* once had a more positive connotation but has suffered a similar fate. As Best (2019) points out, the Summer Institute of Linguistics's dictionary translates *chaikonibo* as demons and equates *meraya* and *yobé* together as witches; some Shipibo correspondingly view them with trepidation. However,

the increasing popularity of ayahuasca shamanism has encouraged the continuation and revalorization of shamanic practices in the face of Christian censorship. These categories and concepts are continually subject to reinterpretation.

The moral and political importance of the onanya, the disappearance (and conversion into spirits) of the ideal meraya, and the dark potential of illness-causing yobé demonstrate the range of shamanic outcomes for people who dedicate themselves to learning from plant spirits. The disappearance of meraya points to the modern loss of ideal relations with nature. The specter/threat of yobé exerts social pressure on practitioners to ensure their path is morally upstanding and healing rather than illness-causing.

2. Cultural Hybridity and Heterogeneity

Given their long-rooted cosmopolitanism, Shipibo cultural fluidity/interconnectedness is fundamental to their shamanic practices. Rather than diminishing it, “Western presence revitalized shamanic practice;” increased contact resulted in a higher number of shamans, explosion of creativity, and incorporation of heterogenous elements (Colpron, 2013: 373). Like other indigenous American shamanic practices (Bacigalupo 2016), Shipibo shamanic practices are fundamentally tied to the ability to embody Others and sit at the border between Shipibo community and human or non-human outsiders (Brabec de Mori 2012). Shipibo shamans incorporate Inkas, Christianity, and modern technologies. Some Shipibo report seeing Christ in their ayahuasca visions³⁹ and for others ayahuasca doctors appear with the tools of Western medical doctors. Shipibo healers are interested in the magical powers of trees, texts, and manufactured goods. For instance, just as ikaros might call on chaikonibo as mentioned above,

³⁹ “¡Oye, en mi ayahuasca yo pude ver a Cristo!” or “Hey, in my ayahuasca I could see Christ!” (Tubino and Zariquiey 2007: 66).

they also sing to a range of other powerful sources, tools, allies, and foes including airplanes, aliens, bleach, bombs, tape recorders, x-rays, motors, batteries, transformers, bibles, saints, angels, machines, and flu spirits who look like Christian missionaries. Working with these various powerful elements “allows them to incorporate specific potentialities, such as the attractive force of magnets, the knowledge of books, or the resistance of iron” (Colpron 2013: 379). Colpron recounts how a Shipibo shaman, Justina, transforms into a machine when she takes ayahuasca. Justina further reported that knowing and appropriating the world of the tape recorder empowered her with its flawless auditory memory.

Importantly, Colpron notes that these incorporations are not necessarily viewed as foreign adoptions but rather as a reincorporation of elements that are understood to come originally from the forest and Shipibo ancestors, not from towns or recent contact (2013: 375). Shipibo histories tell of wealth and goods stolen by ancestors who were then turned into Inkas or whites, framing outsiders, like animals, as fallen Shipibo ancestors. On the other hand, a famous elder Shipibo shaman healer, Pascual Mahua, claims that the Shipibo and other Amazonians are descendants of peoples punished and expelled by the Inka, whereas the chaikonibo were the people who practiced abstinence⁴⁰ and thus were saved from punishment, becoming invisible, ideal Shipibo (Brabec de Mori 2018). Thus, Shipibo histories emphasize the interconnectedness of Shipibo with others, including spirits and whites, who all once shared the same ancestors but became separated through differing levels of proper comportment with nature and with each other – breaking social bonds through stealing or practicing ideal socionatural responsibility by abstaining. Because of this shared history, everything can be learned from the forest world, even the worlds of machines, but the world of machines cannot teach about the world of the forest

⁴⁰ In the next chapter the importance of abstinence for Shipibo, and Amazonian beliefs more broadly, will become clear. For now, suffice it to say that abstinence is tightly tied with proper relations with the natural world.

(Colpron 2013: 379).

The heterogeneity and individuality of Shipibo shamanic practice can be illustrated through the life histories of three related Shipibo onanyabo who work with foreigners, as told by Caruso (2005). Don Benito Arévalo⁴¹ is a well-known traditionalist shaman of an older generation while his son Don Guillermo Arévalo, also very famous, and nephew Don Mateo Arévalo, are members of a younger generational wave of “new” shamans who incorporate even more “foreign” elements into their practice. Their lives and approaches illustrate generational changes while also portraying the mobility and complex cultural lives of contemporary Shipibo healers.

Don Benito (73 years old at the time of Caruso’s writing) represents a “traditional” approach, but his life demonstrates that his path was anything but clear. Although he grew up in Shipibo communities, he moved twice by the age of 18. His father was an onanya and as an adolescent, he bathed with plant leaves to start a shamanic diet/initiation, but then had to leave the community before finishing the process. He traveled to Iquitos to work for mestizos, then served his mandatory military service. However, he became ill due to eating pork, prohibited by the initiation. On death’s doorstep, he was healed ritually by his army sergeant. After the army, he worked various jobs – in a brick factory and as a crocodile hunter – before founding a new community with help from a Canadian missionary. However, the community was abandoned following agricultural obstacles. He subsequently participated in the founding of two more communities before finally moving to Yarinacocha.⁴² Only then, just as his son Guillermo was starting a shamanic initiation, did he settle into the role of healer, becoming known as a famous

⁴¹ By my reckoning, the Arévalo lineage is one of the most famous Shipibo ayahuasquero lineage, with the Mahua lineage of Paoyhan and the Lopez lineage of Roaboya also attracting much attention. There are, however, many newer shamans with many different family names.

⁴² Yarinacocha is the Shipibo community within the city of Pucallpa. Today, they form a contiguous metropolitan area and while Yarinacocha is more strongly Shipibo than the rest of the city, there are not clear lines between Shipibo areas and non-Shipibo areas.

“traditional” shaman, traveling both nationally and globally.

Don Guillermo, Don Benito’s son, became a famous shaman and shamanic teacher in his own right, but he cures with a very different approach, drawing on a vast array of New Age practices, including tarot. He was born in Yarinacocha, but from the time he was seven to when he was 18 years old, he resided at a Catholic boarding school near a mestizo community. He then studied nursing in Brazil before returning to Yarinacocha to work as a nurse. Interestingly, his path to shamanism was facilitated by his experience in Western biomedicine as well as through his friendship with a Swedish doctor. Seeing Western medicine as insufficient, his experiences motivated him to help his people as a shaman and through his connection with the Swedish doctor, he established networks that facilitated a lucrative and influential career.

Guillermo’s cousin, Don Mateo, also adopts a more innovative perspective in his shamanic practice, certainly in part due to his multicultural upbringing. While he recalls a childhood with ayahuasca sessions and a family filled with shamans, at seven years old he was adopted by a German woman and lived with her in Lima for 13 years. She raised him to believe that he was a chosen future shaman and leader of his people, so when she died, he returned to his natal lands feeling called to that mission. He began to diet with his uncle but ultimately came to believe that his uncle was a yobé. To escape the negative energy of his uncle, he left to diet with his cousin Guillermo who agreed with the critique of negativity. Dieting with his cousin, he engaged in a shamanic battle of the mind with his uncle, ultimately feeling vindicated that his “scientific culture” beat the traditional knowledge of his uncle (Caruso 2005: 60). He expresses the importance of learning from and respecting older, traditional shamans, and the natural world from which their knowledge springs. But ultimately, he envisions an evolving and modernizing *curanderismo* which can work with only “la fuerza de la mente y del amor” (the strength of the

mind and love) and can enter the modern world of “computadoras, de la telefonía celular, de la ingeniería cibernética y todo lo demás” (computers, cell phones, cybernetic engineering and everything else) (2005:59).

Yo creo que en este momento existen dos ramas o dos tradiciones diferentes del conocimiento. Yo aprendí mucho de la gente mayor, de los Onaya, pero también aprendí mucho de aquellos que yo llamo los curanderos de la era moderna, de los que leen muchos libros de ciencia, de medicina, que leen el tarot y que curan con las runas, los cristales, los colores. Ya ves: la distinción es neta. Los viejos chamanes no hablan español y no saben leer ni escribir y por tanto permanecen siempre con sus vegetales y no pueden aprender a curar con las nuevas técnicas. Para ellos la ayahuasca es como el aire y no existe ninguna otra cosa para curar. Pero no se puede quedar siempre en este nivel.

A esta gente no puedes explicarles que tienen todo en su mente y que si no tienen la ayahuasca pueden transformar el poder de la mente en energía curativa. Entonces, es preferible mostrar respeto por estas personas, el respeto que se les debe. Por nuestra parte, debemos buscar a gente de nuestra época para ampliar nuestro conocimiento e intentar hacer más dinámicas las terapias. Nosotros debemos curar de acuerdo con los progresos de la ciencia y la tecnología, con la era espacial, pero siempre recordando que nuestra Madre Naturaleza es la que nos proporciona todos los elementos necesarios para llevar a cabo nuestro trabajo. (Caruso 2005: 37 and 281)

I believe that at this moment there are two branches or two different traditions of knowledge. I learned a lot from the older people, from the Onaya, but I also learned a lot from those who I call the healers of the modern era, from those who read many books on science and medicine, who read the tarot and who heal with runes, crystals, colors. You see: the distinction is clear. The old shamans do not speak Spanish and do not know how to read or write and therefore always remain with their plants and cannot learn to heal with the new techniques. For them, ayahuasca is like air and there is nothing else that can heal. But it cannot always remain at this level.

You cannot explain to these people that they have everything in their mind and that if they do not have ayahuasca they can transform the power of the mind into healing energy. So, it is preferable to show respect for these people, the respect that is owed to them. For our part, we must look for people of our time to expand our knowledge and try to make therapies more dynamic. We must heal in accordance with the progress of science and technology, with the space age, but always remembering that our Mother Nature is the one that provides us with all the necessary elements to carry out our work.

Don Mateo’s philosophy is that shamanism must adapt to new realities, innovating and

opening to the world of technology and New Age movements, while recognizing that the plants are the ones that can guide everyone to happiness. He calls for new shamanisms that fuse technology with respect and knowledge of nature, based on the energetic potential of love. But even Don Benito's life demonstrates the hybridity, heterogeneity, mobility, and cosmopolitanism of even more traditional Shipibo healers.

3. Defending Identity and Sharing Knowledge: Modernity, Extraction, Reciprocity

Incorporating outside influences from the world and the corresponding sharing of Shipibo practices with foreigners is not without its discontents. Many Shipibo people, in my experience and in the literature (Dev 2020; Tubino and Zariquiey 2007; Favaron and Gonzales 2019), express concerns about resource and knowledge extraction, modernizing Shipibo and flippant foreigners failing to take traditional Shipibo knowledge seriously, and finding and maintaining Shipibo identity within a plural and rapidly changing world.

While ayahuasca tourism brings wealth to many Shipibo and opens shamanism as a viable career, heightening the interest of young Shipibo in shamanism, the wealth is unevenly distributed, and resources and wealth tend to flow to the Global North while Shipibo communities continue to suffer poverty (Dev 2020). While many of the foreigners who have trained with Shipibo and now provide ayahuasca ceremonies in their home countries continue to provide financial support to Shipibo people and communities, some do not. Due to higher costs in those home countries, “of the thousands 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” (Dev 2020: 151). Related to the wealth disparities, Shipibo despair of knowledge extraction that benefits the learner but not the teacher.⁴³ They frequently complain of foreigners who take the

⁴³ See Lewis (2021) for a discussion of *pishtacos* as an emic category and critique of extractivism.

plant knowledge, never to return. As Dev (2020) points out, those stories are in part told to instruct foreigners and bring them into proper reciprocal relations.

Enrique often says that he, unlike other maestros, does not *mezquinar* – he is not stingy with his knowledge. Other maestros make similar statements. Reminding students of the teacher’s generosity is another important tool in calling the foreigner in to reciprocal relations. It is not just about sharing material connections, but also sharing knowledge. There is also apprehension when foreigners, drawing on Shipibo teachings, acquire shamanic power that may not be redirected back to Shipibo people and communities in positive ways. Relationships and exchanges with foreigners are ubiquitous; Shipibo aim for material and spiritual reciprocity through these relationships. They discuss and critique difference on various axes, including appropriate reciprocity and proper embodiment of the shamanic path. Both foreigners and Shipibo youth are criticized for modern materialism, failed ongoing reciprocity, and not taking the plants or traditional knowledge seriously. For example, Astrith Gonzales, a Shipibo woman, and Pedro Favaron, her mestizo husband, write:

Muchos jóvenes shipibos dejan las comunidades para buscar una vida en la ciudad. No respetan ya las palabras de los mayores. E incluso algunos de los dirigentes políticos de nuestra nación parecen haber asimilado, con poca distancia crítica, los modos mestizos y hegemónicos de hacer política, con sus malas costumbres de corrupción y la búsqueda egoísta del beneficio personal. Cada vez más separados de las comunidades, asentados en los barrios periféricos de la ciudad de Yarinacocha, no mantienen lazos vivos con su ancestralidad.” (Favaron and Gonzales 2019: 21)

Muchos de los estudiosos extranjeros

Many young Shipibo people leave the communities to look for a life in the city. They no longer respect the words of their elders. And even some of our nation’s political leaders seem to have assimilated, with little critical distance, the mestizo and hegemonic ways of doing politics, with their bad habits of corruption and the selfish pursuit of personal benefit. Increasingly separated from the communities, settled in the peripheral neighborhoods of the city of Yarinacocha, they do not maintain living ties with their ancestry.

Many of the foreign students who come to investigate the traditional medicine of the Amazonian peoples

que se acercan a investigar la medicina tradicional de los pueblos amazónicos lo hacen con una visión materialista que les impide acceder a estas dimensiones suprasensibles. Su comprensión de los fenómenos estudiados es así muy parcial y periférica. No profundizan, entienden poco y llegan a conclusiones erradas. (Favaron and Gonzales 2019: 22)

do so with a materialist vision that prevents them from accessing these suprasensible dimensions. Their understanding of the phenomena studied is thus very partial and peripheral. They do not go deeper, they understand little, and reach the wrong conclusions.

Discourse criticizing young Shipibo for distancing themselves from Shipibo communities and knowledge also plays a role in actively shaping modern Shipibo identity. Just as some young Shipibo argue for modernization, others fight to maintain Shipibo identity in the face of cultural plurality, assimilation, and loss. Plurality invites anxieties, material and spiritual, as well as inspiration and creativity. Favaron and Gonzales (2019) cite anxieties about encroaching economic activities and consumer lifestyles which threaten the community and contaminate the land. Shipibo healer, Don Antonio Gómez, attests that the profound effect of missionary contact ripped the ancestral, traditional knowledge from the people (Caruso 2005: 43). A Shipibo teacher, Lener Guimaraes captures the generative possibilities and paralyzing apprehension of Shipibo modernity:

Hemos preguntado, en realidad, quiénes somos [...] no sabemos qué actitud tenemos: si tenemos la actitud de un gringo, de un mestizo, de un shipibo, de conibo o de shetebo. Somos el resultado que hoy somos, somos resultado de toda una mezcla [...] Estamos en un proceso, estamos en una mezcla de valores y principios, entonces, ni él ni yo ni los demás tenemos principios shipibos, propiamente shipibos, tenemos un poco de mestizo, de gringo, de shipibo. Lo que nos falta identificar ahora entonces es cuando somos shipibos, cuando somos mestizos y cuando somos gringos

We have asked who we really are [...] we do not know what attitude we have: if we have the attitude of a gringo, a mestizo, a shipibo, a conibo or a shetebo. We are the result that we are today, we are the result of a whole mix [...] We are in a process, we are in a mix of values and principles, so, neither he nor I nor the others have Shipibo principles, properly Shipibo, we have a little bit of mestizo, gringo, shipibo. What we need to identify now is when we are Shipibos, when we are mestizos, and when we are gringos.

(Tubino and Zariquiey 2007: 65)

Cuando crece el río hay un afluente, pero cuando está creciendo, cuando hay lluvias, lo que pasa es que hay un proceso lento, como que las aguas se juntan en un mismo lugar. Entonces, como que hay una represa y el agua se estanca, no corre, no corre mucho, entonces la gente puede navegar fácilmente [...] Pero el agua empieza a bajar y ahí otra vez notamos las corrientadas de agua, entonces, es un poco difícil navegar. Eso es *jenetian*. Eso es *jenetian*. Yo creo que las culturas amazónicas estamos en esa condición, o sea, en un tiempo en que hemos llegado donde no podemos ni navegar ni retroceder ni avanzar, pero sí sigue lloviendo, sigue lloviendo y lloviendo, y esas lluvias son los conocimientos, las prácticas culturales y hay más ideas que nos llegan: de los gringos, de los mestizos, de los holandeses, de los españoles, de los italianos, de los europeos, de los americanos, de los japoneses. Pero hasta el momento como que las culturas amazónicas hemos llegado a un punto de [*jenetian*]; entonces, no tenemos hacia donde ir. Ahora lo que necesitamos es identificar ese rumbo, identificar claramente quiénes somos. (Tubino and Zariquiey 2007: 2)

When the river grows there is a tributary, but when it is growing, when there is rain, what happens is that there is a slow process as the waters gather in the same place. So, as if there is a dam and the water stagnates, it doesn't flow, it doesn't flow much, so people can navigate easily [...] But the water starts to go down and there again we notice the rushes of water, so, it's a bit difficult to navigate. That's *Jenetian*. That's *Jenetian*. I believe that the Amazonian cultures are in that condition, that is, in a time in which we have arrived where we can neither navigate nor go back nor advance, but it does continue to rain, it continues to rain and rain, and those rains are the knowledge, the cultural practices, and there are more ideas that come to us: from the gringos, from the mestizos, from the Dutch, from the Spanish, from the Italians, from the Europeans, from the Americans, from the Japanese. But so far, Amazonian cultures have reached a point of *jenetian*; So, we have nowhere to go. Now what we need is to identify that direction, to clearly identify who we are.

He uses the analogy of *jenetian*, the flood times, to capture the extreme saturation of new and old values, technologies, and ideas – a time in which river navigation to many places becomes possible, but orientation is confusing and difficult. The cycles of the influx (the rains) affect the people as they try to find their way, their identity. He notes that the question is not whether they embody Shipibo, mestizo, or white identity, but determining when to embody each.

To see how questions of Shipibo identity in modernity relate back to the world of ayahuasca,

we can turn to the perspective of another Shipibo healer, Mama Rosa (Kahpi n.d.). In her story, Mama Rosa stresses how as a child she learned medicinal plants from her mother, thus enacting proper Shipibo identity, unlike other kids who dismissed traditional knowledge. However, she didn't begin to diet until she met a gringo who taught her more about medicinal plants. When asked about foreigners taking ayahuasca to learn shamanism, she likens the phenomenon to similar Shipibo paths which take the initiate from curiosity to learning. Foreigners today, she says, diet more than Shipibo, but ayahuasca retains a unique connection to Shipibo people. Shipibo and foreigners, just like different plants, animals, and machines, have different shamanic potentialities. A key teaching of the shamanic practices described in this dissertation is learning to embody each potentiality while retaining one's own individuality and strength; both appropriating the "other" and inhabiting the "self" can be used as powerful shamanic tools for the good of society. Shamanism is the work of bringing individuality and communality into balance. As Favaron and Gonzales (2019: 27) assert, "cada ser humano es único. Cada ave canta con un tono irrepetible. Pero nada puede vivir por cuenta propia, sin vincularse con los demás (Every human being is unique. Each bird sings with a unique tone. But nothing can live on its own, without connecting with others.)"

4. Animism, Indigeneity, and Ontological Politics

Modern environmental crises are tied to inadequate theories and models for understanding the relationship between humans and the natural world. Favaron and Gonzales (2019) assert that we live in a time of "economic, social, political, moral, ecological, and spiritual" crises that are evidence of a "deeply adolescent cultural state" (27). We have big ontological problems. The tendency in Western thought and philosophy toward objectivizing, instrumental rationality has

left little room for the non-human beings around us to act as subjects (see Demenchonok 2018 for a helpful summary). In other words, we've turned plants into objects to be manipulated toward our own ends. In turning them into objects we've lost the ability to interact with them, learn from them, embody them, and join in reciprocity with them. Our broken sociality with more-than-humans has led us here for if we cannot hear the plants or we do not respect them then we cannot or will not fulfill our reciprocity obligations to them. Ontological questions have been taken up by anthropologists in part out of concerns for indigenous justice (de la Cadena 2010), but also out of a sense of planetary urgency (Haraway 2016). Historically, indigenous animism and scientific knowledge have been at odds, but recent projects attempt to find the middle ground (Wall Kimmerer 2013). By framing indigenous animism as systems of belief or representations of the world (Geertz 1973; Lévi-Strauss 1963) scientific knowledge production has, even when striving for tolerant multiculturalism, mirrored asymmetric colonial power structures (de la Cadena 2010). Framing the animacy of the world as a "cultural view" ("they believe") places it in opposition to an unquestioned "real nature" ("we know") (Stengers 2008; Colpron 2013). Authors of the ontological turn in anthropology (Viveiros de Castro 2015), then, have tried to move beyond the framing of belief and "one world" to argue for multiple ontologies or multiple worlds. Favaron and Gonzales sum up the problem and Kopenawa points to the double standard as well as the need for reciprocity and embodiment of the other in order to move forward:

Las ciencias modernas afirman que los pueblos indígenas son animistas, queriendo dar a entender que sus creencias (por no decir supersticiones) dotan de vida a lo que no la tiene. Sin embargo, nos inclinamos a pensar que es todo lo contrario. Percibimos que la lógica moderna es inanimista, pues es incapaz de sentir la vida de lo que evidentemente vive, siente y dice.

Modern sciences affirm that indigenous peoples are animists, wanting to imply that their beliefs (not to say superstitions) give life to what does not have it. However, we are inclined to think that the opposite is true. We perceive that modern logic is inanimistic, since it is incapable of feeling the life of what it evidently lives, feels and says.

(Favaron and Gonzales 2019: 26)

Today white people think we should imitate them in every way. Yet this is not what we want [...] I think that we will only be able to become white people the day white people transform themselves into Yanomami. (Kopenawa et al. 2013: 22)

The shamanism I've described here and, I will argue later, the hybrid shamanism that coheres at my field site, is a practice of embodying the Other and interacting with the animacy of the world, thereby enabling an animate world to flourish. The shaman mediates between different universes. If Western modernity equates knowing with objectivizing, here knowing is equated with personifying, learning to live the experience of knowing subjects through embodying them:

She [the shaman] thus embodies the masters of the tree just as the masters of the tree embody her. This is not merely a form of imitation, nor merely a metaphor, since, with the help of ayahuasca, the shaman actualizes something else entirely: neither simply human, nor tree, nor anaconda but something among all of them. The shaman embodies interspecificity, allowing her to perform her shamanic mediations. (Colpron 2013: 378)

Shipibo healers stress that learning from nature takes time and patience, but it is important and a sign of being a good/legitimate/proper human. Although whiteness is often equated with an unwillingness to take the time to listen and indigeneity with animism, attentiveness to the animacy of nature can be lost and it can be learned. Favaron and Gonzales opine:

Ser indígena no sería tanto una cuestión de raza sino un estado del espíritu. Hay muchas personas que, aunque genéticamente son descendientes de las naciones indígenas, viven sometidos a la vorágine acelerada del mundo moderno, y ya no saben sentir la vida y la fuerza espiritual que anima a cada ser vivo. Quienes aún pensamos con nuestro corazón, sabemos cómo entablar diálogo con las plantas, con las montañas, con las nubes y con los espíritus de los animales. Todo participa del lenguaje. El humano legítimo, *joni kon*, sabe dialogar con

Being indigenous would not be so much a question of race but rather a state of mind. There are many people who, although genetically descended from indigenous nations, live subject to the accelerated whirlwind of the modern world, and no longer know how to feel life and the spiritual force that animates each living being. Those of us who still think with our hearts, know how to establish a dialogue with the plants, with the mountains, with the clouds and with the spirits of the animals. Everything participates in language. The legitimate human, *joni kon*, knows how to converse with all

toda la existencia.

Los seres humanos podemos recuperar, al menos en cierta medida, esta capacidad para hablar de forma espiritual con los diferentes seres vivos. Justamente, las dietas de iniciación que realizan los médicos Onanya de la nación shipiba, buscan que la persona pueda vincularse con el resto de seres vivos y dialogar con ellos, para aprender sus sabidurías y empezar a trabajar de forma armónica con los diferentes seres vivos y espirituales. Se trata de una conversación íntima, que se da de alma a alma. (Favaron and Gonzales 2019: 26- 27)

of existence.

Human beings can recover, at least to a certain extent, this ability to speak spiritually with different living beings. Precisely, the initiation diets carried out by the Onanya doctors of the Shipibo nation seek to enable the person to bond with the rest of living beings and dialogue with them, to learn their wisdom and begin to work harmoniously with the different living and spiritual beings. It is an intimate conversation, from soul to soul.

Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) similarly presents an argument for the descendants of colonizers to become “indigenous to place,” by learning to listen to and engage in reciprocity with human and non-human neighbors. She advocates for following in the footsteps of “white man’s footstep,” an immigrant plant who became a good neighbor and sort of naturalized citizen through engaging in helpful reciprocity with its hosts in the Americas. While neither I nor these authors are arguing that “white” people can become indigenous, I am arguing that learning animism, joining in reciprocal relations with human and non-human others, and engaging in ontological resistance against hegemonic Western ontologies can be learned and is a part of healing the wounds left on societies, humans, and non-humans by extractive encounters. While I do not think Viveiros de Castro’s “decolonization of thought” is possible because we have all been irrevocably shaped by colonial histories and the adoption of decolonization as metaphor can be problematic (Tuck and Yang 2012), we can strive for re-animizing the world and scientific thought.

Throughout this chapter, I have attended to histories of contact in the Amazon, highlighting

how Otherhood is conceptualized and mobilized by different actors and how those conceptualizations and mobilizations entail both suffering and healing. While Western ayahuasqueros drawn to my field site often may fall into traps of colonialist legacies, such as the essentialization of indigenous people, they are called to the wound to heal it. They are ready to subjectify rather than objectify Others. They bring their baggage and encounter the embodied history of another interrelated set of baggage imprinted on Amazonian people and plants. In entering into relationships with Amazonian plants and people, including ayahuasca, they are shaped by them. The chapters that follow illustrate how foreigners at my field site learn to animate the world through embodying Otherhood.

Chapter 3 – [Merging] Plant-Human Hybrids or How to Merge with a Plant Spirit

Introduction

I met Chakruna, the spirit of Chakruna. And this is my first real encounter with a plant spirit that strongly and she was guiding me into merging with her. It was a very challenging process. I had to constantly breathe and do these things. All the while I could see the spirit and it was being transferred into my being, it was very uncomfortable. I could feel how I'm not used to having a plant spirit reside within me. This is foreign for my system. And there was this whole readjustment process, and I could feel that the spirit felt the same [...]. Then, at some point, the merging ended. And my body felt so different it was so weird. And I could feel that the spirit was within me, like inside me.

Ida, one of the facilitators from Denmark, was telling me about the moment she first experienced a diet. It was an unusual situation – what she called a natural dieta, one initiated by the plant itself, not by a shaman. Before she ever began the course and the process of dieting, before she ever came to the jungle, the spirit of the plant Chakruna came to her during an ayahuasca ceremony in Europe and led her through a process of merging its consciousness with hers. She describes the experience as uncomfortable, challenging, and weird. But she doesn't mention fear or regret. Her words express gratitude, both then and now. Throughout the merger, she kept repeating "Thank you for your patience with me." As she relays the story, she brims with tenderness and awe. With quiet excitement, she shares wondrous facts about chakruna's biology: "It is one of the only plants in the world that can reproduce roots directly from the leaf!" After the merger, her ceremony was not yet over. The facilitator sang to the Chakruna in her and she found herself "in Chakruna's hospital," feeling the "spirit working all over [her]." Her body began to do things it is not normally capable of, her joints twisting with powers beyond her own. After ceremony, her relationship with Chakruna expanded and deepened. Chakruna told her that she needed to eat "excellent" to be on the healing path. Previously a vegan, she asked if it would be okay with Chakruna if she added one biodynamic egg a month to her diet. Chakruna agreed. In the months after the ceremony, she broke up with her partner. As soon as she did, she felt

“that Chakruna took up all the space that had been freed inside [her]. And that was very overwhelming again.” Despite the overwhelming feeling, Ida committed even more to the path, buying a one-way ticket to Peru.

Although Ida’s spontaneous dieta was not typical in its spontaneity, her experiences match those of other dieters. The experience began with a “call,” a message she received about a potential special connection between her and Chakruna. She followed up by setting the intention of connecting with the plant, placing a Chakruna leaf before her in ceremony. As the diet relationship deepened, she communicated with the plant to agree upon her behaviors, such as food consumption. The diet plant took her to its⁴⁴ hospital to do “surgery” on her, rearranging her being to better accommodate its presence. She, too, made space for it. As the plant settled into the space, she made changes in her life, dedicating herself to the path of plant diets, training with Don Enrique, and serving medicine. With each decision to commit, the plant gave her more of itself but also took up more space inside her, which could cause discomfort. That discomfort is sometimes shared with the plant as well. As Ida says above, the readjustment process was uncomfortable for them both.

In this chapter, I will explain the process of the diet more in-depth and explore the kinds of

⁴⁴ I have given much thought to what pronouns I wish to use to refer to the plants in this work. Should I refer to the plants as she/he, they, it, ze? How can I recognize their agency without anthropomorphizing them (such as by attributing gender)?

Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015) argues that using “it” to refer to earth beings robs them of their selfhood, reducing them to things instead of persons. She suggests “ki” and the plural “kin” instead, inspired by the Anishinaabe word for earth beings. While I find ki/kin beautiful, I think it would be too performative and forced in this case and too removed from the people and the place I am portraying. Furthermore, while I agree that most uses of “it” are objectifying and thereby disempowering, I don’t think it need always be that way. I favor a re-agentifying of all “its” around us – an appreciation of and respect for the subjectivity of the objects and earth beings in our lives.

I have decided to, in most cases, use what the people at my field site use, and to, in other cases, allow a fluidity and contextuality that takes into account the particular sentences that houses the pronoun. That is to say, sometimes I use “she,” “he,” “it,” or “they,” taking into consideration various factors including clarity, intention, and ethnographic provenance. In the case here, Ida used both “she” and “it” in the course of her narrative to refer to Chakruna. I am using “it” (1) practically to avoid the confusion of using two ‘she’s and (2) because Chakruna is not a typical diet plant at Inkankena and was not reliably gendered by my study participants.

bodies and selves foreign dieters cultivate as they attempt the uncomfortable process of merging human bodies with plant consciousness. In the following three sections, I will first (1) describe the diet as a contract that establishes a relationship – an agreed-upon exchange between a plant and a dieter that involves clear communication, sacrifice, and reciprocity between human and plant but also between humans (between teacher or diet-holder and novice or dieter). I will also provide an overview of previous studies on Amazonian diets and explain how my project builds on and departs from those projects. Next (2), I describe how the bodily rituals of the diet function to make the dieter’s human body habitable for the plant. By cutting out stimuli following the guidance of Don Enrique and the facilitators, dieters make and maintain space in their body for the plant to inhabit, but also learn to sensitize themselves to communication with their plant teachers. Dieters draw on their understandings of Shipibo concepts such as *niwe* (airs), *kano* (connection line), and *soplay* (a cleansing ritual of blowing tobacco smoke or Agua de Florida) to clean and protect their diet connections and develop the ability to interpret the status and will of their diets. The plants, for their part, work on the dieters’ bodies, such as through “surgery” in ceremony. They heal, rearrange, and generally make appropriate adjustments for the good of the new hybrid being the dieter will become. Lastly (3), I discuss how dieters talk about the feeling of hybridity. What does it mean to be a plant or part plant? I will investigate this question from their perspectives while also positing my own argument about the significance of this hybridity. I argue that the hybrid selves that dieters create are a unique intrapersonal relationship. Unlike in other cases of channeling or spirit possession, the dieter is more than a vessel that holds another consciousness. The successful dieter permanently becomes fused with their diet, while also maintaining enough individuation from their diet to be able to refer to their diet as a dialogue partner that is somewhat autonomous in that it has its own needs, desires, and will. Like a

seedling, their diet is connected to the original parent plant spirit, but separate and individual to its host. The consciousness that emerges from the diet intentionally balances multiplicity, feeding each branch of its identity. As diets are added, more seedlings are introduced with separate, but ultimately fused, consciousnesses, arranged under a hierarchy with Noya Rao (and the dieter) at the head, managing them all.

What is a Diet?

1. Etymological and Conceptual Considerations: Revitalizing the word “diet”

At first glance, “diet” may seem a peculiar and confusing word to describe a mystical jungle practice for connecting to and merging with the spirits of plants. However, its history proves it is well suited to the task. The word diet has roots in the Latin *diaeta* for “prescribed way of life” and before that the Greek *diaita* for “way of life, regimen, dwelling” related to verbs which meant “to lead one’s life” and “to separate or select food or drink.” This later became related, in French, to food regulated for medical reasons. The Medieval Latin *dieta*, related to the word day, also referred to daily church-related duties (Etymonline 2018). All of these point to a historical root of the word diet that encompasses but exceeds mere food restriction.

Of course, the diet is called a “diet” only by way of the English translation from the Spanish *dieta* from the Shipibo *sama*. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) Shipibo-Castellano dictionary (1993) translates *sama* as “dieta, abstinencia terapéutica de ciertos alimentos (diet, therapeutic abstinence from certain foods).” The example says “*Jawen sama xateaxa nato joni isinai, este hombre infringió su dieta y por eso se enfermó de nuevo* (This man got sick again because he broke his diet).” In that context, *sama* is easily related to the broader Amazonian practice of food taboos related to illness and health. In a Shipibo language lesson book written to

teach Shipibo writing to Shipibo speakers and preserve the culture and language, “sama” shows up in two stories – one in which an uncle becomes *onanya*, a healer (or one who knows), through dieting, and another in which the speaker talks about how in the old days if they were lazy, they would be given purgatives and then they would diet to become good, hard workers (Sánchez Rodríguez et al. 2013).

Like other terms circulating through indigenous and mestizo Amazonian ayahuasca traditions, sama is likely related to Quechua. The Quechua term *samay* can be glossed as ‘to breathe’ or ‘to rest.’ Although highland speakers do not use it to refer to dieting, Quechua-speaking communities in the Peruvian lowlands do. Lamas Quechuas use sama to refer to a diet practice with the same features of other lowland shamanic diets – connecting and communicating with teacher plants through a period of social seclusion and food restrictions including prohibition of salt and pork and prescription of plantains and fish (Sanz-Biset and Cañigueral 2011: 271). Kichwa (a version of Quechua spoken in the Ecuadorian lowlands), employs the word *sasikuy* for “to diet,” but *samay* can mean “soul,” “spirit,” “rest,” “break,” or “heart” (Kinti-Moss and Masaquiza Chango 2018).

Juxtaposing the Quechua interpretation with the Shipibo use binds the practice of food restriction to spirit, breath, and removal from everyday cycles of labor. The ideal diet, from both Don Enrique’s and the facilitators’ perspective, is practiced by fasting and swaying in a hammock for weeks on end, in isolation from the rest of human society with little food, no work, and communication with plants in lieu of human interaction. This rest is more grueling than restful, but it enables the dieter to return to work as a productive member of society. The connection between the diet and the breath is significant considering the historical connections among wind, breath, spirit, air, and psyche (Abram 1996). Air has unique boundary properties in

that it flows inside and outside of us, animating our bodies while also connecting our bodies to the animating spirit of the breathers around us. Abram (1996) suggests that many cultures have historically recognized the breath and air as an important animating force connecting humans to the spirit of the world around us, but that connection has been lost along with a recognition of the animacy of the world. He points out that the English term for psyche is related historically (through its Greek origin) to “soul,” “mind,” “breath,” “to blow,” and “gust of wind.” The breath is an important vehicle for healing in most indigenous American cultures, evidenced at my field site by the use of *soplay* (cleaning through blowing tobacco smoke or *Agua de Florida*). I will come back to *soplaying* in more depth in the next section on habitable bodies. For now, I will suggest that *sama*, similar to psyche, may pose a linguistic and material bridge between self and spirit.

Diet, then, in Western traditions as well as in indigenous American traditions, is a word well-suited to the complex and multi-faceted practice I am describing. Diets are about things that go into the body (and soul). They are conscious choices to restrict what goes into the body (and soul) to the end of shaping one’s body and oneself. A diet is a regimented practice and a restriction of the food one consumes to fulfill a healthy lifestyle and spiritual duty. In many contexts, diets can be understood as daily practices, rules, and choices that connect the dieter’s body to spirit, and in some cases, perhaps, to the animating spirit that connects humans to the natural world. The word diet reveals how mundane acts of living become, through intention and habit, transmuted into identity and connection, as well as meaning and duty beyond oneself. Although readers, as well as new arrivals at my field site, might experience some initial dissonance with the use of the term “diet,” its historical use and its linguistic context within the Amazon and beyond illuminates how fundamentally apt it is in multiple languages.

Does this account entirely for the way the word “diet” is used at Inkan Kena? In the opening case from this chapter of Ida with Chakruna, Ida uses the word diet to refer to a merging of herself with the plant. As we will see throughout this chapter, however, such a merging is only possible because of the cultivation of certain bodily practices and regimented prescriptions and proscriptions as agreed upon through a contract with the plant. Facilitators and others at my field site also spoke about dieting visions or experiences, in addition to substances other than plants. Although the process of dieting a vision might involve more mental exercises than physical dietary restrictions, the principle remains the same – the dieter intentionally monitors what goes into them (in this case into the mind especially), over a period of time in order to make space for something with the ultimate purpose of shaping the self. The use of the word “diet” to refer to the diet plant or the product of the diet can be understood as extensions of the initial meaning.

Furthermore, using the word “diet” allows dieters to talk about this special practice in a way that enables initiates to know exactly what is being discussed while non-initiates remain obviously unaware. When casual listeners hear “plant diet,” many immediately think they know what the speaker meant – a food regimen that is plant-based. In the context of the ayahuasca tourism industry, this is even more true because everyone who travels to Peru to partake in an ayahuasca ceremony hears about the “ayahuasca diet” – a series of diet restrictions that participants are encouraged to follow in order to make the most out of their ayahuasca experience. The “ayahuasca diet” restricts red meat, salt, oil, and other seasoning. These restrictions resemble the food restrictions required by plant diets and some foreign *ayahuasqueros* insist that the ayahuasca diet itself is a foreign misunderstanding – either a meaningless modern-day application of historic diet limitations based on what was available, a biologically important, but spiritually vacant set of rules to prevent contraindications with

ayahuasca substance, or a conflation of plant diet practices with ayahuasca practices (Shoemaker personal communication 2015).

I myself heard people discuss diets years prior to having any real understanding or awareness of what the practice really was. In one of the first ayahuasca retreats I attended, years before beginning my research, I received what I now believe to have been a diet (of *ajo sachá* or wild garlic). I didn't know that at the time and I actually did not drink the *ajo sachá* tea that was brought to me because I didn't like the taste and had no understanding of the meaning. Later, when conducting research on ayahuasca in 2015, my informants told me about diets and about a relationship with a special ancient tree (Noya Rao) – but I was focused on the phenomenology of the ayahuasca experience. I was not ready to know about diets.

2. Framing Foreign Dieters within the Literature on Amazonian Shamanic Diets

The advent of ayahuasca *pasajeros* partaking in plant diets is a relatively recent phenomenon and, to my knowledge, this is the first study focusing in-depth on foreign participants in plant diets. However, diets among indigenous and mestizo healers, sometimes referred to as *vegetalistas*, are relatively well-documented. Several Spanish and other non-English language ethnographic monographs about Shipibo cosmologies (Illius 1991; LeClerc 2003; Tournon 2002; Caruso 2005; Tubino and Zariquiey 2007) elaborate upon the shamanic development of *onanyabo* (healers or knowers), through plant diets.⁴⁵ The practices they describe mirror those found in the more limited English literature, which focuses on mestizo practitioners (Luna 1984; Luna 1986; Fotiou 2017; Fotiou 2019; O'Shaughnessy and Berlowitz 2021) but sometimes

⁴⁵ Unfortunately for the English-speaking *pasajeros* who are interested in reading about Shipibo traditions, most of these accounts are not widely accessible, nor available in English. Instead, they sometimes read about Shipibo worldviews through Roe's (1982) *The Cosmic Zygote*, which mentions ayahuasca but doesn't have much to say about diets.

incorporates Shipibo informants (Jauregui et al. 2011). Here, I will provide a brief overview of the extant literature on diets, offering my own departures from what others have provided.

What Fotiou (2019) calls “shamanic diets” are a prominent “technology of the body” in many Amazonian traditions. Most authors place these practices within a broader, pan-Amazonian complex of “food shamanism,” in which food taboos, and other digestive interventions such as purgatives, constitute environmental management and shamans are the arbiters of the interspecies domain that governs illness and health. Within the cosmological model of food shamanism,⁴⁶ illness is often the result of offending the spirits of game animals or plants, tying the health of individuals to the health of the entire cosmo-ecological environment. The role of the shaman is to monitor the relationship between people and their environment. Healing is predicated on managing that relationship and thus the entire medical system is intertwined with ecological imperatives. Århem (2003 [1996]) writes about Macuna culture:

Disease, then, is a punishment for failed reciprocity. [...] Their ethnoetiology thus relates human illness to environmental abuse; disease is viewed as the result of cosmonomic mismanagement. The notions of health and curing are focused, not narrowly on the individual person, but on the natural and social whole of which the human patient is a part. Such a totalising ‘eco-medical’ system, with all its bio-medical shortcomings, is a notoriously powerful sanction against environmental abuse. [...] The protective shaman is a cosmic manager controlling the relationships of predation and exchange among different life forms and communities—human and non-human. It is his task to supervise the pact between men and animals and to guarantee the well-being of people by ensuring the reproduction of the non-human life forms on which humans rely for a living. (196, 197, 201)

As well as mediating the relationship between human persons and non-human persons, dietary restrictions are important tools for shaping the body to maintain human personhood vis-à-vis other, non-human persons. Ever since Lévi-Strauss (1983 [1976]) famously contrasted

⁴⁶ This theory of food shamanism is largely based off ethnographic research with Tucanoan-speaking people on the Colombia/Brazil border by Århem (2003 [1996]) and Reichel-Dolmatoff (1997), but it has become ubiquitous within the literature as a tool for understanding Amazonian relationships between food, health, spirits, the natural environment, and personhood.

Spaniards' fixations with the soul and indigenous concerns with the body,⁴⁷ the distinction has permeated the literature. Research centered on diverse Amazonian groups (including Achuar, Napo Runa, Muinane, Urarina, Cashinahua) has focused on Amazonian bodily techniques for person-making, contributing to the theory that Amazonian cultures often see the body, rather than the soul, as the site for management and construction of human personhood (Descola 1997; Viveiros de Castro 1998; Uzendoski 2005; Santos-Granero 2009; Londoño Sulkin 2012; Walker 2013; McCallum 2014).⁴⁸ If you eat with jaguars and eat what jaguars eat, you run the risk of becoming a jaguar yourself.

While many food taboos are about maintaining the eater's humanity, shamans themselves are often portrayed as shapeshifters who can take the form of other non-human persons. They use this transformational superpower to heal, engage in sorcery, or improve hunting and/or warfare. Brabec de Mori (2012) interprets Shipibo diets as a period of abstention from human contact which enables the initiate to communicate with non-humans through altered states, and ultimately learn to transform into non-humans.

Shipibo and mestizo practitioners stress that the initiate must learn directly from *plantas que enseñan*, or plants that teach (also referred to as plants with a madre – mother, ibo/dueño – owner, or espíritu/alma – spirit/soul), rather than from other people. In Shipibo, they are called *rao*. Rao is actually used broadly to refer to powerful objects which can heal or kill, whereas plants that do not heal or kill, are called *raoma* – not rao (Arévalo 1994; Tournon 2006).

Practitioners do not always agree upon which plants teach and different practitioners emphasize

⁴⁷ “In the Greater Antilles, some years after the discovery of America, whilst the Spanish were dispatching inquisitional commissions to investigate whether the natives had a soul or not these very natives were busy drowning the white people they had captured in order to find out, after lengthy observation, whether or not the corpses were subject to putrefaction” (Lévi-Strauss, 1983 [1973]: 330).

⁴⁸ See Fotiou (2019) for a review.

different plants in different orders and combinations (some diet one at a time, others diet multiple at one time), but there are at least one hundred (Jauregui et al. 2011; Sanz-Biset and Cañigüeral 2011). Some non-plants are also dieted as teachers, including perfume, Agua de Florida, alcanfor (camphor), pedernal (flintstone), and creoline (a commercial disinfectant) (Luna 1984). Different plants offer different powers often according to their mimetic properties (e.g., strong trees make the dieter strong). Some purify and cleanse, others develop sensitivity and intuition (“they make you see”), some strengthen and increase the body’s defenses, some provide defense against “negative energies” and “bad spirits” (Jauregui et al. 2011).

Dietar, in Amazonian Spanish, refers to all conditions related to learning from the plants, including fasting, sexual abstinence, and plant baths (Luna 1986). At their core, “shamanic diets” typically include four elements: 1) isolation from other people, 2) ingestion of diet plants, 3) dietary restrictions such as salt, sugar, fat, pork, game, acidic food, garlic, chili sauce, alcohol and often a total fast, and (4) sexual abstinence (Jauregui et al. 2011: 742). The length of dieting varies on average from two to five years, with each individual plant diet lasting weeks, months, or years. Those practices are combined with ayahuasca sessions, the use of purgatives to induce vomiting and other kinds of cleansing, careful attention to dreams, and cultivating the ability to listen to and learn *ikaros* directly transmitted from plant teachers (Giove 1993). Sometimes individuals undergo diets just for healing, whereas healthy individuals undertake learning diets to become healers; dieting is seen as essential for ayahuasca healers. These processes are understood as purifying for mestizo healers who report changes in spirit and body, including the ability to come closer to nature through the sensory changes to their bodies:

Under these strict, rigorous, severe and austere conditions, the initiates go through a process of bodily, mental and spiritual cleansing which takes them to a state of purification, an essential step in order to communicate with the plant mothers. On one occasion, EL, a Mestizo healer, told us that “it purifies to such an extent that the body

loses its human smell and some animals come so close that it becomes easy to hunt them. (Jauregui et al. 2011: 742)

The idea of following a particular diet is seen as a *sine que non* both for becoming a *vegetalista* – i.e., for acquiring wisdom and strength – and for restoring one’s health. Only by purifying oneself by following the diet is one able to contact the spirit world, learn from the plants, and regain physical health. All *vegetalistas* insist that following the diet is the way of wisdom. They all say that while they follow their diets their minds work differently, they could observe and memorize more easily, even their bodies changed their smell, allowing them to study nature in a more direct way, and they had lucid dreams, in which the process of learning continued. (Luna 1986: 161)

Practitioners from different backgrounds emphasize the importance of direct knowledge⁴⁹ and discipline. Guillermo Arévalo, a well-known Shipibo healer, emphasizes the importance of discipline for forming the correct relationship with nature:

La dieta es la disciplina. Forma parte de tal disciplina también el ayuno porque mientras ayunas te haces más fuerte. Como dice el cristiano: el ayuno es el alimento del alma. Es igual también en el curanderismo. Es necesaria una dura disciplina, porque de otra manera el chaman no estará en buenas relaciones con el mundo del chamanismo y sus espíritus. (Don Guillermo Arévalo in Caruso 2005: 143)

Diet is discipline. Fasting is also part of such discipline because while you fast you become stronger. As the Christian says: fasting is food for the soul. It is also the same in curanderismo. A harsh discipline is necessary, because otherwise the shaman will not be in good relations with the world of shamanism and its spirits.

Mestizo and Shipibo healers talk about diet “tests,” in which temptation lures dieters into improperly breaking their diet, leading to rashes and other physical punishments. A crossed (improperly broken) diet leads to physical and mental symptoms of illness. This punishment is referred to, in Spanish, with the verb *cutipar* – a widespread word in Andean-Amazonian Spanish, derived from Quechua, which can perhaps be translated as something akin to “pay back” or even karma. It usually refers to reciprocal negative consequences suffered in response

⁴⁹ “That is why some doctors believe that the *vegetalismo* (or science of the plants) is stronger than *la medicina de estudio* (Western medicine), because they learn by reading books. But we just take this liquid (*ayahuasca*), keep the diet, and then we learn” (Luna 1986: 142).

to transgressions against natural beings.

Although vegetalista and Shipibo diets contain many overlapping features, Shipibo practices differ in their focus on the culturally specific notion of *onan*, loosely translated as intuitive knowledge or wisdom. Lener Guiamares, a Shipibo teacher, referring to the diet and the requisite relationship with nature for developing *onan*, says:

Uno tiene que estar muy relacionado con la naturaleza para formar su personalidad.[...] estas dietas te están construyendo para que seas un hombre de principios. Pero, ¿a quién estás obedeciendo?, ¿a la persona? No, estás obedeciendo a los principios de la planta [...] y la dieta te produce un efecto: construir tu personalidad; porque te disciplina. [...] Los conocimientos pueden ser transmitidos a través de otra persona, pero ese es un concepto muy occidental, en la cultura indígena, los conocimientos nos los transmiten las plantas. (Pucallpa, agosto del 2003 in Tubino and Zariquiey 2007: 70-71)

One has to be closely related to nature to form one's personality.[...] these diets are building you to be a man of principles. But who are you obeying? The person? No, you are obeying the principles of the plant [...] and the diet produces an effect on you: building your personality; because it disciplines you. [...] Knowledge can be transmitted through another person, but that is a very Western concept, in indigenous culture, knowledge is transmitted to us by plants.

So not only must the initiate learn from the plant, they must also *obey* the plant and construct themselves as a person with principles following the plant's teachings of discipline in order to achieve *onan*. According to Tubino and Zariquiey (2007), *onan* is spiritual and material, theoretical and practical:

No existe un equivalente al *onan* en la tradición occidental, atravesada desde sus orígenes por las dicotomías teoría-praxis, ethos-physis, cultura-naturaleza, espíritu-materia, cuerpo-alma. La adquisición de la sabiduría para los shipibos pasa por un proceso de iniciación anímico y corporal, que nos prepara para existir en diálogo vivencial con los espíritus de la naturaleza y para ayudar a nuestros

There is no equivalent to *onan* in the Western tradition, affected since its origins by the dichotomies of theory-praxis, ethos-physis, culture-nature, spirit-matter, body-soul. The acquisition of wisdom for the Shipibo involves a process of animic and corporeal initiation, which prepares us to exist in experiential dialogue with the spirits of nature and to help our

hermanos a preparase para la vida.
(Tubino and Zariquiey 2007: 70)

brothers prepare for life.

Thus, while Amazonianist theories about indigenous Amazonian worldviews emphasize the importance of the body, the diet practices described here are important processes of managing both body and soul. They are part of broad, overlapping but distinct, pan-Amazonian logics and patterns that draw on various cultural and historical inheritances, including from Christianity.

The studies above describe practices that mirror the general practices that are taught and practiced at my field site. However, they focus on healer (mestizo and Shipibo) perspectives and beliefs rather than the perspectives of foreign dieters. While diets have been offered to foreigners since at least 2008 when I first traveled to the Amazon, they only started to become well-known in the ayahuasca community in the last few years. Fotiou (2019) observed that most ayahuasca retreats offered diets as of 2019. I and facilitators at my field site noted that while in 2021 few course participants arrived already knowing about diets, by 2022, most did. As evidence of the newfound and growing popularity of diets, detailed posts on the diet practice and diet plants (relayed by an English-speaking student of a Shipibo shaman) can be found on Reddit's ayahuasca thread as of 2022.

In Gearin and Labate's (2018) review of the "Western ayahuasca diet," they examine how Westerners adapt the shamanic diet practice for global ayahuasca drinkers. They note how interesting and remarkable it is "when a cultural group adopts the spiritual dietary restrictions of a different culture" (2018: 177). Ultimately, however, they argue it represents a significant departure from indigenous ontologies. Focusing on the ayahuasca diet rather than plant diets, they find that Westerners often interpret the diet simplistically through a highly individual, psychologized lens, concerned with the psyche, psychological and energetic damage to themselves, and universalized rather than local spirits. For example, they find that sorcery is

often conflated with PTSD, building an epistemological bridge to explain why “natives” are not barbaric in believing in sorcery. They also argue that foreigners have not adopted the idea that all foods can be vehicles for spirits to take revenge on humans. They do acknowledge that plant diets among foreigners come closer to approximating local worldviews, but dismiss them as rare.

In contrast, I see the diet practices at Inkan Kena as much more closely tied to broader multicultural Amazonian complexes, though they represent a new, hybrid form. Their focus on contracts and the way they talk about merging with plant spirits (using metaphors of saplings growing inside them) exceed what has been portrayed thus far in the literature on plant diets. However, I argue that my informants are doing more than psychologizing or mapping their own static, preconceived cultural notions onto local practices. The spirits and practices they are engaging with are deeply local, embodied, and reciprocal. They use western psychologizing concepts as well, but often reinterpret them in new ways as they engage deeply with the particularity and moral complexity of individual plant spirits. In the rest of this chapter, focusing on foreign facilitators and long-term dieters who take most of the tenets of the practice very seriously, I demonstrate how they grapple with the diet process and see it as a merging of themselves with a plant spirit through an energetic contract.

3. A Diet is an Energetic Contract: Rules, Reciprocity, Negotiation

Dieters at Inkan Kena fixate on the “contracts” they make with their diet plants. Diets are not only about the practice (daily, restrictions), they are also about the connection to spirit. This connection is an interrelational one governed by an “energetic contract,” one of the definitions given in the course for what a diet is. At the beginning of a diet at Inkan Kena, the dieter makes a contract with their diet plant to set the intentions of the diet. Through the contract, the dieter

negotiates with the plant on what they will give and what they will receive. Some facilitators recommend that dieters write these contracts down – outlining what the dieter will do and give to the plant and what they hope to gain from the diet. Contracts include agreements such as “I will go to visit the Noya Rao tree every day,” “I will not use my phone,” “I will practice ikaros every day,” and “I will fast for five days and then only eat fish and plantains” as well as requests for the lessons or healings the diet might impart such as helping the dieter with a health issue or helping the dieter become a better healer or singer or to ask for guidance to open their heart more. Facilitators suggest intentions for growth over time rather than specific requests. I repeatedly heard them say something along the lines of: “most of the intentions of the diet usually always get answered. It’s a pretty magical process” (Faciliator, Peter). The contracts may be subject to negotiation throughout the diet, depending on the initial terms and the relationship between the dieter and the plant. Here are some examples of contract terms:

I asked for two things in the contract. One, to completely reconfigure my mind, body, and soul – to reset and transform all of it for the better. And the other was to help me become a being of unconditional love for myself and all of this. (Facilitator, Peter)

Part of my contract with Bobinsana is to plant one Bobinsana tree. But I have been planting a whole bunch of them – and all of a sudden, the plant is giving me seeds! (Participant, Oak)

I had put into my contract that this is what I want to do. There's nothing more important than this that I can think of in the world for me to do. I just wanted a way for it to work. I said, please help me find a way to live and work in Peru and make enough money so that I can diet as often as possible. [...] I had also put in my contract that I needed to brush my teeth with toothpaste. Just because my teeth were a mess after the first after the course. (Participant, Claire)

I also put some stuff in my contract about [pork]. I said, I'm not willing to do this for life. And if you don't accept that, then tell me and then I break this diet, and we're all good. But I am not going to commit to this. And she said, she's okay with it. At least that's the message that I got. And so yeah, I think it's amazing... It's not going to be a major path of my life. (Participant, Isaac)

Please teach me in my dreams. And in return, I will make sure to get up and write them down. (Facilitator, Reed)

The contract is about reciprocity. Throughout the course, the facilitators impart many lessons about the diet. One of the recurring themes is the analogy between plant relationships and human relationships. Often likening the diet to a romantic or sexual relationship, facilitators emphasize the importance of such relationship features as communication, fidelity, and compromise. If you don't treat the plant with respect, it will negatively affect your ability to learn and benefit from it just as if you cheated on a partner your chances of a sexual relationship with your partner is compromised. In the excerpts below from one of his lectures, a facilitator, Adam, explains how this shared relationship is rooted in a shared "energetic body." He emphasizes the need for respect, commitment, sacrifice, dedication, and reciprocity. He encourages students to welcome the plant into their bodies and to engage in this lifelong relationship of reciprocity because it will help them achieve the dual goals of receiving ("without the sacrifices [...] you're not going to receive the medicine of the diets") and administering healing ("this reciprocity is fundamental to all shamanic traditions really").

So essentially, [the diet] is a contract made between you and the plant. It's important to recognize that a diet is a lifelong relationship. The Shipibo talk a lot about how when you diet a plant, it now lives inside of you. it's no longer just your body, you are sharing this body. As you diet more and more, the plant grows more and more inside of you. And they describe this as, like an internal energetic pattern, the plant carves these patterns through your energetic body. And as that process happens, then it's easier for the plants to move through your body. And it's also easier for Ayahuasca to move through your body and to connect. [...] It requires a lot of commitment and dedication. And without, you know, reciprocity, without the sacrifices that we do, then you're not going to receive the medicine of the diets, because this reciprocity is fundamental to you know, all shamanic traditions really. (Facilitator, Adam)

The sacrifices of the diet are more palatable when seen as reciprocity within a relationship:

I think the way I see sacrifice now is, is much healthier... if I want to be friends with you, for example, I have to put something into the relationship like, you know, you have to give to receive. And so, the diets are a way of practicing sacred reciprocity. You reap what you sow. And a lot of that is true with the diets the more that you think about these plants, the more that you care about your relationship with these plants, the more that you get back from them. (Participant, Ian)

Adam continues to the topic of negotiation:

So, what is the contract? I touched on that there's there needs to be an energetic exchange. There's a time commitment required so you and the plant can work out what the time is going to be, you know, if you have three days available, and you say. So, I want to diet for three days, I want to offer these three days. And the plant might say perfect, or the plant might say well, what about five days or whatever.

So, the contract is somewhat subject to negotiation between the plant and the dieter. Some terms are considered non-negotiable – such as pork, salt, or sex – but “the contract is also a conversation about what’s needed in the moment. As you go along it will evolve as your dieta evolves.” Students are advised to continuously converse with their diets and with their inner self, feeling into how the relationship with the diet feels. However, that doesn’t give them carte blanche to disrespect the plants. As Don Enrique says “con la planta no hay que burlarse” (you mustn’t mess around with the plants). If you act disrespectful in the relationship, Noya Rao will just take your diet and leave. Dan, one of the facilitators, likens it to repeatedly letting down a friend who eventually loses faith or trust in you.

Overall, the contract is about stating abstentions and intentions and engaging with a dialogue with the plant spirit about those agreements. For some participants, the word contract seems harsh. For others, they relish the structure. Ida insists that despite their use of the word contract and their metaphors about friendship it is really more of a bond/band and an alchemical merging:

I would say that contract, for me that has a charge in a way. I call it like a band, a band that you can tie something together with it. But with the bond, yeah, like your dieta bond, which to me just romanticizes it a little bit and that eases my mind. So, what it is essentially is that you will be inviting this very massive plant spirit to be inhabited within your body and system. This is a very big alchemical merging. That again is a very serious thing. This is not just making a plant your friend or learning about different medicinal properties of a plant and being really good at using it. This is actively inviting a spirit to live within you, to become part of you, for you to become a mutant, a plant-person mutant. It is a very serious alchemical process and the contract aspect of that, is so in a way you can see you are inviting the plant to live within you. (Facilitator, Ida)

In the next two sections, I will explore what Ida means by this merging, describing the bodily

processes involved in the merge and the ways dieters talk about inviting a spirit to live within them.

Habitable Bodies: Sensitizing

1. Preparing: Emptying, Purging, Surgery

Nuestros ancestros decían en tu cuerpo tienes que estar como un papel, la planta te dice *min yora xapwa*. Prácticamente listo para que tú puedes elevarte. Por eso, nuestros maestros no nos dejaban comer mucho, eso es nuestro costumbre, no caminar mucho en sol. ¡No caminar así, tampoco – despacio! Cuando tú haces tu necesidad, no hacer fuerza. No! La caca solito tiene que... (Don Enrique)

So, one of the reasons why it's in their custom, they eat so little so their body can become like paper thin, it has to be like thin as a paper so you're ready to fly away your body becomes what he was saying *min yora xapwa* is like 'my paper thin body.' So you can fly off to different worlds. You can like elevate your spirit and your body to go to other planets, other realms and speak with the spirits there. You have to become really, really light in body so that you can easily take off your spirit and easily travel. Also, their customs. They don't walk around a lot in the sun. When they diet, they don't walk fast. They walk super slow. Also, when you go to the bathroom, you don't force out your shit. You just let it drop by itself. Very important point. You don't force in that way. You know just let the things happen. (Facilitator Peter's translation)

Don Enrique often tells us we have to make our bodies like sheets of paper. He tells us that many dieters who come think they're in a restaurant; they want to eat well. But in order to heal yourself and others, in order to learn from the plants, your body must become light. You shouldn't stomp on the ground or exert force when you poop. You should eat delicately. As facilitators interpret these statements, they contextualize and provide additional details, explaining that this light body will let you fly to the realm of the spirits and that an attitude of letting go will allow the plant to more fully enter the body. Throughout the course, as participants use various purgatives, the facilitators frame them as important for both healing through cleansing and creating a habitable body for the diet which opens up sensitivity to plant ways of being, sensing, and knowing. Many dieters experience "surgeries" in which the diet

plants themselves rearrange the dieter's body. However, the facilitators always stress that these changes are mutually beneficial – for the dieter and the plant. In striving toward bodies that are habitable for plants, dieters develop new sensitivities and pave the way for receiving healing and guidance from the plants. Dieters do this through limiting input into their bodies and minds, cleansing through purges, and receiving plant-initiated “surgeries.”

Ida explains that by way of the diet, the plant, through the body of the dieter host, “will be trying to live in a human world,” and so the dieter should be sensitive to the plant's adjustment. Fasting helps the plant adjust, bringing human metabolic processes closer to a plant's:

There are some very big differences about being a plant and being a person. But for example, a plant doesn't have a I-don't-know-how-many-football-fields-long digestive system to process and dissect all the food that we take in and distribute all over the body and produce a massive amount of waste. A plant just simply kind of harvests light directly. So, a human being has a much more kind of densified energy around it, the way that we process nourishment, the way that we are processing everything physically is very different from a plant perspective. Therefore, for the plant spirit to suddenly come into your body is also quite intense, like it is intense for us to be dumped down into the plant spirit world. So, it's like you will diet the plant, but the plant will also diet you at the same time. Therefore, to make that merging easier, to make it easier for the plant to inhabit you, we make as much space as we can, within our beings. So many of these things that we abstain from is to create space. The less there is of anything else, the more space there is for your diet. (Facilitator, Ida)

Facilitators use this reciprocal view of dieting (“you diet the plant, and the plant diets you”) to explain the many restrictions of the diet. The goal is to limit stimuli as much as possible so the plant can fill up the physical and metaphysical space of the dieter's being. Dense, gross, sensory stimulating, and loud energies repel the plants. Oil and spices even hurt it. Dieters frequently use the phrases “emptying yourself physically and energetically,” and “emptying your vessel.” The diet begins with at least two days of fasting, limiting ingestion to the extract and energy of the plant and pure water (although dry fasting is preferred). Longer fasts are encouraged, since that affords the diet the most space. After fasting for at least two days, dieters are permitted to eat the plain, bland food provided to them (potatoes, sweet potatoes, rice, lentils, eggs, rice, beets, soup,

occasionally chicken or fish). Facilitators stress that the food should not fill you; it is best to avoid overeating or eating for pleasure since that approach will occupy more space. Students are also encouraged to restrict beyond the diet foods provided, always listening to their diet's guidance and inner knowing. They may choose, for example, to follow a "more traditional Shipibo" plantain and fish diet.

Beyond the consumption of food, other forms of consumption and input including thoughts, books, and conversation are also important, since:

Everything that you engage with when you're on diet is woven into the tapestry of your connection with your diet. [...it] all becomes part of the world that your dieta is experiencing in and through you. (Facilitator, Peter)

It's advisable to avoid reading books (they distract from the diet) unless they complement and align with the diet energy. Similarly, it's recommended to avoid speaking, or at least step away from conversations that don't feed the diet (such as contentious political conversations). Crucially, the initiate should abstain from violent or sexual acts or thoughts; sex and violence are seen as the worst energies for dieta:

An analogy that Enrique often uses is that fighting with people is like taking a glass of water symbolizing your diet. When you fight with somebody doing the dieta, it's like taking the glass and dropping it on the floor. And it's shattering into 1000 pieces. Fighting during dieta shatters the connection. (Facilitator, Peter)

Loud energies like sexual energy, like anger, all these things can overpower the plants, especially in the beginning like, when it's really sensitive, it's just coming in. Lowering down the loudness of the physical energy, the gross, course, like thick energies, for the soft energies to come in. So that's how I look at the purges, like mentally or spiritually, the first thing is silence. (Participant, Nadeem)

Learning to apply discipline to the inner world of thoughts, dreams, and emotions is a skill that dieters attempt to cultivate, because even thoughts can harm the diet, the dieter, and other people. While earlier diets might be more forgiving, plants expect the more experienced dieters to know the ropes. The following quotes illustrate the demands on the dieter to control all parts

of their inner worlds, from their thoughts to their emotions to their dreams. Furthermore, those thoughts, emotions, and dreams are classified to be almost on par with material actions.

However, because they are harder to control, students are assured that the diet will be understanding. The diets will react to both intention and progress with control over inner worlds, along the way coaching and encouraging the development of such discipline.

If you're thinking about eating cake all the time, it's kind of like eating cake. (Facilitator, Rosemary)

A lot of emotions can be out of line with the diet's energy. Like anger, especially directing anger and frustration at others. In the tradition, they often call that *boman*. *Boman* is like an unconscious sorcery where your negative thoughts are given power to harm somebody else, or to block somebody else or to affect somebody else. And so, it's very important to be aware of how far we entertain negative thoughts about other people in and out of dieta. (Facilitator, Adam)

Sometimes when you diet, you'll be just like munching marshmallows in your dreams, eating like big buffet tables with like, all the food that you love the most. So, again, you're not breaking your promise by having a sexual dream, you're not breaking your promise by eating your favorite cookie in your dream, but it's how you engage with it. And it is possible, specifically, as you continue to continuously diet, it is possible to realize when you are dreaming that you are dieting, and therefore stop engaging with energy. And whenever you are able to reach that point, the plants are very happy for you. Not that you are like punished if you don't, but just that it's like subconsciously also working with you. (Facilitator, Ida)

In addition to limiting input, dieters should cleanse what is already inside them. Don Enrique administers multiple purgatives to that end. Ayahuasca itself is a purgative and it is not unusual for one week on the course to include multiple days of fasting, three ayahuasca ceremonies, vapor baths, and multiple *vomitivos* (purgatives that induce vomiting). Purging can take the form of various expulsions inside and outside ceremony – vomiting, screaming, crying, snotting, burping, shaking, peeing, pooping, bleeding menstrual blood, yawning, coughing – but *vomitivos* are the favorite tool of choice to induce the purge. As it turns out, anything, even just water, can be a purgative with the right knowledge, but here I'll describe a standard garlic *vomitivo* (from my field notes):

We've only slept a few hours after a long ceremony last night, but the facilitators wake us at 6 am and we wearily gather on our mats. On the ground before each mat they place a bucket, a little cup of blended garlic cloves, and a large pitcher of warm water. Someone starts a timer and barks "go!" We throw the garlic shot back as quickly as we can. It burns immediately, like fire poured into the chest and stomach. A chorus of moans ring out. Someone is crying. My eyes water and I realize I too am moaning in pain. Some people can't hold it in any longer; they are already puking. One minute later the timer has gone off and we can begin to chug copious quantities of water. The trick is to learn how to essentially pour it down your throat like an open tap until your belly expands and you vomit up a whole bucket. The facilitators cheer and goad us to chug more water and advise against inducing vomiting with a finger in the throat. Two or three full rounds is best – until the vomit runs clear and free of foam. It is truly something to sit in a circle and hurl violently together with 15 other people.

The purges can release emotions and trauma. They can clean dark energies and demons, ancestral lineages, or bad airs (*niwe*) that are trapped in the body. Don Enrique often mentions that foreigners are very sick. Dieters often interpret this as due to their urban, industrial bodies and minds, removed from proper relations with nature. Since their bodies are filled with plastics and heavy metals, purification is necessary to develop a more fine-tuned intuitive faculty.

The intention of the purging is to get us back to a place where we are less influenced by the toxins in our bodies that are the toxins from our culture, you know, like sugar and caffeine and whatever things that we use a lot of in an unhealthy way. Allowing us to be more grounded in kind of an instinctive and intuitive place. (Facilitator, Adam)

Adam also reflected that while local Amazonians may need purgatives for bacteria and parasites, Westerners might have different needs. Stories about purges that were shared in the course include a story about heavy metals purging through the soft palate into the mouth during vapor baths and another about vegetarians chucking up meat, consumed years prior, from the depths of their gastrointestinal system. Those who have been dieting for longer or whose vessels are pure, do not typically purge from ayahuasca because they are already clean.

Another interesting aspect of the purgatives is how dieters also apply the nascent sensitivities learned through their diets to the purgatives. The purgatives provide an opportunity to engage in communication with their diet plants. They can also be teachers in their own right with their own

lessons and consciousnesses and ability to inhabit human bodies in the long term if the human is open. Below, Peter narrates an experience in which he listened to Noya Rao's advice during a purge and Adam tells a story about how using a purgative led to the purgative plant staying with him for years afterward.

The first time I did garlic I was drinking water to purge. And then I was getting closer to purge and then this like voice just insistently set in inside of me like "don't purge, don't purge, don't purge." And I was really confused by it. I started asking Noya Rao like "well should I purge?" And she was like "no, don't purge, let it go through your system." So, I stopped, and it was kind of a little bit annoying because I was quite close to purging. I had so much water in my system now. But then she was like, "don't purge," so I didn't purge. And I just let it run through the system. And I had this vision of this big worm being extracted out of out of me like coming out of my mouth. And a lot of stuff just passed out of me. And I felt super good afterwards, it was just like burning everything inside of me, all the stuff that – all the bacteria and stuff – that wasn't supposed to be there. (Facilitator, Peter)

Piñon Blanco, I worked with twice, and the second time was like, pretty rough physically. I purged some pretty weird things, like bile. I don't know if it came out of some organ or something, but it was like a vibrant color. but then afterwards, for a few days, I had the smell of it in the back of my nostrils, and I couldn't get it out. It kept coming back at various times over the next few weeks and months quite regularly, and then it kind of went away and then just occasionally, it just fills my nasal cavity. I would usually be like uff that smell is like reminding me of this terrible purging experience! Then at one point, after a couple of years, Piñon Blanco came to me in ceremony and said that it's been protecting me, it's latched on to my immune system, and it's strengthened me, you know, and it's like, 'every time you smell me, I'm working in your body to fight something off. So stop being upset about the smell and be grateful.' I was like, Oh, wow. So, I still get that now and that was probably four years ago. He's still with me, you know. So that was a really interesting experience of friending a plant spirit through a purgative. (Facilitator, Adam)

Surgery is another idiom for discussing bodily changes. Sometimes it is explicitly spiritual or energetic (such as when practicing cord cutting rituals), but it can also be embodied and physical. Evelyn is a frequent, long-term dieter with a history of physical abuse which led to deafness and related surgeries. Here, she describes the painful experience of plant spirits doing surgery on her, during which she used a common tool that Enrique teaches to ask the plants if they are good spirits and if so, give them permission to do their work:

Marosa, she's all about cleaning and healing. But the healing is not – what's that word? It's not fun. It's painful. Every night when I dieted her, I would go to bed and I would have like, they're doing surgery in my head constantly. And the right side of my ear, there's like a straw that goes into my ear, and they're doing brr [drill sound] like a major surgery inside. And just like working constantly in my head, like, I don't know what they're doing. So every night, you feel like you have like some kind of like bugs, running around in your head all the time, every night. It's like, okay, you know, are you here? Are you aligned with Noya Rao? If not, please kindly go away. And if you're here to serve my highest good, I guess continue what you're doing. Like every night there's always something working in my head constantly. Marosa is a powerful healing energy, but it's no joke. (Participant, Evelyn)

Surgery is the work of the plant spirits, and it can happen with or without the dieter's conscious knowledge or sensory perception. Ayahuasca at Inkan Kena is seen simply as a tool to consciously connect and understand the changes that are happening.

Ayahuasca is sort of like the translator, the one who can make it make sense cognitively. Or make it not make sense. Depending on how well you align with that way of communicating. It's like the difference between having surgery when you're under sedation or having surgery while awake. It's like with ayahuasca you're having surgery while awake. (Participant, Claire)

The surgeries and other changes driven by the plant are, crucially, healing for the dieter as well as space-providing for the plant. The two aspects are mutually reinforcing because the plant merges with the dieter. When the dieter thrives, the plant also thrives. Thus, through the bodily process of preparation, the dieter is beginning to learn the necessary tools to share a body with a plant spirit. The process requires constant attentiveness to the needs of the plants. Through attending to the needs of the plant, the dieter also learns, via the reciprocal relationships of the diet, to attend more carefully to their own needs and begins developing sensitivity, discipline, and discernment.

2. *"Listening:" Sensitivity and Airs, Messages, Discernment*

Through the diet, students learn to sensitize themselves to the subtle energies of the plants. The bodily practices of purging and fasting eliminate digestive energies that stimulate and clog

up the system, making it possible to perceive communication from the plants. Marosa is one of the diet plants most appreciated for her capacity to open up sensitivity. While dieting Marosa, dieters sometimes can't even touch their phones without suffering an electric shock. Loud noises, such as people stomping across the wooden floor of the maloka, upset them. However, the new sensitivities are perceived as helpful for the dieter. Ida says, "I've never heard of any of those sensitivities not being something that supports the well-being of that person beyond just the diet." Another facilitator, Rosemary, told us that Marosa helped her perceive her own sensitivities as superpowers, allowing her to feel into the energies of others more precisely. Such cultivation allows adepts to sense and read energies throughout the ceremony room and even across long distance. Rosemary noticed, for instance, that when she holds ceremonies, she knows when a participant is menstruating because she can taste the blood in her mouth. Facilitators draw on the Shipibo concept of *niwe* to explain how dieters can use their senses to attune to the sensorial and energetic world around them:

Niwe in Shipibo means airs, but it's also the concept of energy and smells. Within the cosmology those things are very intertwined. Energy, air and smells. So, the way of working with scent is also seen as working with the air energy of the plants. [...] when you sniff something as well, scent comes into your nose, it has a very direct pathway to engage with your system. So, it is a very effective way of engaging with a substance. (Facilitator, Ida)

Ida uses the sensory modality of scent to point to the permeability of dieter's bodies, and to give them a practical and theoretical approach to sensitizing their systems. The plants like perfumed airs and dislike heavy smells such as semen or menstruation. But more importantly, they open the capacity to smell in a more nuanced way and derive information from the smells. Reed described the opening of sensitivity as a process of human perception approximating plant perception:

The plant is insanely sensitive, and over time, it's trying to like, match up, bring our frequency of perception and also sensitivity up to its, and in doing so, it will try to make

us feel things the way that it feels it. And this is what people often misinterpret as punishment. So, you might do something you think it's nothing because you can't really feel it. But the plant feels that like this, and it's trying to bring your sensitivity up. By knowing that, by actively being like okay, how did it feel for you? Then it can, you know, you can bring it to the repair much, much quicker. (Facilitator, Reed)

By drawing attention to the reciprocity and shared sensory experience between the dieter and the plant, dieters can more quickly achieve an ideal, healthy balance for both dieter and plant.

The messages dieters receive from their plants are most often about food choices, healing for self and others, and interacting with the natural world. One time, Doña Wilma (Enrique's wife) brought papaya. Evelyn sat at the table with her eyes closed, praying over the papaya, asking her diet if she could eat it, repeating the question many times in different ways to confirm the answer. Different diets communicate differently and different dieters receive communications differently (words, visions, symbols, bodily sensations). Reed, for example, described a word-vision download⁵⁰ package that applied to a specific moment but simultaneously unfolded in lessons for years. Claire, a participant who since has become a facilitator, differentiated between a more communicative, accessible diet plant and a more authoritarian, taciturn diet:

My first dieta felt a lot more communicative whereas Chiric Sanango felt like a very distant teacher, like a kung fu master, you know, like in those kung fu movies where you kind of hardly know what's going on to give you the tiniest bit of direction. And you have to follow these grueling instructions for years. And you're like, why the fuck am I doing this? I don't even know. But then you find out that they're like, incredibly wise and whatever. There's I don't know how to describe it like a real distance, much less interactive, except in dreams. [...] I felt with *Piñon Colorado*⁵¹ that it was a little bit more of a, not peer, that's a very wrong word. But like, I went to a high school where you called your teachers by their first name, and there was like, less of an apparent hierarchy, even though there was a hierarchy. And I felt like that's how it was with *Piñon Colorado*, it brought itself down to my level a little bit more. (Participant, Claire)

Another participant, Noah, also felt Chiric didn't speak too much: "He gives me signs like

⁵⁰ The word "download" is used within New Age and psychedelic communities to refer to the reception of information, insights, or knowledge from a higher source, such as the universe, spiritual guides, or one's higher self.

⁵¹ A diet plant frequently used as medicine but infrequently dieted at Inkan Kena. She had dieted it at a different location.

thumbs up or he'll like make the sign of the cross or he'll give me a big 'STOP' sign for my inner vision." On the other hand, for Noah, Noya Rao appeared as a female face with a snake tongue on his left shoulder. He described it as a visual feeling that requires constant discernment:

Sometimes I have to discern, I always have to figure out, am I just talking to myself? Does this actually feel like I'm talking to someone else? Or is it just myself? Am I just responding to my own question with the answer I'd like? Or am I really listening to what this plant spirit was telling me? (Participant, Noah)

Others primarily feel the messages in their body. Adam, for example, had an ache in his foot which he eventually, over the course of many weeks, began to interpret as a message that he was ready to "stand on his own two feet," after years of habitually standing awkwardly when he felt socially uncomfortable. In ceremony, he sometimes feels twitches and contractions in his arms, hands, and legs, which give him information about the emotional state of others in ceremony. He explained:

It's not that my leg is twitching. It's like, my leg *is* twitching, but as I tune into that, it's all of a sudden, I have information about something else. And so that I perceive as a communication from the plant. The plant is like, okay, you're sensitive enough to tune into this thing going on and the other side of the room, but you're not experienced enough to be able to just be like, oh, there's this thing in my field that I am aware of, and now I can just take all this information from it. It's like, hey, this is my way of communicating to you something's happening, there's something that you have the capacity to tune into and understand right now. And the body is the kind of, I guess, the translator app.

As Adam diets more and removes traumas and blockages, he is more connected to the world around him and able to perceive more information.

In learning to perceive messages, dieters need to use both logic and intuition. The course also teaches them how to ask permission to harvest plant medicines, in ways that remind me of Wall Kimmerer's (2013) honorable harvest that incorporates both logic and intuition:

Asking permission shows respect for the personhood of the plant, but it is also an assessment of the well-being of the population. Thus, I must use both sides of my brain to listen to the answer. The analytic left reads the empirical signs to judge whether the population is large and healthy enough to sustain a harvest, whether it has enough to share. The intuitive right hemisphere is reading something else, a sense of generosity, an

open-handed radiance that says *take me*, or sometimes a tight-lipped recalcitrance that makes me put my trowel away. I can't explain it, but it is a kind of knowing that is for me just as compelling as a no-trespassing sign (187).

In a plant walk around camp, students are encouraged to spend time with the plants, greeting them first ("Hi, Malva⁵²!"), talking to them, and looking for clues about which parts of the plant are offering themselves or not. They are given practical tips (look for the malva leaves that have a few signs of bug attacks because the plant's immune system has been activated so it will have more medicine), but they are also encouraged to engage their new sensitivities.

You can ask – which leaves wants to be part of my malva? And then try to sense which leaves are speaking to you. Which leaves stand out visually? Or in what way are you guided to which leaves wants to be part of your remedies. Gratitude is always nice; you are taking a part of a living being to make a remedy. So just to honor that the plant is allowing you to do that or sacrificing part of itself. Some people like to always make an exchange to offer something as a present to the plant that you're harvesting from. It can also be a little bit of water if it's a dry day, even a song or just giving it a little bit of feeling by charging your hands, whatever. The way that I see it, it's more a gesture that you are showing the plant that you want to offer something in return to honor the gift. (Facilitator, Ida)

The practice of discernment is always present when receiving messages. Peter received a message that his father died, but realized later it was a piece of his father inside him, preventing him from loving his father fully. Anytime a dieter receives a message they are taught to engage in self-inquiry, taking into account who they are and the symbolism of the message for them. Ida defines discernment as "the ability to work with what you perceive, your ability to differentiate and consciously decipher the messages that you get." Especially when the message is for others, students learn to pay attention to what bit of it might be their ego, and realize that the messages are always channeled through their own perfectly imperfect, human vessel:

Like any mystic, spiritual energetic practices, chances are that you still have a tiny bit of ego left. I know I do – and it's not tiny! Identification with being in the role of being of service, of helping others in any way, requires a serious amount of self-inquiry and integrity. The thing about channeling and getting messages on behalf of others and

⁵² A common medicinal plant, though not a common diet plant to my knowledge.

guiding others is a very integral thing. In my experience, everybody can channel, everybody has access to the unified field. But nobody is able to channel in a 100% objective way. Because you do receive that channeling through the vessel that is your subjective personal view. (Facilitator, Ida)

Ida continues, explaining that the message's meaning might change over time as the context changes:

If you get a message, and even though it seems 100,000,000% clear, always you have to remind ourselves, this is the state of the present moment. And the next present moment might reveal something else. [...] So, the initial vision is like a seed being planted, which we all know is just the beginning. Being curious, attentive, nourishing, to that seed of that experience or vision will allow it to unfold. Because nothing is static.

The ability to discern messages, most importantly, is learned through practice: “if you receive a message and choose to listen to it, you will learn either way.” Thus, the discernment that is learned and practiced at Inkan Kena is characterized by fluidity and attunement to a contextual, constantly changing, highly interpersonal and intrapersonal, embodied truth. Through this attunement, dieters learn to recognize when the strands of their personal volition and perception are tangled up in the energetic contributions of others, including their diets. In the next section, we will see how they attempt to disentangle those strands, but they are never fully separable. Nor are they ever still. The strands are constantly tangling and disentangling and changing and moving so that attunement and discernment require constant curious vigilance – constant attention to relationships both inside and out and how they influence proper interpretation and responsive action.

3. Cleaning and Protecting: Kano, Tools, Spiritual Hygiene

In Shipibo everyday use, *kano* translates to “frame of a house,” but in the shamanic context, *kano* is a line connecting the dieter to the world of the plants. Many of the *ikaros* explicitly strengthen, straighten, clean, or protect kanos. Although not all dieters may understand the

Shipibo words, the facilitators explain that throughout the ceremony the work of the maestro is to check on and straighten or clean the diet kanos:

Every ceremony here, [Don Enrique] is checking out and reviewing your kano, your connection to your diets and to your guides. He's seeing if everything is as it should be, or if there's something that's a little funky, if it needs to be straightened, if there's a little bit of dirt or something that needs to be cleaned. This is his work as a maestro. (Facilitator, Peter)

The main tool he uses to see or act on the kanos are the ikaros. The ikaros unfold in real-time as the adept responds, freestyling, to an ever-evolving context of people, spirits, and energies.

Shipibo ikaros often are perceived by students in the course as harsh but effective, compared to the gentler but less powerful Spanish and Quechua ikaros in the mestizo tradition. As one facilitator explained, the ikaros are surgical tools in the service of plant doctors through the medium of human doctors:

The way that the Shipibo ikaros are spoken is not really poetic, it's not really like a song, it's functional. It's like, "I'm doing this thing, I'm doing it again, it's done." This plays into why the Shipibo, I think, view themselves as doctors, because they're using the tools of these plants to do the work in ceremony. So, you know, you always hear the analogy of a surgery, an energetic surgery. It's such a good analogy, because the curandero is kind of the surgeon's tools, in a sense, and the surgeons are these plants, and they're using their tools to act on this person. And so their tool functions properly, when it's properly pronounced, properly shaped. The cuts are just perfectly placed, you know? Yeah, and I think that's really the biggest difference between Shipibo ikaros and other songs or ikaros is that it's crafted for that moment, in that moment. If you're trying to remove or change a very specific thing, then I believe that a Shipibo ikaro would be the most effective form of healing for that because it's because the plant is seeing that thing inside of you and is actively fixing it in that moment or working on it. (Facilitator, Adam)

But to properly channel the plants through the ikaros, the curandero must have dieted well and have good relationships with their diet plants. He stressed that the ikaro surgeries only work in ideal scenarios in which the "curandero is well connected to these plants, so that what's coming through is coming from the plant." Maintaining a straight, clean connection means not only following the rules of the contract and maintaining a clean body, but also protecting against contamination from self and others, using various shamanic tools.

The *ikaros* are the primary tools at the healer's, or initiate's, disposal, but their toolbox also includes *palo santo*, *soplaying*, *Agua de Florida*, *mapacho*, and/or a diet pipe, bodywork, breath, and breathwork. *Soplaying* is the practice of blowing cleansing air, using smoke or perfume, to clear bad energies. It is taught in an early course workshop. Unlike at other ayahuasca retreats where participants do not typically use these tools and they remain the domain of the shaman, students in the course are urged to *soplay* themselves frequently, especially before ceremony, before going to bed, before drinking diet extract or medicine, and after disturbing or contaminating experiences. For this purpose, all participants in the course receive a bottle of *Agua de Florida*, an alcohol-based perfumed blend popular across Peru, and a big pack of *mapacho* sticks (thick, hand rolled cigarettes made from local tobacco, purchased in the Belen market in Iquitos for only 5 soles,⁵³ or about \$1.50). *Palo santo*, a scented wood used globally to cleanse spaces and attract good spirits, also circulates around camp and is used more unevenly (some use it, some don't). Additionally, most participants buy a pipe carved from the wood of a diet plant, most typically Noya Rao, though Bobinsana and Chulla Chaqui are other popular choices. Workers at Inkan Kena and visiting Shipibo relatives supplement their income by selling these pipes for about \$70.

In the "soplar/soplay workshop," Don Enrique and the facilitators show students how to suck *mapacho* smoke into their mouths (not their lungs) and forcefully blow it across patient bodies. Everyone first whistles an *icarar*, a soft tune of prayer and blessing, into their *mapacho* stick, their pipe, or their *Agua de Florida* bottles, whatever item they wish to charge with intention. "Conversa con tu pipa," Enrique says: "talk to your pipe." They tell their pipes their intentions – to protect, clean, or connect. Sometimes they do it with one hand hovering above the head of

⁵³ The Peruvian currency.

their practice partner. The would-be patient sits patiently, cross-legged, back straight, eyes closed, palms upturned. Then, they solemnly fill their cheeks with smoky air and expel it in a rush over backs, heads, and hands. At the end they leave a heavy whisp in the hair at the top of the head and it drifts upward lazily, almost viscous. From time to time, the sopl原因er spits the stale accumulated taste of tobacco (and perhaps cleansed toxins) into a purge bucket. Agua de Florida is tougher. It burns in the mouth, held in front of the teeth before it is sprayed explosively over the patient in a fine mist. We sputter and occasionally douse each other in thick droplets of spit. While mapacho provides strong protection and helps connect to spirits, Agua de Florida attracts good spirits and repels the bad.

Throughout the course, the sounds and smells of the sopl原因er fill the air. Agua de Florida wafts on the air, sharp and ethereal. Mapacho clings more heavily, earthy. From my field notes:

Mapacho from a stick, mapacho from a pipe, the specific wood imparting its unique character, mapacho from different mouths blown in my direction, each heavy with the particular scent of its provenance. Mapacho never smells the same twice. Each puff tells a story. Sometimes it's sweet and I breathe deeply. Other times I gag.

The use of these various tools ties into the previously mentioned etymological connection of the diet to the breath as does the Shipibo concern with airs (*niwebo*) and the discussions at my field site about the scents that plants do or don't like. Ikaros often mention perfumed airs (*inin niwe*) of the diet world. These sensorial concepts help dieters tune into the quality of energies inside and around them and play with the permeability of their own bodies in their endeavors to enact healing inside and out. While the airs provide a powerful tool for thinking with and embodying energies as scent, the concept of the kano resonates with visual perception. Similarly, the popular Shipibo line-based designs (*kene* and *kewe*) play an important role in mediating dieters' perception of and play with visual cues in ceremony. Ikaros frequently include phrases placing *kene* on bodies. Participants, and Don Enrique on special occasions, also sometimes wear

kushmas (*tari* in Shipibo), poncho-like tunics painted with *kene*, for protection in ceremony.

More serious participants buy multiple pipes, including a separate pipe for soplaying oneself and another for soplaying others. They take great care to avoid anyone else touching their pipes. On one occasion in Iquitos, tempers ran high when Evelyn left her pipe unattended for a few moments and someone else (not affiliated with the course) touched the pipe to move it. After that, Evelyn meticulously soplayed her pipe and herself. Still, in the evening that followed and the next day, she displayed signs of energy contagion. In an angry moment, without realizing it, she began to parrot the same words that the person who touched her pipe had been using.

This sort of energy contagion or contamination from others is seen as a danger, but also a necessary risk and learning opportunity for initiates. In some cases, letting your body become a filter for others' energy to come through is framed as a healing methodology and it is very common for participants to speak of purging on behalf of other participants or other people. In a class focused on facilitating, or holding ceremonies for others, a facilitator shared an experience in which another participant's energy entered her. She explained how control over her own feelings and thoughts about the experience allowed her to prevent the contaminating energy from affecting her or her diet too intensely:

I sat by her and worked with her energy and right as I was done with soplaying her, I could just feel oh, okay, something is inside my system. And it's coming from this cleansing that I've been offering her. I felt a little bit bad. I felt a little bit energy drained. I thought I might have to purge. Instead, I burped like crazy, of like airs that didn't originate in my own body. And so sometimes, energy also just passes through you. And I think we've mentioned this before that part of facilitating to some degree is also that you offer yourself as some kind of filtering mechanism, and then the art is how to let the energy pass through you, and not get stuck in your system and connected to getting crossed⁵⁴ or twisted. That's again, so much with your mind. So, if some energy from somebody else comes into you, you can do many things, but either you can be like, okay, so great, thank you, I am making myself available to let this energy pass through me. Yes, I'll probably not feel great for whatever time this takes, but I'm happy to do this to support somebody else. Or I can also be like, Oh my God, this is horrible! She's giving

⁵⁴ Crossed and twisted diets are the topic of the next chapter.

me back that energy! Like if your mind circles onto that, then you could get crossed or twisted from that. (Facilitator, Ida)

Spiritual hygiene and energetic protection are specifically important for people who are working in any kind of healing modality. Any sort of exchange of information or energy, but especially the healing exchange, can lead to an energetic accumulation of gunk. So soplaying and other tools for cleansing and protecting are important both for helping others in ceremony and for maintaining one's own separate channel, connection, and system. This clean connection is important for maintaining personal health and the ability to help others. Ida emphasized it should ideally become integrated into daily life, as routine as brushing your teeth. She says: "you wash your body, you wash your dishes, you wash your house, do you wash your energy? Because you should."

Cleansing and straightening practices keep your diet clean. Ikaros, fasting, and visiting the tree (Noya Rao), feed and align diets, growing and maintaining the energy. As Reed said, "if you're not feeling great and it has something to do with your diet, you sing a whole bunch of ikaros, especially if you do it at the tree, you're going to feel better." However, he emphasized that feeding your diet with love is the most important protective practice to keep your diet happy and integrated in your being:

I'm always checking: Is it clean? Is it straight? Is it integrated? Because your diet can also just leave your body – dis-integrate from your body temporarily. I've had it with Noya Rao. If I get angry and it's just like -boop!- checks out of my body and I have to like bring her back. But what I found is that if the plant is 100% fed, it self-cleans sometimes. Just like if your body is 100% healthy then you know all the detoxification happens naturally. And so I found that if the plant is like loved up to the max, it cleans itself to a pretty large degree. Which is cool because I spend so much time like oh, it's gotta be clean, it's gotta be shiny, it's going to be spic and span, you know? And then I was like, No, It's just gotta be loved. Loved up, like really loved up! [...] because the love, it lubricates the channels of the diet and it also straightens it, you know, like, you

could straighten it by, okay, you can sing *ponte pontebainkin*,⁵⁵ you know, but you can also like love it straight. And love it like a lot and love it loaded and love it like, lubricated! (Facilitator, Reed)

Reed's emphasis on lubricating the diet with love, juxtaposed with a Shipibo ikaro phrase to straighten the diet lines, is an example of how facilitators fuse Shipibo practices with their own interpretations and elaborations.

In this section, we have seen how dieters make their bodies habitable to their plants, drawing on Don Enrique's teachings interpreted through the individual perspectives of the facilitators. The teachings and practices of the course help them fine tune their perception of Others and skillfully manage the boundary between Self and Other. They need to open their bodies to be porous and sensitive enough to let their diet plant in (or on occasion, to let the energies of patients or healers in), but they also need to control those boundaries at times to protect themselves. They should be able to identify clear channels and clean muddled connections. As dieters learn through their plants, they hone a set of skills – attunement, discipline, reciprocity, and discernment – which allow them to merge with the plant. In the next section, I will examine how dieters talk about the resultant hybridity they experience.

Hybrid Bodies, Hybrid Selves: Merging

1. Saplings in the Gut and Plant-human Mutants: Talking about hybridity

What is a diet? Firstly, it's not the easiest question to answer in the world. I remember many, many times, you know, it's one thing to hear all the information and then it's another thing to do a diet and then it's another thing to do two diets, three diets. You know, it's an art and it's very complex. And it's incredibly sensitive. *I'm* incredibly, incredibly sensitive, and it becomes, in my experience more sensitive as time goes on. But what happens energetically is that the sapling of the plant that you're dieting is implanted within you. And over time it grows to maturity. But in the sapling phase,

⁵⁵ A subordinate phrase commonly sung in ikaros to perform straightening. The closest translation I have come up with is: 'straightening while (doing something else)' – from the verb *ponteti* meaning 'to straighten' and the suffixes *-bain* ('going along') and *-kin* ('while' when attached to a transitive verb such as *ponteti*).

which is the whole dietary phase, it's exquisitely sensitive. When it comes to maturity, it's less sensitive, just like an actual sapling would be, you know, where you can make an analogy to a human child infant, you know. A better analogy actually, is that you're pregnant, and everything you consume will affect your sapling. Everything you say, will affect your sapling. You know, everything you do. So being hyper mindful of this being that's inside of you. Now, this is part of the tree, but it's also distinct from the tree in that it's, it's a sapling that doesn't have the fully developed maturity and strengthen energetic fortitude of the tree. And so how does this happen? It's a combination of this agreement, contract. And the fasting and then the dieting in terms of the food and abstinence. (Facilitator, Reed)

I love Noya Rao. I'm so, so grateful to have her be a part of me. It was completely you know, I never ever expected that. I knew nothing about plant dietas. I had no idea I was going to morph into a human plant mutant spirit and literally feel so intertwined and connected with this plant spirit that is complete divine love and light. I didn't know that was possible. (Participant, Renee)

All plants including your holographic, sapling humanoid, infant, hybrid, mutant thing, will respond to love. (Facilitator, Reed)

In the first section of this chapter, I gave one definition of the diet as an energetic exchange or a contract between the dieter in the plant. However, as we can see in the first quote above, another definition of a diet is a physical/metaphysical merging via the planting of a sapling inside the dieter. The contract and the physical/metaphysical merging provide two interrelated, complementary, but distinct ways of thinking about the relationship between the dieter and their diets. Each brings attention to reciprocity, exchange, sensitivity, and responsibility. Mutants, pregnancy, saplings, and host/guest are the main metaphors that dieters use to describe their hybrid relationships and think through their new intrapersonal, intersubjective experience. In all the quotes above, dieters search for the appropriate idiom which will express their connection. Reed playfully refers to the diet as an ineffable, but somehow planty, somehow mutant, thing, and Renee talks about how intertwined she feels with Noya Rao, becoming a new human plant mutant spirit. In this section I will review the different metaphors of hybridity people use.

Renee had an experience with her diet as pregnancy. In ceremony she experienced a spiritual pregnancy with another course participant, resulting in the birth of 11 spirit babies. However, at

the end of the ceremony, two fetuses remained. After talking to Enrique, she came to believe that the two fetuses were her two diets. She then had a vision that she would lose the babies and lose the diets in a bloody miscarriage in six days if she did not take the right steps and take her diet seriously.

In the same course, another participant, Oak, experienced a ceremony in which he connected with a tree spirit, became pregnant, and gave birth to a spiritual baby which lives both inside him and also in the forest.

My entire body feels like I cannot move. I was paralyzed. I felt these entities taking over my body. I felt all of a sudden that I was pregnant, and it was happening all so fast and all of a sudden there it was. I felt like I birthed an entity which I originally called it *raro* which means joy [in Shipibo]. But then every time I find it, the word *paro* [meaning river in Shipibo] comes out so I ended up calling it *paro raro*, both words in the Shipibo language. And it has grown. Every time I check on it, it feels different. Sometimes I feel that it's actually growing in the jungle as a tree. Sometimes it feels like it's living inside me. Yeah, I feel the presence of this third entity. (Participant, Oak)

Despite Reed's suggestion that pregnancy might be the best analogy for the diet, I found that saplings are the most commonly used and the more powerful. Diets as saplings resonate with the doctrine of signatures way of thinking that proliferates at the camp. As students learn to read the form and sensory expression of plants for clues to their medicinal uses, they also learn to interpretively extend the properties of plants to understand their emotional resonance and teaching potential. Plant lessons often come from metaphorically extending plant properties to human behavior. Seeing the diet as a sapling makes sense because it *is* a plant, not a human baby. Talking about plants as saplings allows the facilitators to talk about the delicacy and sensitivity of the baby plant, while referring to its long-term potential for growth and major, substantive, structural changes in the dieter as it grows through their system even after the diet is complete. Saplings are specific and individual. While they are descended from the mother spirit and connected to the collective, each is wholly unique to its environment. Facilitators stress that

each diet is specific and unique because the dieter is merging with the energy, so their individual quirks are attached to it.

Sensitive saplings often are perceived as living in the gut. Just as the pregnancy vision and fear of miscarriage convinced Renee of the importance of obeying her diet, the sensitivity of the gut saplings persuades dieters to gently ease into post-diet foods:

You can imagine, you know, if you picture a little, little sapling sprouting in your stomach, and then just throwing a half-chewed steak on top of it, maybe a couple cocktails, it might be a bit of a shock, you know?... With food, or with sex, or with stimulus, whatever it is. Anything that we're taking into our body, or anything that our body is experiencing, when we have this fresh little diet sapling inside of us, the energy is just shocking to it. And so it can, I've heard them refer to it as, you could scare it so that it like stops growing. It's just like hiding in there. ["It's like a little kid seeing their parents have sex!" (interjection by facilitator, Dan)] (Facilitator, Adam)

However, if the dieter is kind to the diet, gives it love, and continue to feed it, it will grow strong and stay with the dieter forever. In the following examples, facilitators explain how the diet is a lifelong relationship that continues to grow for years beyond the actual diet period.

In the beginning, it's like a little seed inside of you, and it's growing with you slowly, slowly, slowly, and becomes a shrub then becomes a tree. It will keep growing with you during this time. And afterwards, the diet will always stay with you, if you want to continue the relationship, then it will always stay with you. (Facilitator, Ida)

It's up to us how big we want to grow that tree by how much we feed it, how much love we give it how much attention we give it. (Facilitator, Adam)

So as that little sapling grows as you keep nourishing it like all the things that you've been, you know wishing for or calling in, start to become stronger and they drop into your life. Sometimes very suddenly, you know, exponential growth spurts happen. [...] So you can plant these beautiful seeds, you know, it takes strength to understand where the weeds are. And every day you're like you're tending to your garden, and it's not just like, this one's done, okay, cool. It's like, every day, every day, now I'm aware of these things, what are my tools? What are my practices? What are my rituals, that are going to help me take these weeds out, which ones are going to be help me nourish and nurture this little sapling that I have in my being now? This little baby? The more you work on that, the more it helps you, you know, it's, it's a relationship. (Facilitator, Rosemary)

Some changes from the diet are often referred to as structural, differentiating them from conscious processes related to the visible psychological work of achieving insight through

visions or other explicit messages. Ida gives the example that if your body, identity, and personality is a built structure, Noya Rao has the ability to turn some of the bolts or screws in the foundation. With such a tiny adjustment, Noya Rao can change the entire structure over the course of many years. As I described in the previous section, many of these changes are framed as about making the dieter's being more appropriate to plant sensitivity. The structural changes are part of a mutual growing. It's always presented as a two-way street. For example, Ida describes:

Your diet is in your body and it's like a tiny little seed. That's just like sprouting up. Most seedlings also don't do well in like direct 12 o'clock jungle sun. So you want to just protect your body. The burning [is] both uncomfortable for you and a very hard environment for your diet. (Facilitator, Ida)

One participant described the experience of hybridity as making a home hospitable for a guest, explaining that if the guest suffers, so does the host, since they share the same home. She even indicated that her body might belong more to her diet than to herself:

It feels like I'm hosting a being in me. And there's a reciprocity involved. So the first dieta I did, one message I got really strongly was, you drank way too much water, your body is like a swamp to me. And if I'm not comfortable, you're not going to be comfortable. So you better get your act together. So it's like, I'm the host, I have to follow the rules to make my guest comfortable. And if I can follow those rules, then the guest will be a good guest. And there'll be a reciprocity there and I'll also gain from the relationship but if I'm not a good host, then that won't happen. And I will suffer as well because we're the same body. Or in fact, my body is almost their body at that point. Perhaps even more so than it is mine. (Participant, Claire)

Claire uses the metaphor of host/guest, here. Peter also describes the diet as a guest. However, in his example, he likens it to a guardian angel who sits on your shoulder. The diet engages with dialogue with you, but it truly knows you because it is a part of your being, your mind, and thus knows about you from the inside out.

You engage in relationship with the plant, and this plant takes up residence inside of you. So it becomes a part of your being, and a part of your mind knows, it gets to know you from the inside out. In many ways, the plants will get to know you way better than you know yourself. It's like, it becomes like a mentor. If you imagine a mentor, like a little

tiny mentor, that always sits on your shoulder, and is always with you with whatever you're doing whatever you're saying, whatever you're thinking, and he can guide you through all those things and give you advice, give you tips guide you in in different directions. (Facilitator, Peter)

Exchange and respect for the diet are constant themes throughout each of these metaphors, which constantly reinforce such reciprocity by invoking reciprocal, shared sensory apparatus. Ida describes it as an exchange in which the dieter learns how to experience the world as a plant, and the plant, ever curious, learns how to experience the world from the perspective of the human dieter:

And when you diet, it's like you open yourself up to the plant world. So you're going to be experiencing things probably that you have not experienced before, feeling the things around you in ways that you have not experienced before, you're going to be engaging more in this sensitivity that is more like the plant sensitivity because you're being opened up to the world that is contained within the plants. But at the same time, you're also opening up the plant to the human world, you're sharing your worlds with each other. So it's a cooperation between you and the plants. You're sharing your consciousness and your world with the plant and exchanging this information, exchanging the experiences and the sensations that are in the plant world and the human world. So it's, it's kind of like a, it's a teaching relationship for you to learn from the plant. But also ultimately, it's also a teaching relationship for the plant. To learn from you what it's like to be this particular human that is coming here to diet, as well. You're exchanging in this way, which I think is quite nice. That it's a two-way thing. (Facilitator, Ida)

Dieters, using various analogies from pregnancy to saplings in the gut, refer to the diet as a bodily merging with their diet plants that allows them to straddle the boundary between the plant world and the human world. They emerge as a specific kind of hybrid being who hosts a plant who is a part of their self but also not fully equivalent to their self. This multiplicity is a unique experience which often presents challenges to their sense of self, as we will see in Chapter 4, where I will further define the kinds of selves that dieters are creating. For now, I will examine how this kind of multiplicity of self resists dominant Western understandings of a bounded, unitary self.

2. Hybrid, Permeable Selves in Historical Perspective: Policing the self/other boundary

The history of Western thought is filled with concerns about policing and fortifying the boundaries of the self. Just as “modernity” arises from a concern with separating agents from non-agents and persons from things (Latour 1993; Demenchonok 2018), the formation of the modern state and the Western philosophical tradition that accompanies it are invested in the separation of self from other and the segmentation of individuated, unitary selves. Anxieties about firming up the boundaries between Self and Other are evident in Kantian, Cartesian, and Christian branches of thought and they spill over into many other domains of Western knowledge-making. In developmental psychology, seeing oneself as separate from others and as a “coherent, continuous, discrete being over time” is an important developmental milestone (Ochs and Capps, 1996: 30). Anthropologists, meanwhile, note that Western, industrialized cultures typically pathologize experiences of multiple selves, labeling them as schizophrenia or other disorders (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). For Foucault (1999 [1962]), the medicalization of spirit possession was instrumental in the making of the modern individual, requiring new attention to knowing and monitoring interiority in order to know who possesses you (76). Johnson (2014), drawing on Foucault, argues that the category of (and apprehensions about) “spirit possession” in Western thought developed in tandem with foundational theories of state and the ideal individual’s relationship to the state. He explains that Kant, Hobbes, and Locke together form a theoretical complex about proper selves and proper societies. They envision civil society as exchanges between free individuals (or possessors) and that which they possess. Autonomous, bounded individuals are a prerequisite for an ordered society based on predictable rules of property ownership and exchange and continuity of the self is necessary to

ensure trust in contracts and other social transactions. There is no room for multiplicity of self, such as spirit possession, in such a complex. Indeed, Hobbes deemed spirit possession madness – a man can be possessed only by his own spirit. Similarly, Locke regarded man a “proprietor of his own person.” He favored a theory of self and personhood that eschewed the soul or the body in favor of consciousness over time (memory) since he saw such rational awareness (and constancy over time) as a necessary basis for an effective civil society.

Within this historic and theoretical milieu, possessed action and other experiences of multiplicity come to be framed as “unfree, nonautonomous, irrational” in opposition to more proper individual action which is “accountable, contract-worthy, transparent, and properly civil” (Johnson 2014: 7). Both shamanism and spirit possession emerge as containers for the various Western imaginings about Others. The category of shamanism holds all the romanticized and condemned wonder and terror of indigenous ecstasy which sends the spirit “out,” mapping onto fantasies of authentic, free-roaming natives. Spirit possession, on the other hand, involves the receiving of spirits “within” and links to questions about control over black bodies and governability of ungovernable savagery. Both pose a danger for a civil society as envisioned by Hobbes, Lock, and Kant.

In spite of their efforts, neither Western selves nor Western society are unified or bounded. Kusserow (1999) points out that although anthropological and psychological literature have often problematically flattened supposedly unitary and independent Western selves while simultaneously exoticizing supposedly interdependent or sociocentric Eastern selves, there is historical and ethnographic evidence that those distinctions are overly simplified. Other influential theorists in the West, including G.H. Mead, William James, and Merleau-Ponty, provide alternative models of the self which allow for more fluidity and multiplicity, pushing

back against more dominant ideologies based on Cartesian rational dualism (Kusserow 1999; Spiro 1993⁵⁶). Both in the so-called West and the so-called East, people's lived lives evidence a continuum between independence and interdependence. Groups within cultures may vary in their use of self-concepts based on factors such as gender, and individuals themselves might vary depending on the setting and context (Holland and Kipnis 1994; Triandis et al. 1985). For example, students might refer to the death of a loved one as a partial death of the "self" (Ochs and Capps 1996; Hollan 1992). The Western unified self is a fallacy, but the legacies of attempts to unify it have left important marks.

Preoccupation with the risks of holding multiplicity continue in the labeling of late capitalism's disorders as the "schizophrenic" self of the West or "multiple personality disorder of North America" (Van Wolputte 2004). Such labels reflect worries about purportedly new global conditions of information overload and the absence of overarching narratives, but by framing pluralism of the self as an "idiom of distress" and fragmented consciousness as a disease, they reify those old Kantian/Cartesian tropes. My interlocutors share those worries but lean into the active embrace and management of plurality as cure rather than relegating plurality to pathology.

In recent years, work has been done to undo the dichotomous legacies of Cartesian thought dividing body/spirit, self/other, human/nature, and biological/social. Haraway's (1991) cyborg's, Kohn's (2013) semiosis of nonhuman things, and Mol's (2002) enacted multiple bodies are just a few examples. But how do people learn to soften the boundaries of their selves? How do they learn to read the animacy of the world? This dissertation provides an example of a practice to develop those abilities. Through diets, my interlocutors refine particular embodied sensitivities, similar to Csordas's (1993) somatic modes of attention or Wirtz's (2014)

⁵⁶ See Spiro 1993 for a comprehensive list.

perspicence, that help them tune into the world around them. Through attending to the way their bodies process others – for instance through metabolism and inhalation – they engage in a type of serious play at the boundary of self and other and human and plant. In so doing, they interweave the boundaries in important ways. This allows them to tune into what Merleau-Ponty (1962) calls the preobjective in which the subject and the world are intertwined in a prereflective field.

Foucault's concept of technologies of the self (1988) also provides a helpful lens for interpreting these practices. Foucault proposes a spiritually and politically liberatory practice of the self, aimed at radical self-care and self-knowledge. Such practices endeavor toward the creation of ethical subjects through ascetic practices that instead of subsuming the individual to the power of the state, aim for access to truth through self-transformation. Through detailed introspection paying sensitivity to the nuances of life and constant monitoring of relationship between self and other, individuals can achieve fulfillment and morality which enables them to properly relate to others. The diet, similarly, is a practice of self which combines the development of skills (attunement, discipline, discernment, and reciprocity) with the revolutionary experience of merging oneself with a plant. The dieter's body and experienced hybrid self, then, present significant possibilities for the reimagination of societies and selves when viewed as self-care that aspires to the creation of ethical subjects who can engage subject to subject with the non-human beings around them.

My interlocutors find fusing themselves with plants to be healing and transformational. They embrace healing through multiplicity and a plurality of truth-saying voices, rather than one body, one voice. In the next two chapters I will explore further the significance of the discourse between the dieter and their diet, posing it as a unique intrapersonal-interpersonal exchange

(talking to a plant inside you that is you but is also not you!) and arguing that reshaping perception, learning to interpret non-human agency, and practicing relationships with others through embodied self-hybridity offer possibilities for healing. First, I will explore the conflicts and negotiations between dieters and their diets.

Chapter 4 – [Negotiating] Crossing and Dominating the Plants

Introduction

So from messing up his diet he got celiac disease. And he told me that I was like, wow, like you made an energetic contract with a plant and that gave you celiac because you messed it up. I was like wow, I totally want to do that. That's amazing you can do that. That's crazy. You can make a contract with a plant energetically, you know, like spiritually in your mind and it actually has physical consequences. I wanted to believe in the spirit world [...] I think I always had a knowing that there was something else but I also was very heavily conditioned like so many of us to believe that that's not the case that it's all you know, physical matter [...] then when he told me about that experience with a diet I was like wow, it's real. Like God, that's amazing. (Peter, facilitator)

Peter, one of the facilitators at Inkan Kena, was telling me about the first time he heard about diets. What really resonated with him from the beginning was that breaking an energetic contract with a plant could lead to physical consequences in the body of the dieter. Over subsequent discussions, it became clear that those consequences were, for Peter, a basis for measuring truth when it comes to plant diets; the possibility for punishment made it real. In this chapter, I will discuss the consequences for breaking the diet contract, discussions about discernment, and interpretations of rules, consequences, and truth. For many dieters at Inkan Kena, discussions and negotiations around contracts and breaking them were characterized by a constant push and pull in which dieters learned to balance what they perceived as the will of the plants with their own will and autonomy. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the diet process opens up new sensations and sensitivities which are attributed to the diet plant and the hybridization process through which the dieter fuses their consciousness with a plant's. As I described, the diet plants are believed to have certain likes and dislikes, but each dieter's hybrid version of the plant has the potential for individual variation. For instance, while facilitators and Don Enrique told dieters that all diet plants vehemently hate pork and a dieter can never again consume pork, they displayed some flexibility about other rules. For example, facilitators stated that in the case of using hallucinogenic mushrooms after dieting, it can be highly dependent on the individual and

their prior relationship with mushrooms. Don Enrique, for his part, demonstrated that flexibility by giving different people different answers at different times. In a context in which learning to attune to and listen to yourself is just as important for many as learning to attune to and listen to your diet, dieters struggle with messages (from their diets) or rules that conflict with their own intuitions, especially when guidelines conveyed by facilitators and Don Enrique conflict with their own beliefs. In the following sections, I examine first the crossings and tests of the diet, describing teachings about and interpretations of the consequences when dieters break their contracts and analyzing examples of the experiences of dieters who apply the teachings to make sense of their own trials and tribulations through the diet. I then explain how teachings about domination and discernment provide a framework for dieters to think further about the differentiation between themselves and others. After Chapter 3 explored the ways in which the diet is a practice of joining the dieter with the diet plant, this chapter explores the tensions within that fusion. I show how dieters navigate tensions around following the rules of the diets (messages conveyed by the healer and facilitators), messages from their diet plants (presumed to be directly received from the plant spirit), and their own inner knowing (asserting their own individual will and selfhood). Dieters ultimately aim to balance “dominating” but not “crossing” the plants – i.e., asserting their will enough to properly take charge of the relationship without crossing the line and thus upsetting and provoking punishment from the plants.

Crossed Diets: Consequences and Interpretations

1. Brief Overview of Crossing

At Inkan Kena, crossing generally refers to what happens when a dieter breaks a rule of the diet and suffers consequences such as physical illness because of the offense. Crossing can be

quite serious and would usually be caused by major offenses such as engaging in sex, eating salt, or physically fighting during the diet. More minor offenses might lead to a gentler punishment that doesn't qualify as a cross. Symptoms of crossing can include physical symptoms such as a rash or blisters all over the body, intense fatigue, digestive issues, or other physical ailments. It can also manifest as mental symptoms such as sudden depression or out-of-the-ordinary, unexplained confusion, anger, irritability, or paranoia. A strong cross can lead to psychosis or "Jesus Christ syndrome" – megalomania in which the dieter fancies themselves the Messiah and bringer of ultimate truth. If a dieter doesn't clear a cross, it can continue to negatively affect their life, even kill them, unless they clear it. Addressing it promptly is important to remove it before it settles into the kano, or diet line. Resolving the cross requires many of the cleaning techniques reviewed in Chapter 2. Vomitivos, ikaros, drinking a small amount of Agua de Florida, and swallowing large amounts of pipe smoke are the most potent cures.

2. Enrique's teachings about punishment and tests

The students lay languidly on their mats in a circle around the edges of the *maloka* as they waited for Don Enrique to arrive for his lecture. Some tip-toed barefoot across the wooden slats to approach the facilitators sitting in the center, asking questions in soft tones. When he burst into the room, they fought their fast-induced fatigue to sit up straight. Enrique was full of energy today, wearing a polo shirt decorated with Shipibo designs and dress shoes that shook the *maloka* with each sharp footstep. The scent of cologne filled the space. His voice resounded forcefully as he began to talk about the consequences of breaking the diet contract and thus crossing the diet:

La segunda dieta que yo hago de Marosa, Marosa me castigó. Por eso digo, piénsalo bien, mil veces antes de tomar. Si tú abusas de la planta, la planta mismo te puedo castigar. La

The second Marosa diet I did, Marosa punished me. That's why I say, "think carefully, a thousand times before drinking [the extract]." If you abuse the plant, the plant itself can punish

planta mismo te puedo cutipar – hacer
enfermar, mejor dicho.

you. The plant itself can *cutipar* you –
make you sick, rather.

He went on to recount some of the times the plants punished him for not following the rules of the diet as well as some of the times he passed the plants' tests. Once, while dieting Marosa, he accidentally ate a plantain cooked by a menstruating woman. Without knowing it, he had offended Marosa, and she punished him for it. His stomach swelled and began to move like a boa, but he couldn't poop. He had promised Marosa a three-month diet but now he would have to double the diet to six months. Only after he had completed the six months of dieting as well as asked Marosa for forgiveness, was he cured. In another instance, he had promised a plant a year of dieting, but again, he interacted with two menstruating women. It paralyzed him from the waist down. He peed blood. Although his mom wanted to take him to the hospital, he refused, knowing that only fixing the diet would improve the illness. Finally, his father brought him more of the plant extract and he doubled the diet to two years, only improving five months before the end of the two-year diet. Later, when the plants tested him by bringing two naked women to his bed, he firmly denied them, claiming he was sick, even though they teased him, accusing him of being a liar and a "*maricón*," a derogatory term in Spanish for a homosexual. Through these experiences, he learned that going against the plants is the same as going against yourself. He had to pass the tests to avoid sickness and impress the plants with his strength to receive the gifts and teachings of the plants: "Cuando yo no quiero castigarme, no quiero enfermarme, yo digo mejor no. La planta dice: 'Ah! Enrique es fuerte, hay que regalarnos el don, hay que regalarnos la sabiduría.' (When I don't want to punish myself, I don't want to get sick, I say better no. The plant says: 'Ah! Enrique is strong, we must give our gift, we must give our wisdom.')

Continuing the talk, he mentioned the kinds of tests that the diets might bring and emphasized the importance of staying strong, concentrating, and exercising faith and patience.

Even bad words and thoughts can be a sin against the plants and other people, so it is important to remain nonreactive throughout the difficulties of the diet. In this talk and others, he refers to the Shipibo phrases *joimeran ocha* (sins or problems inside words) and *shinanmeran ocha* (sins or problems inside the mind or thoughts). The first, he describes as engaging in arguments and the second as “estoy pensando mal, estoy pecando, estoy yendo contra mi dieta (I am thinking badly, I am sinning, I am going against my diet).” Even bad thoughts can have a deleterious effect on others. He explains that solely thinking poorly about someone can result in their illness: “En tu memoria, has hecho daño. Tú no haces, las energías has hecho (In your mind, you have caused damage. You don’t do it, the energies you have made [do].)” Therefore, whenever people provoke him, he makes himself deaf:

Muchas personas hablan de mí, pero yo me hago de sordo para no pecar contra la planta. Muchas personas me hacen escuchar, pero yo no contesto. Porque no quiero pecar contra la planta. Si yo me pego con las plantas, no es fácil sanarme, quién me va a sanar? [...] Aunque va a haber muchas difíciles cosas, seas sorda y seas muda para no malograr tu dieta, para no pecar contra las plantas. Tengan fe! Sean fuertes! Tu estás en dieta. Aunque más que se presenta difícil cosas, problemas, toda cosas, si tú aguantas, en buenas en malas has llegado. Has cumplido tu dieta.

Many people talk about me, but I make myself deaf so as not to sin against the plant. Many people make me listen, but I don't answer. Because I don't want to sin against the plant. If I fight with the plants, it is not easy to heal me, who is going to heal me? [...] Although there are going to be many difficult things, be deaf and mute so as not to spoil your diet, so as not to sin against the plants. Have faith! Be strong! You are on a diet! Although many difficult things might come, problems, all kinds of things, if you hold on, through good and bad, you will have arrived. You will have completed your diet.

We might even need to face our past sins or even the sins of our ancestors in the form of *ocha niwe* (airs of sin or problems) which he translated to Spanish as “energía negativa (negative energy).” One of the Shipibo phrases he most frequently repeated in classes was

“atikomameranbi ea beba yonbanon (even in the midst of difficulties, I will pass through).”

When passing through these difficulties, bad airs, and tests of the diet in which it might seem

impossible to escape or save ourselves, he exhorted us to pray to and converse with God and the plants, asking them to help us through the tests: “Haz tu oración. Dios, ayúdame! Agua de Florida, ayúdame! Dios de Noya Rao yo sé que me estás haciendo un inmenso prueba, más bien quítamelo, yo quiero ir en buen camino. (Pray. God, help me! Agua de Florida, help me! God of Noya Rao, I know that you are giving me an immense test, please take it away from me, I want to be on the right path.)”

3. *Punishing vs. Teaching: Facilitator Interpretations*

Although Enrique answers questions about diet protocol with a curt “conversa con la planta (talk with the plant),” the facilitators who translate for him provide their own, more elaborate interpretations of what happens and what to do when a dieter crosses their diet. While Enrique talks about punishment and sin (*pecado* in Spanish or *ocha* in Shipibo) more often than crossing (*cruzar*), the facilitators use “crossing” more often. They expressed some discomfort with the use of terms such as “punishment” and “sin” due to their “strong charge,” devoting their own lectures on crossing to clarifying how students should best understand those terms. The concept of *cutipar*, which appears above in the first quote of this section and was previously discussed in Chapter 2, presents an additional challenge to the translation of what is happening when a dieter transgresses against the plants. *Cutipar* is a Spanish word used throughout the Peruvian Andes and Amazon, likely from the Quechua *kutipay* which means “to respond.” *Cutipar* does not translate easily into English, but I understand it as a sympathetic-magical punishment for a transgression against a being that has a spirit. Espinosa (2011: 24) defines it in Peruvian Amazonian parlance as:

The capacity of plants, animals, or bodies of water, namely anything that has spirit, to capture your body and energy and impose its characteristics upon you, causing problems and disease. For example, eating too much of fruits that are liquid will give you diarrhea.

In translating and interpreting these phenomena, the facilitators at Inkankena offered four main overlapping interpretations of crossing and punishment: 1) punishment promotes responsibility and gravity while providing certainty, 2) transgressions hurt the plant, 3) the plant is teaching the dieter what is good for the diet connection and thus the dieter, and 4) plants mete out punishments individually tailored to dieters' goals, experience, and capacities in order to probe and push the dieter's potential as a healer. Ultimately, they described crossing as one of the key teaching tools available to the plants.

Learning about punishments and the potential for a crossed diet can be a scary part of the initiation for students, some of whom arrive without any prior knowledge of the plant diets and begin the diet before even learning about rules such as the lifetime prohibition of pork. Some are surprised to learn that they can be punished for not following the rules of the diet. As Scott, a participant, told me: "Making contracts with entities can be very dangerous business. Sometimes people don't understand the ramifications of what they're getting into." While some reject the notion entirely, most accept it as a call to take their contracts with the plants seriously and as proof of the veracity and power of the diet contract. Peter sees it as "a very radical way of promoting responsibility for your actions and your desires." Drawing on a common refrain of Enrique's that "if you abuse the plant, it will turn around and you will be face to face. Instead of being your teacher, it will become your enemy," Peter explained:

If you mess with the plants, if you don't treat them well. If you don't care about them, as they are trying to work with you on trying to heal you. If you shun that relationship, then the plants, they turn on you. And instead of being your maestros instead of being your guides and your healers, they become your enemy, and you can get sick you can get really, really sick, and in some cases, you can die. So, you need to really, really be present with the plants and give them the respect that they deserve.

Even though Peter is aware that other foreigners who "work with dietas are not keen on speaking about the subject, because they do not want to put fear into the people who want to

diet,” he thinks it is important that students at Inkankena cultivate this respect and gravitas. In his lectures on crossing, he cautions students but also assuages their anxieties: “I would say just don't worry about it – at the moment. But, but do...[laughter] It's just good to know and to think about when you go into the dieting.”

Beyond alluding to the threat of punishment as a tool to keep dieters in line, facilitators sometimes added that diet transgressions hurt the plant because the dieter has merged with the plant so what the dieter does to their own body they also do to the plant. Ida, for example, provides this as an alternative explanation to viewing consequences as punishment and both Rosemary and Ida emphasize the pain of the plant that lives in the dieter's body:

Oil and spices can cause discomfort to the plant inside of your body. And so that can cause physical repercussions inside of your body. Breaking the diet in terms of the food restrictions can result in physical pain and discomfort. (Facilitator, Rosemary)

Even seeing it as a punishment doesn't resonate with me, personally. I resonate much more with well, you invite the plant to live within you. So that means another being is now inhabiting yourself, your body as well. Which means that, you know, if you're going to have something living within you, that means that its needs becomes your needs. Because if you have a being living within you and that being is suffering, you're going to suffer too, because you are one. (Faciliator, Ida)

This explained to some why intention was important but not the only factor determining “punishment.” Ultimately, these punishments were simply physical consequences of having a diet. So, while a dieter might be intentionally punished by their plant for intentionally breaking the diet, if they accidentally broke the diet:

You're not going to be punished for that. But you will suffer. Because again, there's a physical reaction going on. So we've seen people break out with crazy rashes that won't go away. Or have other types of skin problems, or just intense stomach pain, diarrhea, vomiting, that sort of thing. (Facilitator, Adam)

The third type of interpretation offered by facilitators was that the transgressions hurt the diet connection and through “punishments” the plant teaches the dieter what will be good for their diet connection. Since breaking the diet inhibits the plant's potential to help the dieter, it also

diminishes the dieter's ability to grow and heal. Therefore, the plant is effectively showing the dieter what they are doing to themselves. Peter explains how his perspective differs from what he views as Enrique's Christian-influenced focus on sin, emphasizing that crossing always brings a teaching moment, and is sometimes a crucial point in the learning process as the diet plant teaches the dieter more about themselves so they can deepen the diet connection and grow.

Enrique was speaking a lot about punishment, like being punished by the plants. And if you abuse the plant, and the plant abuses you, and it punishes you back, can be in the form of a physical ailment, or it can be confusion, or unclarity or stuff like this. Personally, me and Ida, are very much in the same place. I don't personally resonate very much with the concept of punishment by the plants. I understand how it can feel that way, and how it can operate in that way. But personally, the concept of being punished by the plants, there are some ties to like the religious background that is also here that has been imposed on the culture, this element of castigation in Christianity, where you are punished for your sins, and then you pay for them. For me, personally, it's much more that the plants just show you the consequences of what you do. If you do things that are not good for the diets, then it's not good for the diet. And because the diet lives inside of you, it then is also not good for you. So it's more showing what actually happens when you do these things. There's always a golden teaching inside of it. There's always a jewel of wisdom, inside any of these kinds of experiences. Sometimes, the cross is like the only way that we really get to know ourselves like the darker sides of ourselves. And they expose those things, sometimes in a very strong manner. But sometimes that's necessary. Sometimes that's how we have to learn the lessons that are important for us to learn.

He also comes back to the *kano*, the line connecting the dieter to the plants, which I discussed in Chapter 2, to explain how the transgressions change the connection line to the plants, making it harder to attain the necessary lessons and easier for corrupted information, energies, and entities to enter the dieter:

This line, this connection, the kano is kind of your information highway to the medicine. You receive medicine, you receive information from the plants. You see information about what's going on with you, what do you need to do? What's going on around you? How do you work with it, all these kinds of things. And when that channel is clear and straight, the information that you receive is often very clear, a lot of clarity, it's good guidance, it's good insights, it's things that you can use, like very readily available, without, like, having to worry so much about or, like, where the discernment is kind of easy. However, when your kano gets kind of twisted, the information that comes through also becomes kind of twisted, and can get a little bit muddy, a little bit more difficult to discern, a little bit more confusing. When you have your kano crossed, it's like there is an interjection somewhere in the kano and an opening and other things start moving in as

well. So these can be things from the environment around you. It can be things from other plants, other plants that might not always have your best interest in mind, or spirits. It can be the projections from other people. For the most part, it's our own stuff that gets crossed into the kano and interjects the flow of information. So it gets mixed in with all kinds of different messages. That can be quite confusing. Also, because it's not always super clear to ourselves, if we are feeling crossed, if our connection has been interjected by something else, it's not always super clear.

He explains that there can be many “degrees of being twisted, or like having your connection a little wobbly,” and that the squiggles, twists, and crosses can be mental, emotional, or physical. Most of the time, the line is not completely straight, so it is constant work to keep it clean or straight, but truly crossing it is rare. But the cleaner the connection, the clearer the dieter’s ability to see, or discern healing messages clearly. Thinking or speaking badly about someone else can really:

Damage the connection. It blocks the connection and it’s twisted. So the information that you get and the connection that you get becomes twisted, becomes filtered through a screen that is dirty, basically. So you want to do your best, you know, to keep yourself straight. One of the things you can say is [...] “*Ea ocha kashamai*.”⁵⁷ This is saying like a negative energy is in my mind, it is in my thoughts. It is in my being, but I'm not going to fight, I'm not going to act it out, I'm not going to make it a reality, I'm not going to give into it, I will pass this test, I will pass this torture, I'm going to move through it. And I'm not going to make it the reality.

Both of these interpretations – in which the plant is hurt by the transgression (2) and the plant teaches the dieter through showing the dieter the consequences on their diet connection (3) – highlight the interrelatedness of the dieter and their diet plant. For the facilitator Reed, ocha (sin) has an “energy of separation” since sinning, or actively harming another being, requires some degree of separation. Sorcerers, he says, believe in separation. Acts which cross or twist the diet, then, are acts that work against the mutual entanglement of plants and their dieters and the consequences are the consequences of failing to peacefully and healthily cohabitate.

In the last type of interpretation, facilitators stress that the consequences for twisting or

⁵⁷ I am not sinning/going to sin.

crossing a diet are highly individual, partly because the plant is gauging the dieter's commitment, experience, intentions, and capacities. After Enrique's stories about being punished, facilitators stress that the students will not experience comparable punishments because they are new to dieting. The more knowledgeable and experienced the dieter, the greater the rewards, the greater the consequences. Through the tests, the plants determine if the dieter is "strong enough" to be a healer and simultaneously train them to become the healer they will become. Those dieters who intend to work as healers will be tested more than others:

For that the plants test you severely. To make sure that you are clear in your channel that you are clear with what you're doing that you're not coming from a place of manipulating or imposing your ego or your own selfish desires onto somebody else or your ill will. So they really want to know what is this person made of? What do they contain? Are they able to hold this? Are they able to hold this energy? What is the energy that they're able to channel? What are the energies that they can work? What is their level of discernment? What is their level of discipline? If I give them all this power, or this energy to do all kinds of things? How will they use it? Will they know how to use it? Are they able to hold these capabilities that they're being given, because if they're not, if they're all over the place, if they're not disciplined enough to be with it, when things get stormy, then it's not gonna happen. And then if you want to do that, but then you continually mess up the dieta, because you don't take it seriously, or because you can't keep your discipline or because it's too hard, then the plants they will show you. Okay, well, you really want to do this. But you don't put in the effort, well then, you will have consequences.
(Facilitator, Peter)

To illustrate, Peter tells a story about getting crossed himself. The crossing began in a ceremony where he was working on a man with a long history of drug abuse. In the following days, he began to notice that he was overcome with anger to the degree that he was unrecognizable to himself. The crossing was a multi-step process initiated by interacting with a patient's energies, but compounded by his own reaction as the initial energy triggered some deep, unresolved anger within himself. Thus, crossing is just as much about the reaction as it is the initial contamination, since he wouldn't have been crossed simply from exposure to a patient. In order to uncross himself he swallowed three pipes of smoke and engaged in other cleaning rituals as described in Chapter 3. Ultimately, Peter thought that the crossing was a necessary

lesson since it enabled him to root out and heal his own deep-seated anger. He concludes that sometimes, making mistakes or crossing the diet can provide crucial lessons. You might even be “guided directly by the plants to do things that are actually not the best for the plant or the diet initially. But in the long term is actually way better for yourself, your dieta, and the people that you’re going to be working with.”

Overall, facilitators reframe sins and punishment as teaching opportunities and invitations to practice discernment, healing, and growth. They portray crossed diets as learning moments in the process of merging with a plant spirit. While they attempt to soften and contextualize Enrique’s teachings, they follow his lead by emphasizing the importance of discipline, the possibility for corporal punishment, and narratives of passing through difficult tests in order to attain knowledge and self-fulfillment. By focusing on the individualized nature of the tests and punishment and offering dieter/plant entanglement as the mechanism that enables punishment, facilitators lay the ground for dieters to perceive twists and crosses as boundary moments in which they must discern and/or negotiate their own will in relationship to the will of the plants that reside in them (and within the context of the rules or guidelines they receive from Enrique and the facilitators). In the subsequent section, I will provide an example of two students who crossed their diets. The narratives of their tests are laden with the tension between their perception of their own inner knowing and the information they receive from others, including their plants.

4. Crossed Lovers: Renee and Noah’s Diet Tests

Renee and Noah met through the course. Renee is an American osteopath and Noah is a Danish psychiatrist. They hit it off right away, bonding over their shared experiences as medical

doctors with interests that exceeded and challenged the limitations of their roles in Western biomedicine. Their intense and immediate connection excited them, but it soon became a challenge as they began their diets and found themselves unable to resist the temptations of physical and emotional intimacy. They engaged in sexual relations during the diet, and as a result crossed their diets. Sexual relations too soon after a diet can negatively affect the diet, but sexual relations during a diet is one of the worst sins a dieter can commit against a diet. Not only is sex itself offensive to the plants, but focusing on another person too much interferes with the dieter's ability to focus on and commit to the diet plant. Since the goal of the diet is to limit distractions in order to demonstrate devotion and make space for the consciousness of the plant to come into focus, sexual relations can contaminate the diet kano. Carlos, the American who runs the Ayahuasca Foundation, likens engaging in sexual relations too soon after a diet to disrespecting a romantic partner by moving on too soon, and sexual relations during a diet to cheating on a spouse.

When Renee and Noah crossed their diets, they experienced physical and emotional ramifications as well as disturbances in their lines of communication to their diet plants. Renee became very angry and was constantly burping. Noah was less strongly affected because he immediately went into isolation after the cross, but he received odd messages from his plants, such as that he needed to eat a kilo of broccoli every day. To straighten and clean their crossed diets, Don Enrique needed to sing to them directly and repeatedly in ceremony and they had to complete several additional purgatives.

When I interviewed Noah and Renee, I was struck by the way they talked about messages from their diet plants. They both perceived strong, clear messages early on in their diet processes and they both brought up the difficulties of discernment and balancing their inner knowing with

the messages they received from the plants. As they became crossed, when messages are notoriously difficult to discern, they continued to decipher messages from their plants about the state of their crossed diet, sharing those messages with Enrique and the facilitators. Their challenges with discernment illustrated their broader healing work during their diets, in which they both sought to improve their boundaries and relationships with others.

Renee felt a strong connection to the Shipibo lineage and experienced a strong sensitivity to her diets combined with an ardent desire for a long-term commitment to this path of healing. She originally came to Inkan Kena after meeting the facilitator, Reed, who told her that the plants conveyed a message to him that she should attend the training, which he interpreted as evidence of a strong calling to the path. Even before crossing her diet, Renee began a process around discernment. When Enrique talks about the best diet practices, he says that the dieter should only eat a green plantain and a small fish. Accordingly, the most committed dieters at Inkan Kena eat fish and plantains instead of the veggies, grains, and the occasional chicken typically offered. Although she initially wanted to eat fish and plantains to emulate a more traditional Shipibo diet practice, she came to believe that Noya Rao wanted her to listen to her own inner knowing, rather than the established ideal:

At first, I would, like, ask her about everything. I'd be like: What do you want me to eat? Like do you want me to eat fish and plantains? Can I do this? Can I do that? It was like I had kind of forgotten that I had also my own autonomy and free will and choice too, I was like, Okay, I just got to always make sure Noya Rao's happy. So I'm going to ask her about everything to make sure she's happy. And so a lot of her tests like, came about to me, in this manner of me asking her things and her telling me things that maybe aren't actually like, what she was happiest with or what made me happiest, but she was testing me to see if I would like, listen to my body and my own inner knowing, too, or whether I was just gonna listen to whatever she said, right?

So, during my dieta, with Noya Rao, this was just a big conflict of mine is like, Okay, I'm gonna eat fish and plantains. And I was like, This really sucks. Like, I just didn't feel good in my body. And so it's like wrestling back and forth about it and she kept saying: "Yes, eat fish and plantains" whenever I asked her. And then it's funny, because eventually I got this lesson. When I started to realize when I started to just say, like, Noya

Rao, I get that you want me to eat fish and plantains, but I don't think I can do this anymore. Like, I don't feel like my best self when I eat fish and plantains. And I think it's more important for me to feel good in my body and feel like my best self to also like, be able to, like, enhance that, like, love and light in you as well and make you happier as well, like, and it wasn't until I started, like, just kind of like making my own decisions and communicating with her and explaining why I came up with my own decisions in this way. Where she was like, okay, yeah, that sounds good. And then later in one of my ceremonies I turned into like, every one of the fish that I'd eaten during the course. And it was like, very much a clear sign to me that like, Noya Rao, did not like me eating the fish, actually.

Although she learned a lesson about listening to what made her happy, she soon ran into issues following her own desires and disregarding the rules of the diet. After becoming crossed, she had a number of dreams and visions, although they became blurry and staticky due to the cross. They included a terrifying lucid nightmare and a ceremony vision in which she saw herself having a miscarriage; she received the message that the babies were her plant diets which she would lose if she did not take the right steps to uncross her diet. In communication with her diet, she felt Marosa's anger and mistrust, but also felt encouraged that Marosa was trying to instruct her how to fix the diet. She also received a ceremony vision of a house hit by a tornado, with two cleaning ladies slowly trying to clean up the mess "dust particle by dust particle," which was also a representation of her diet and the enormous labor before her of cleaning it up. She tried to encourage the ladies in her vision, singing "soa soa soa" – *soa* is a Shipibo word for cleaning used in *ikaros* – while also singing for forgiveness for her sins.

Both Noah and Renee arrived with an intention of working on their attachment styles, and they both interpreted a lot of what they struggled with and learned in terms of working through their unhealthy attachment styles – Renee as anxious and Noah as avoidant – with the guidance of the plants.

For Noah, he went through multiple phases of being drawn to, and withdrawing from, Renee. Each stage came with messages from his diet plants, complicated lessons about his own personal

growth and discernment. First, his diet told him he needed to take space from her (and all women) to make space for the diet. Next, he was allowed to talk to her again. But it escalated too quickly; they spent too much time together, and soon he felt that it was messing up his diet. The plant didn't like that. At that point, it hurt him physically to even look at her. He exclaimed: "She gave me a note, a tiny folded up piece of paper, and it hurt my hand. I couldn't hold the paper. I had to put it away. It's too painful!" He set boundaries but then felt that she broke them. In that moment, he got so mad he thought he would kill her. At that point he received a message from the plant that he could never speak to her again. Just hearing her laugh was painful: "it was hurting me inside, into the bones, you know, I had to put my hands to my ears. Everything she did was just so painful in my system." His diet, Chiric, told him he would never be able to speak to her again because their energies were not aligned. But soon, it changed yet again: "I looked at her and I could feel okay, now it's different. I'm not being triggered by her anymore. Her laughing isn't hurting me. I could have eye contact with her. I didn't feel physically hurt by it." This process teetered back and forth various times, as he felt himself guided very intentionally by the plants to be more aware of his boundaries, to know himself better, and to balance his extreme tendencies toward poles of intense connection and avoidant withdrawal. The relationship played out similarly to previous relationships he had, but this time the plants were accentuating the patterns and also demanding that he examine those patterns. At one point, he received what he felt was a test in which Noya Rao told him that Renee loved him:

She was telling me we shared a bunch of lives together before. We had like this really tight bond with each other and like over different lives. And at this point, I hadn't spoken to anyone in probably 10 days, and I had definitely not spoken to her, just avoided her at all costs, because I could just not engage with her energy at all. But so I got really happy about this, and I started dreaming and I got all these thoughts about like, sharing a life with her and just got like, really, into this whole thing. And then I well I had this thought. I knew I couldn't talk to her while I was dieting, that was part of the contract. But then I wanted to write her a letter, slide it under her door, ask her out for dinner after the course.

And my diet's like, oh, yeah, it's a good idea, oh yeah you should do that. And I was almost ready to do it. You know, when it dawned on me, wait a minute, yesterday and last week, your message was quite clear, like do not engage at all, right? So why did you suddenly change your mind? And that's when I realized that it was a test.

Then I got the message that Noya Rao had been lying. We did not have all these different lives before and so my diet had lied to me and tried to make me dream about a relationship with her so I could go and write her a note, which would be a break of like breaking my contract with my current diet with Chiric. So that's like a test of my commitment and my discernment and like how to connect with my diet in this process.

So Noah, like Renee, was going through some complex self-interrogation, struggling to determine which messages he received from his diets were tests and which were to be taken more literally. Despite this, and despite some occasional questioning, both had faith that the messages they received were real. They mostly dithered over the best way to interpret them, especially as the crossing made it hard for them to get clear answers. Noah doubted at times whether the answers were correct and whether he should follow the plants especially after he experienced a small seizure, which he attributes to dehydration. He said:

You can doubt if, like, if they have your back, or if, like, will they guide me in the right direction? How much do I need to listen to this? How much also because this second diet was so commanding and demanding, like why do I actually have to do what you say? I must have my own free will still. And what is the meaning of making me fast so much that I pass out and have a small seizure that's too much, you know? I guess when my body can't take it anymore, then they also kind of course correct and let you eat some more, if that makes sense. But if they're good, I mean, the mythology or what we learn here is that they're not all good. I mean, just like all of us we have good sides and bad sides and these spirits have different personalities different ways of acting and different amounts of light and dark kinds of energies and I guess especially if you get on their bad side well then they will punish you and they will make you sick and they will treat you bad. I guess like a parent or someone caring for you a teacher who also maybe punish you if you might go the wrong direction. I think these plants we're working with here are mostly just good but you have to respect them and treat them right.

Renee and Noah's communication with their diet plants and how they attempted to actively navigate through those messages demonstrate how dieters apply the class teachings about tests to their own experiences. They attempted to balance personal insights with the guidance of Enrique and the facilitators, while also framing their tests and crossings within their own personal growth

narratives about healing their attachment styles. They both talk about balancing the need to maintain free will with the need to listen to their plants. They also strive to learn to balance their interpersonal boundaries with each other – maintaining the right amount of independence and interdependence. Thus, the diet and the tests of the diet become a space for practicing and striving for balanced interpersonal relationships with plants and others.

Discernment and Dominating the Plants

1. Dominating

Tú mismo ordenas los espíritus de las plantas medicinales. Tú tienes que dominar a las plantas, no dejes que las plantas te dominen, tú tienes que quitar la fuerza y la sabiduría de las plantas. Solamente te va a hacer inmensos pruebas, si eres fuerte, no es para que la planta te dice hazlo así, hazlo así no, uno hay que ser inteligente, si la planta me dice tú tienes que hacer esa cosa, eso, eso, eso, pensando en mí como la planta me va a decir eso, si estoy en dieta, a me está haciendo pruebas, si estoy fuerte o no, si yo no hago caso a la planta si yo sigo según el dicho del maestro, paso y recibo el don. La planta me puede decir Enrique puedes comer mañana con sal, cómo la planta me va a decir eso? Hay que ser inteligente – la planta me está haciendo pruebas. Cómo voy a comer sal si estoy en dieta? Ahora si yo hago practicamente la planta te ha dominado, tú tienes que dominar a la planta, y tu tienes que quitar el poder y la sabiduria de la planta. Ahora si vas a comer sal, cómo vas a tener don? Cómo vas a tener la sabiduría de las plantas? Estás yendo contra tus dietas. *Atikoma meranbi en bebana!*

You yourself order the spirits of the medicinal plants. You have to dominate the plants, do not let the plants dominate you, you have to take away the strength and wisdom of the plants. They're going to give you immense tests, if you're strong, it's not for the plant to tell you, do it like this, do it like that, no, you have to be intelligent, if the plant tells me you have to do that thing, that, that, that, thinking about myself, how is the plant going to tell me that if I am on a diet, it is testing me, whether I am strong or not, if I do not listen to the plant, if I continue according to the teachings, I pass and receive the gift. The plant can tell me Enrique, you can eat tomorrow with salt, how is the plant going to tell me that? You have to be smart – the plant is testing me. How am I going to eat salt if I'm on a diet? Now if I do, well the plant has dominated you, you have to dominate the plant, and you have to take the power and wisdom of the plant. Now if you are going to eat salt, how are you going to receive the gift of the plants? How are you going to have the wisdom of plants? You

are going against your diets. I pass through, even surrounded by challenges!

Here again, Enrique urged us to be strong when facing the tests of the diet. However, he also described this strength in a particular way this time, declaring: “you have to dominate the plants, don’t let the plants dominate you.” This is one of Enrique’s favorite pieces of advice, and like his discussions of sin and punishment, it is subject to much discussion and interpretation among facilitators and students. As with sins and punishment, the facilitators will often translate the word – in this case as “dominate” – but then provide some additional context and explanation. Reed, for example, says:

I'll first give you like the literal translation and then I'll give you what I think is a better translation, but he will say you need to dominate the plants and not let the plants dominate you. At least that's the word they use in Spanish – dominar. I would say a better translation is you need to master the plants and not let the plants master you. I would say an even better translation is you need to master yourself so that you can be in the right relationship with the plants. But part of that is not waiting and relying on ayahuasca to bring you your mareación,⁵⁸ part of that is going and getting it or magnetizing it to yourself.

Similarly, Peter says, “We like to think of it as like mastering the relationship with a plant. So like you're mastering the connection.” The facilitators usually choose to acknowledge the potential translation of dominar as dominate, but side with mastery as a more accurate translation. They want to avoid the power struggle connotations, and specifically the hierarchical implications of the people subduing the plants. However, Enrique does specify that the dieter must take the power of the plants, and when he says “*quitar*,” suggesting we must *take* the power of the plants as our own, I understand it as a forceful act. It presents a certain paradox for dieters. The dieter must respect the plants, but take their power. They should avoid sinning against the plants by not listening to what the plants say because the dieter must be strong enough to know

⁵⁸ Ayahuasca vision.

that those messages are tests. We have seen some of how those dilemmas play out for students in Renee and Noah's case. The connection gets "funky" or "weird" and heads toward the territory of a cross when the dieter starts giving into the test and thus, letting the plants dominate them. Jade, another facilitator, forcefully engages with the language of domination when she talks about "bringing your power to yourself." She pulls angels to her: "I don't just like say, oh angels..., I say Gabriel, come sit by my side! Noya Rao be my support, be my spine! I give them not commands, but like commands. I dominate my situation, with my words, in my head, sometimes out loud."

Peter says that domination is a way of thinking about the relationship on equal terms. Ida has an elegant analogy which she uses to describe the mastery:

Domination has like a quite charged sound to it. I like to use the metaphor of a giant ocean wave. That giant ocean wave can crush you, potentially kill you. But you can also surf on it. The same energy, the same amount of force, the same amount of power of strength, but how you interact with it can play out in some very different waves – uh ways [chuckles]. Of course, this metaphor, at least how I understand it, applies very much also to being taken over by the medicine. But the concept of mastering or dominating whichever term, you want to use these things, it's not just about being able to control it. It also applies to sensitivity to the space awareness, and even way beyond ceremony, as well. And this is, again, part of this being a course and what Enrique is sharing from this more empowerment perspective, which is how we can actually be an active part of co creation with the medicine or with our diets. So instead of just having a passive receiver role, we are encouraged here, to actually kind of meet, meet the energy that is presented to us.

She explains that the wave can represent the intense and powerful energy of the plants, "immense spiritual masters that we are inviting into us." To remain active participants, we need to learn concentration in order to "maintain some kind of equilibrium, centeredness."

Dominating the plants, or learning to surf in this analogy, means entering the world of the plants and "actively being part of that bridging" between the plant realm and the human realm, rather than being a passive observer. For Ida, the Shipibo tradition represents a practice of learning centeredness to face the world, and "engaging and responding to what is there." She sees it as a

valued skill not only for healing, but also living in the world: “Dominating the plants, dominating the diets, dominating your own field – how you hold yourself is learning how to be able to stand strong, no matter what goes down.”

This domination, mastery, or control is applied to various contexts, but is often tied to learning to hold oneself in a strong and centered way. The facilitator Adam spoke at one time about domination as being able to curb a purge when holding ceremony. Enrique rarely vomits in ceremony, Adam pointed out, especially when singing. Being able to hold the energy of nausea in the midst of a ceremony and therefore contain, even in one’s body, the energy of the space, is the beginning of learning to dominate oneself, the *mareación*, and the plants.

In previous sections I discussed the consequences for sinning against the diet and how the diet plants test and punish dieters. In this section, however, we have seen that dieters must follow the rules of the diet while still asserting their own will. Letting go or surrendering is not the goal, dominating is. Dominating the plants requires careful cultivation of a disciplined and discerning self who can skillfully negotiate and balance messages and energies from many sources. Dieters should follow the rules Enrique and the facilitators give, but also listen to the messages they receive from their plants, but also listen to their own inner intelligence. How Enrique and the facilitators discuss domination and crossing demonstrates that the process of the diet at Inkan Kena teaches dieters skills to negotiate boundaries between self and other as they attempt to understand their newfound hybrid consciousness. After Chapter 3, in which dieters felt their consciousness merge with their diet plants’ consciousness, throughout this chapter, dieters are asserting their own individual selfhood, pushing back against the merger.

Whereas in the previous chapter Enrique’s pupils directed the development of four skills (attunement, discipline, reciprocity, and discernment) at the achievement of merging with a

plant, now they direct those same skills toward maintaining some distance. Attunement in the previous section was equivalent to honing the ability to receive communication from the plants and perceive their desires (within one's body); attunement to dominate the plants involves feeling into the distinction between self and plant. Discipline in the previous chapter meant following the rules; but to *dominate* requires applying that discipline to command power to control the plants and resist undo influence by external forces. From the positive reciprocity involved in merging (gift, exchange, sacrifice, mutual aid), the lessons about reciprocity learned through dominating the plants are more negative ("what hurts you hurts me," or "I will hurt you to teach you"). Discernment for merging involves finding the plant within the self – asking "am I just talking to myself (or where is the other)"? However, in learning to dominate the plants, prudent dieters discern between tests and moments in which they need to assert their own, human morality. They must actively query the moral positioning of the spirit they are interacting with, separate the intentionality from the messages of the spirit, and establish their own perspective separate from the plant.

In short, the skills are first applied to finding and feeling the other within self and are then sharpened by differentiating the other from the self. There is a psychological move from "the plant is me" to "the plant is someone I can have a dialogue with." The move is almost developmental; whereas before dieters learned to think like a plant, now they are learning to think for themselves. Combined, the two promote a practice of interaction with a being that is equated to the self but also differentiated, teaching a flexible orientation toward selfhood and otherhood.

2. Discerning

In navigating the tension between dominating and crossing the diet, discernment is a key skill dieters cultivate. In this section, I will begin to discuss how discernment is taught, especially concerning discerning diet messages, crosses, tests, and twists.

Discernment at Inkan Kena is the ability to skillfully interpret experience, differentiating between projection and truth. As Reed says, discernment is the reason shamanism requires a long training: “You never, ever, are free of discernment issues. Never. Enrique is not free of discernment issues. Well, if Buddha was here, he probably wouldn't have discernment issues. If you have an ego, then you can have discernment issues.” Even though dieters can only ever interpret the messages they receive from the plants through their own vessel and therefore their own unique, individual, human lens, they strive to know their wounds, desires, and triggers so they can identify when those might adulterate the message. Reed continues: “There's a certain amount of healing that needs to happen before you can be a clear channel for the plants. And that's somatically, sonically, mentally...” The healer needs to be particularly adept at discernment because conveying messages from the plants is an important part of their role. Furthermore, when they hold space, they project their lines and airs (kano and niwe) onto the ceremony space; discernment is necessary to exercise control over what energies they and others emit in the space. Healers must know how to work with entities but also how to identify entities – many entities are considered by Enrique and the facilitators to be simply projections of the mind. The facilitator Rosemary describes the process of knowing oneself and healing oneself so to establish the ability to discern between a clear message and a projection:

That's shadow work. Our unprocessed, our repressed needs, or emotions that we had to shove down into the basement into the shadows, and forget about as a kid, whenever, you know, whenever these traumatic experiences happen. They create these filters over our eyes, and we're unable to see clearly the present for what it is. Because we tend to take

that template, and then stick it on to our present moment. Especially when in ceremony as well, because everything becomes really super amplified, right? [...] the more we work in, tune in and come back to our bodies and like, bring all these parts of our being to come back into our own to our wholeness, so we can communicate with the whole gang, right? And so we can be energetically whole. We can recognize when it's clear, it's like a clear message. For me, there's a specific resonance in my body, which is like it's a clear message. It doesn't come from an unmet need or a want or anything, my whole body feels clear. There's no emotional attachment to it. If there are little, little, like kinda tingles of emotional things and like, okay, cool. There's some things that I need to work on, you know, and clear that before I work on anyone, or share any insights with anyone, or share any messages with anyone because I'm like, I need to just tune in with myself. And keep clearing that until the message has come through in a very clear and crystalline way. Like, for me, it feels crystalline. And very direct, and there's no thinking about it, it's just like, it's a no-brainer.

The practice of discernment at Inkan Kena often begins with assessing encounters with spirits. Not all spirits are good or have good intentions. As Enrique teaches:

Todo espíritus de la planta tienen buenos y malos también, y todas las plantas tienen su brujería. Si se presenten a Uds. dígame “si eres planta, éntreme, maneja mi memoria, maneja mi corazón” si ves que no entra, eso es sus malos espíritus de la planta, pero a veces no sabemos...cuando uno dieta cuando uno no tiene experiencia dice entra no más, pero sin saber cuál, que clase de espíritu, porque tu has dicho entrar, tiene que entrar los primeros espíritus. Eso a veces es su espíritu de brujo.

All plant spirits have good and bad ones too, and all plants have their witchcraft. If they introduce themselves to you, tell them "if you are a plant, come into my memory, drive my heart." If you see that they don't come in, that's the bad spirits of the plant. But sometimes we don't know...when one diets when one has no experience they say just enter, but without knowing which, what kind of spirit, because you have said enter, the first spirits have to enter. That is sometimes their witch spirit.

Whenever dieters meet spirits, they are encouraged to speak with them – asking their intentions, whether they are aligned with Noya Rao, whether they are medicine. Sometimes the answers are not straightforward. One student had an experience in which he asked a plant spirit if it was medicine and it replied, sneakily: “a type of medicine.” He persisted with his line of questioning: “Are you here for my benefit?” The spirit melted like cotton candy. The topic of plant morality comes up a lot in the classes as students are sometimes distressed to learn that

every plant contains good and evil. The facilitators explain that plant morality does not adhere to human morality, that's one reason why dominating the plants is important – in order to apply human morality and become a good healer and not a bad sorcerer. The plants, Adam said, see any human experience as fine, so humans have to be specific when questioning the plants. Rather than “should I do this? Or how do I do this?” students were encouraged to ask “is it in my best interest to do this?” Sometimes misleading answers could be a test, but other times they were simply indicative of plant curiosity which saw all possible outcomes for the dieter as equally interesting. While the question “can I have coffee tomorrow?” might yield an enthusiastic “yes!” the follow-up “can I have coffee without hurting my diet” would likely fizzle out into a no. Rather than representing a planty semantic rigidity, I interpret this plant response as reflecting the intentionality of the plants to probe the dieter's reflexivity, inner knowledge, and openness to further dialogue; accepting the first answer would likely reflect a choice to yield to the easy, convenient answer and not further engage in reflection and dialogue with their self and their plant Other.

In teaching discernment, facilitators teach several techniques including: 1) ask the right questions, 2) seek verification, 3) tune into the body, and 4) give it time.

Dieters are always advised to talk to their diets. For example, dieters can and should ask their diets if their diet is straight. But learning how to communicate with their diets means learning how to ask the right questions. Just as in the coffee example above, dieters are taught that it can be better to ask whether something will benefit them or serve their highest good rather than asking whether they should do something. They can also ask: “what will I learn from doing this?” Instead of “tell me about it” they can ask “what would you have me know about it?” Instead of “why is this happening to me?” they can ask “why is this happening for me?”

Facilitators offer these adjustments as framing that might provide more fruitful answers and ones that they view as less human centric and more adjusted to plant sensibility.

Verification is the simple act of interrogating beyond an initial message, by asking further questions, or following up with the other techniques such as giving it time or tuning into the body.

Since messages can come from different sensory organs, feeling into the body is important to receive and discern messages. Reed gives an example of a time when he was walking to the Noya Rao tree and with each step closer he felt sicker and sicker and each step back he felt better. He took it as some kind of message, though the discernment of its meaning was not complete and required time to process. He also gave an example of yawning or burping in ceremony, which can sometimes be a purge or can sometimes be a message. For him, he has found that sometimes yawns bring his attention to something he's not seeing. If he yawns, he stops and scans his body, looking for evidence that it is inside him, and then he scans the room, noticing that the yawning stops once he's identified the source of the message. The body scan is also a tool to check in on the general status of a diet. Ida teaches a body scan in which a dieter can ask: "where is it (the diet) in the body? And how does it feel? Does it feel restless? Does it feel agitated? Does it feel sad? Or does it feel super joyous and like in you and like, present? All those kinds of things can also inform you in how your diet is doing." Similarly, she teaches that when receiving or sharing a message, the healer can take deep breaths to tune into the present, noting "what you're doing, why you're sharing? How does it make you feel? Where's it coming from? What's your agenda?"

If at first a query receives no response or a message is unclear, it can be helpful to sit on it over time, and let it ripen or sprout one day when the moment is right. Many facilitators

expressed receiving a message that took years to unfold and come into focus. Ida encouraged students to start off slowly:

Maybe do not start off by asking the biggest question of your life path or your marriage. Or if you have to invest all your money in something, start slowly with something that carries less risk, you know? So instead, you can just practice with smaller things, where the consequence won't be as big. Like, should I eat chicken today? Or should I not? Or am I affected by this vision because of my own perception or not, and just examine it with curiosity, and go slowly, slowly building. The way I see it is building a foundation. And there's no, absolutely no, use in rushing that process.

Although some lessons become clear for dieters over time, sometimes they experience no conscious resolution, and come to accept that not everything needs to be understood. As Adam said:

When it comes to discerning whether things are true or not, we often are kind of attached to having this truth and not truth. And I am often reminded by Noya Rao that you don't have to understand everything. Some things, you just have to just let go of, you know, not let go like, forget about them, but not attach to, does this need to be understood mentally, in a specific way? And I think that for me, you know, singing is very helpful for that, where singing is connecting to the energy of the plants, and allowing that away to come through. And I don't have to understand everything that's going on.

Reed summed up the problem of discernment and truth by saying that:

Any interspecies communication, it happens as a vibration. And the vibration goes to your heart. And on the way between your heart and your head, it turns into discernible information based on you know, you your language, your paradigm, your filters, all of these things. There's a lot of room for misinterpretation there you know. And this is how channeling happens as well.

The diet process at Inkan Kena is a practice of a particular kind of learned relationship with a plant spirit, one that requires new skills to navigate and that also influences the dieter's relationship with themselves and with other humans. Through learning to discern and aiming to dominate but not cross the plants, dieters practice communication, test the boundaries of the relationship, and negotiate the terms. However, because the diet relationship is uniquely based on the diet plant inhabiting and sharing the dieter's body, bodily effects and the potential for bodily consequences are always present in the background. The intimacy of the shared bodily effects

provides the foundation for the relationship, inducing some fear but also inspiring a sense of certainty and power. Since the threats of crossing puts the dieter's body at stake, the dieter's body becomes the ground for negotiating relationships between the dieter and human and plant others. Crossings confirm the sharedness of the dieter's body and reaffirm the need to develop attunement, discipline, reciprocity, and discernment. Listening carefully to others inside and outside the multiplicitous self is laborious, but the stakes are immediate and real. Learning to dominate the plants involves learning to balance the individual's will with the plant's will for the benefit of both. Furthermore, dieters practice maintaining interpersonal harmony with the various parts of their intrapersonal selves. Discerning often involves identifying and attempting to separate out the energy (affect and agency) from different sources, but ultimately recognizing the inseparability of the self from the plant and the shifting indeterminacy of messages. The next and final chapter will further elaborate how teachings on discernment teach indeterminacy – messages and truth are alive and flexible, constantly shift with changing contexts.

Chapter 5 – [Integrating] Becoming Good Relatives

Introduction

When the diet ends, the dieter starts, bit by bit, to introduce the fragile little saplings inside themselves to the outside world. In this chapter, I will cover the steps to close the diet, including the *arkana*, a closing ceremony that functions as an “energetic vaccine,” and a post-diet period when dieters begin showing their diets the non-sheltered world beyond Inkan Kena. Then, I will discuss how facilitators teach integration as a process of non-attachment which allows students to fluidly accept changing interpretations. This fluidity, framed as discernment, enables them to step into their roles as bridges between different worlds. Also, by applying the diet practice to other plants in their home communities, they extend their practices beyond the Amazon, just as non-Amazonian plants make their way into the diets of Shipibo healers. Next, I will present a framework for understanding the kinds of bodies, selves, and worlds that dieters create. I suggest that the lessons at Inkan Kena combine New Age spirituality, Western psychotherapy, Shipibo shamanic concepts, the affordances of the plants, and the generative capacity of the encounter among all of these to provide a blueprint for how to become “good relatives.” Good relatives is a term I am using to refer to those who not only know how to listen to others, including non-humans, but have also cultivated a moral and ontological stance to difference that is based on: 1) active management of porous and shifting boundaries, 2) relational multi-subjectivity which foregrounds the relationship between agentic and affective entities whether they are considered to be internal or external to the self, and 3) fluid and contextual relativity that emphasizes when and where over what.

Lastly, I will end with some concluding thoughts. Throughout the chapters, we have seen progressive steps toward a transformation through relations. Starting with the initial magnetism

and moving to the histories of pain and healing that support the meeting, we then advanced to a happy and hopeful merging governed by clear contracts and rules. Next, we saw the confusion and consequences when things go wrong and conflicts emerge. Here, we end in the peaceful acceptance of confusion and multiplicity.

Closing the Diet: Arkana Ceremony and Post Diet

And then in the ceremony itself, it's not uncommon that it can get kind of funky, like that, you might feel some of those things that the arkana is trying to, like trying to protect you against. (Facilitator, Peter)

The *arkana* is a special ayahuasca ceremony to protect and close the diet. Arkana energy is funky. Arkana ceremonies can be sad, as people mourn the end of the diet. They can be festive. Sometimes they are chaotic, swirling in darkness and confusion. Sometimes, dieters describe painful darts of energy hitting their stomachs, provoking nausea. The term arkana, like so many other terms from the world of Amazonian ayahuasca practices, likely derives from a Quechua word – in this case *hark'ay*, translated as “to defend, protect, or intervene.” During the arkana, Don Enrique and the facilitators sing special arkana songs which call in protective diet entities as well as many offensive items that the dieter might subject their body to, now that the diet has ended. Peter describes it as an “energetic vaccine” whereby the dieter receives armor to protect them from food, experiences of annoyance or anger, arguments, sexual energy, and the energy of other people. The arkana serves as both protection and “the final solidification of the energy, of planting all that energy inside you. And really binding it well to your body into your mind, to your, to your connection.” In ceremony, he explains, the arkana calls in the energy of menstruation blood, sex, pork, prohibited fish, bad dreams, bad thoughts or pain in the stomach, “so you’re exposed to it in the arkana, but you get a little bit and then the protection is made around that.” Teaching all the assembled dieters the arkana song, he recited and translated some

of the lines from Shipibo that detail many offensive airs: *jawen jimi janxobo* (smelly menstrual blood), *jawen jonra janxobo* (smelly semen), *jawen chota janxobo* (smelly sex), *janxo jawekeboka* (all the smelly things), and *jawen wia parobi* (smelly fish of the ocean).⁵⁹ He warned us:

You very well might feel the energy that is being brought into that. [...During one arkana], I was feeling like I was getting attacked, and I was getting super confused, and just like. What the heck, like what is going on, you know, because it was just so much energy. And in that moment, it's like, okay, it's not because there's an attack going on. It's not because there was anything like, bad happening, this is just all the arkana energy, all the things that are not that great during the dieta that are just coming in and you feeling that really strongly.

On the final day of the diet as the arkana ceremony draws near, Ida encourages us to spend time with our plants and take advantage of the final moments of the diet to strengthen our connections. Inevitably distracted in anticipation of the following morning's fruit, salt, and oil, we try to instead focus our thoughts on asking Noya Rao for guidance in gracefully sealing our diets. Our work is not over. Discerning learning continues through the arkana ceremony. "Did you feel it?" Ida asked me after one arkana, "What did it feel like?" "If the experience becomes intense," she told the group, "It can be quite a good sign, that you're actually perceiving the energies that are being projected out into the room." But she also assures us that even "if you get fully smashed, or you fall asleep, and you're snoring through the entire ceremony, you're still receiving your arkana."

If the arkana is strong (and Enrique's are) we will be more protected "if anything goes awry" during the post diet period, such as in the story Peter told us about the time he got "porked" – or accidentally consumed pork – during a post diet in which he had specific intentions to improve his post diet habits. "It's very interesting," he smiled knowingly, implying that the lesson was

⁵⁹ His translations – which I believe accurately portray the general meaning.

divinely emanant in the faux pas. However, Ida and Peter both shared that sometimes *pasajeros*, or participants, arrive from working with other healers, only for Enrique to find that their previous diets are still open, and he has to close them before opening a new one for them. Thus, while the arkana protects fragile new diets during the post dieta, it is possible to go without; it just requires more vigilance in the post diet.

The morning after an arkana, I usually take my time to officially close the diet. Something about just the knowledge that I am now allowed to eat something tasty, temporarily sates my appetite. And I like to sleep in after a good arkana. In the kitchen, I look for the hot chilis, some onion, and limes to make a spicy concoction which officially ends the diet, but usually everyone else has a shot of harsh liquor such as aguardiente. The alcohol or the chilis are a sharp shock to the system after weeks of bland fare, and they signal to the stomach the physical end of the diet.

Often, Enrique holds another ceremony after the arkana and before everyone departs. This can be an important part of the diet process as it gives the dieters a chance to experience an ayahuasca ceremony after the termination of the diet, providing yet another opportunity to attune and discern. Ida shared her experience in one of the post diet ceremonies:

I was shocked at how different it felt in me to be in the *mareación* without having the open dieta. And there was a lot of grief and sadness and like, missing the diet that I didn't even really know. I knew it was there. But it's sometimes it's only when stuff ends or when it changes that you fully realize what just happened, you know, and I think that's a very beautiful process. And it's beautiful that you're feeling it just, yeah, treasuring even that part of the grief as well. Yeah. And, of course, your diet is not leaving you, it's actually merging deeper into you. It's also getting to know you through the integration, which we will have a full talk on integration as well. It's also about how can we continue the relationship without it being you're not speaking to anybody, not even eating salt? You're constantly focusing on the dieta, but how can you actually be present with that relationship when it's more integrated into your world and that is, for most people, very different.

As we will continue to see in this chapter, the diet work continues long after the end of the diet, beginning with the rules and guidelines that continue into the post diet period of two to four

weeks. Ida frames the post diet as an important part of the physical transition of the physical merging with the plant, and a crucial good beginning to integration. While Enrique sometimes says you only need a few days, Ida and Peter recommend weeks.

During the post diet, there are three main concerns: easing back into a wider array of foods, restricting and changing sexual habits, and paying attention to energy absorption from other people. With eating, the main recommendation from the facilitators is take it slow and eat slowly. The best practice is to slowly introduce new food and stay away from heavy inputs like dairy, red meat, fried foods, and stimulants. Most of us can't resist completely, though. Ida and Peter recommend coconut water, fruits, and avocados and a little salt for brain recovery, but many people on the course end up indulging a little (or a lot) in Iquitos on French toast, pasta, or steak. The facilitator Dan often reminded students of a rough time he had after eating lasagna on a break in between diets. But he also stressed that if you're going to splurge, don't let yourself feel guilty about it. It's better to enjoy it. How you eat is just as important as what. Facilitators encourage students to pay attention to changes in their bodies and use those changes as opportunities for growth and new patterns:

Maybe you're super used to having these things, [but] chances are also that your system has reset a lot during the dieta. So at least being very aware about how you respond because maybe you were used to drinking like five cups of coffee a day and you've been doing that for 10 years. But having this break has actually kind of reset your relationship to coffee and you have a new chance to meet it again and maybe find a better type of relationship that will serve you better.

Similarly, sexual practices require both some temporary caution and long-term adjustments. There should be no sexual interactions during the post diet, although non-sexual cuddling and kissing are ok. Ida tells us:

Just like be aware of what energy that brings in. If you're cuddling and it gets like, it gets like, quite like a lot more than just that, then stop, give yourself a soplay. So just be mindful of the energy that comes in, you know that it doesn't get too rowdy. It is really, really sensitive. Like there's a very big difference in cuddling with clothes on or cuddling

without clothes on or, you know, find your way of doing it in a good way. And speak about it, if you are in a couple like communicate about your boundaries might be different. And that's totally fine. And communication is important. [...] Also, if you're just super close, give yourself a soplay afterwards, just to take that like respect to watch your diet.

Soplaying yourself before and after sex is considered ideal as a long-term practice, since sex can transfer diet energy. Specifically, Ida says, 10% of your diet battery will be transferred to each sexual partner. This can be beautiful, she says, sharing how she was able to share a diet with her partner before ever dieting that plant herself. However, it does mean that diets prefer long-term monogamous relationships. Perhaps unsurprising given the plants' aversion to menstrual blood, period sex is forbidden forevermore. Interestingly, Ida is the facilitator who shares that rule most extensively and insistently, while also admitting that she found it initially triggering. As someone with extensive experience working ritually with women's cycles, she bristled at the insinuation of dirtiness. She has many explanations for how she has come to terms with it and come to understand the rule that Enrique has imparted – she sees menstruation as a time with powerful energy that most modern women have not learned to properly control, making them vulnerable to both loss and absorption of others' energy.

Energy absorption and leaking through non-sexual interactions is also a concern. Peter explains what it's like to go into Iquitos after dieting, when the diet connection is fresh, and the dieter is more open:

Our energetic channels are a lot more open. So, it's more easy to absorb energy from the environment from other people that you interact with. You can have a really nice interaction with somebody, that's totally fine and innocent, but you know, you don't know what that person has just been through, maybe that person was just through a massive fight. Or that person just came out of a pinch of a binge drinking, you know, or like, or that person just like experienced something really traumatic or like, whatever, or that person might have judgments or something, it can be all kinds of things. And a lot of that transference is unconscious. So, the soplay thing is like when they when we open up the channels very much, there is a reason for it. And it's beautiful when it happens. But then when we then go out and interact with a lot of people that that energy that comes from other people doesn't necessarily need to enter when our child's [our diet is] very open.

The soplay is important to protect that, especially when you're in a very intense environment like Iquitos or any other city. [...] When I [don't do that and] go out into town afterwards and interact with a lot of people, I just feel a lot more raw. Like my whole body. My energetic system just feels way more raw, and I absorb a bunch of things that I wouldn't have absorbed otherwise. And sometimes then going back and just being like, Whoa, what just happened, you know, I just like sucked in the energy of 50 people. And whatever they've been through, you know, and it can be a lot.

A large part of integration after the diet, as we will see in the next section, is about learning how to engage with the energy of the world outside of the protected confines of Enrique's camp while still keep one's diet happy. After a period of isolation and surrender to the plants, dieters must regain some of their humanity without completely losing their acquired planty-ness. After a period of radical porosity, they must now close their bodily and self boundaries a little more tightly, sealing a piece of the Other, their diet, inside.

Integration

Throughout the diet, there are rules and guidance, contracts and crossings. Enrique and the facilitators answer questions and concerns, and identify and repair crossed connections. There are social and physical supports and repercussions. But what about when dieters leave and go home, the diet now safely sealed, present but further in the background, less vulnerable but still in need of tending? Now free to float in the world as a human-plant hybrid, dieters depart with strange new bodies and tools under their belt – such as course teachings on integration practices – but suddenly far from the plants and people who orchestrated profound changes in their bodies, minds, and souls. Despite the cyclical pilgrimages that repeatedly connect students to Enrique and the plants on his land, the diets function like retreats, presenting a challenge for learning how to step into life through stepping back.

Integration, unlike most of the teachings I have covered so far, does not have a referent in Shipibo practices. In fact, a facilitator once told me that Shipibo people do not need integration

because the diet practices are already so intertwined with their culture. The idea of integration is firmly planted in the world of psychedelic therapy, with the added task of helping dieters integrate not only their psychological and spiritual insights, but also diverse cultural interpretations of those experiences. Yet, facilitators repeatedly stress that integration is where the real magic and work happens for Western dieters. Through integration, dieters live with the long-term effects of their diet. As dieters bring their plants home and encounter their homes with new (hybrid) eyes, they apply the skills (attunement, discipline, reciprocity, discernment), practices, and stances learned during their diets. Those tools allow them to be “good relatives” by which I mean people who 1) recognize the animacy of other beings (plants) and engage in those relationships respectfully and 2) embrace fluid perspective-taking that allows them to sit comfortably with multiplicity. This concept, which I will further explain in the next section, is inspired by Haraway’s (2008) response-ability and the way “relative” ties together kinship and relativity.

According to several facilitators, the diet keeps maturing through integration and sometimes takes two years to fully settle in its host. Continuing the pregnancy metaphor from earlier chapters, Ida likened it to a two-year-old who begins to use language and thus can have a more mature relationship. Rosemary drew again on the sapling metaphor to describe how the sapling inside will become a tree with continuous feeding. How to feed the diet? Facilitators recommended practices for the body (such as dancing), the mind (such as meditation), and the heart (self-love), including spending time in nature as well as engaging in manual work, creativity, and mindfulness practices. Ida recommends connecting with plants to engage the plant diet channels physically, mentally, and spiritually. Any plants can help: “Even, you know, even if you live in a major city, and you just have a little house plant. Go call your oregano. And

seriously, sometimes that can do miracles.”

Often, dieters who have returned home find that the changes within themselves instigate friction with their old lives although they just as often can produce a ripple effect of healing through their loved ones. I spoke with Ian, one of the course participants, over a video call a year after he took the course. He told me he struggled when he was in the city and was rearranging his life to spend more time outdoors, following facilitator guidance that sometimes a diet requires external changes as well as internal.

He also demonstrated the curiosity and openness to observing change in himself that they teach in integration talks. Ian had experienced a very intense, traumatic/healing experience while on the course when he began to convulse violently at the end of a ceremony. He thought he was going to die. The facilitators began to work on him, through singing and touch and eventually administering electrolytes. He experienced Marosa, one of his diet plants, working on him as well. In the aftermath of the experience, he has gone through many different interpretations of the event. He alternately described it as healing and traumatic. He felt that the event had provided physical healing from pain, which was comforting. He also thought perhaps it was a necessary test for him administered by the plants in his healer apprenticeship. However, he also believed that he was very close to actually dying due to a dearth of electrolytes. He ultimately found peace in the indeterminacy and fluidity of letting the interpretation flow and change, maintaining both faith and skepticism, biomedical perspectives, and spiritual perspectives. The inspiring, but morally neutral stance of plants toward sunlight gave him both a way to understand the intention of the plants who pushed him into, allowed him to enter, or helped him in his scary situation. When I asked him about whether he saw the experience as a mistake or as intentional (from his diet plants) he responded:

I think all those possibilities are potentially true. Like, I definitely acknowledge the biomedical reality of life, you know, if your heart stops beating, you die. If you stop breathing, you die. If you don't have enough electrolytes to keep your muscles and organs functioning, you die, eventually. But then there's also an energetic body that we've learned about and experience, you know, and we know that there is a reality beyond this one, at least observable third world, that that is just as important to our health and well-being. And it's possible that I was suffering some kind of crisis on both planes that were either related, independent of one another somewhat, but both needed to be tended to. And so, yes, electrolytes were pivotal to a good recovery. But that wasn't the only thing that was needed. In addition to that, spiritual assistance was also needed. I also needed to learn and undergo this kind of rite of passage to be able to hold space. So there was a metaphysical lesson to be learned. I think all of those options are on the table, but like, to, I can't really, with any degree of certainty, say, what the plant's intention was. Now, do I have my own speculations? Yeah, I do.

It really depends on the hour you asked me, sometimes it's, it's like state dependent, where, if my faith in the plants is low, and I'm having lots of doubts, then I'll be like. Oh, it's more biomedical. If my faith in the plants and trust is high, sometimes I'll be like oh, it was the plants that saved me, you know, but in general, I do think that the plants have a plan. I don't think that their plans always go to plan 100% I think they're really good at adapting to change and reflexive, you know, Adam was making some analogy in one of the talks he gave that was like, yeah, you know, if a branch falls in the jungle and light opens up, plants they go and fill that space and grow over there. And then if that space fills in on the canopy they'll go to the next place where there's light, and I think that they do have a plan to grow towards light and that's their general goal. But how they do that is very much suited to the moment and what's needed, and I don't know if they had, I guess, designed that ceremony for me.

I remember, when the facilitators and Don Enrique would be like, the plants are testing us. And, to me, it seemed like, like, what are we in the military? It seemed a little bit dogmatic and overly ideological for me, and I was like, blah, blah, blah. Now, now, I really, actually do believe that the plants test you and see what you're capable of, and to see where you're at, to see what you need. Based on the intentions that you put out to them. I honestly think that they know that I want to be a facilitator and they're going to humble the shit out of me. Because they are like, he needs to know what's possible, he needs to undergo the range, he needs to be humbled, you know, his ego needs to get out of the way if he's going to hold space for other people.

This open indeterminacy and embracing of multiple stories and flowing between different interpretations mirrors the teachings of the course, which emphasize discernment as a process of non-attachment. As Adam once said whilst discussing integration as a process of discernment, “We often attach to truth and untruth. Sometimes things don’t need to be understood.” Setting boundaries with people by not narrativizing experience is valued as a practice of discernment.

Ida explained that narrativizing can reify interpretations, which prevents the organic flow of intuitive interpretations that resonate with planty magic:

It can become kind of like you're just pressing replay on a button. And it, you know, the more times you've shared a story, generally, what happens is that the less present you actually are when you share it. Also, if you can contain something within definitions, which language is that – definitions – with subtle, magical, mystical stuff, like what's happening here. Your perspective on what happened right now might be this much of the you know, in two years, you might have a completely different understanding on what happened. Even that one experience that one dream that one ceremony, that you now might feel like, oh, this is what it meant. Maybe in three months, you'll wake up and you'd be like. Oh, my God, this is what it meant. And just to help us in our minds, hold those stories, those experiences in a more fluent way. So that we're also encouraging our kind of understanding to maybe be more present more from like a heart space, than from a mind space where it becomes like a static, oh, this is how the story goes.

So, discernment (and integration) here means exercising a certain kind of detachment, one that allows emotions (and narratives) to flow but does not fix or freeze explanatory models. This embrace of fluidity, relativity, and multiplicity, resonates with the general approach of many facilitators at the site who embrace multiple, at times seemingly incompatible, perspectives.

Here, Ida explains her relativism, how it is based in positionality and combination:

Personally, I do not subscribe to that [ultimate right thing] at all. It's like a diamond. There are different facets and ways into that beauty, which means that for some people they'll have they'll be like doctors of psychology and then work with medicine, that beautiful combination. You can basically combine everything and it's all valid. It's about making sure that it's connected to you and that you have a not-singular approach.

Below, I see her doing something similar when she argues that dieters can hold both plantness and humanness. Taken together, I interpret this as a theory of relativity oriented toward being a good relative through fluid perspective taking and gentle detachment. Furthermore, Ida argues that this ability to take perspectives and hold them lightly is integral to the healing capacity of plant diets. Integration is learning to reconcile the irreconcilable. Ida depicts this ability to integrate multiplicity, specifically between humans and plant spirits, as a salve for a hurting world:

It's the same thing that I've talked about before with the plant realm, and the human realm and building that bridge, we can do both. I think I that's what's meant for us is to be both and to understand that we don't have to lose our humanness to serve from like a spiritual place. And we also don't have to like just discard our like connection and channeling because we feel like we can escape our humanness. We can learn to integrate both aspects and let them coexist. And personally, I believe that's something that also on a global scale. This is the feeling the world really needs.

Dieters branching out into the world with magic plant connections is a part of that global impact that she envisions. As an increasing number of foreigners study and complete Shipibo plant diets, they have begun to diet plants at home as well, and even bring them back for Shipibo people to diet. Blue Lotus is a non-Amazonian plant which has become a popular diet plant for Shipibo practitioners in recent years due to the influence of outsiders. Enrique offers to assess foreign plants for their resonance with Noya Rao and encourages the expansion of Shipibo diet practices beyond Amazonian plants. The pioneering process of dieting other plants connects worldwide dieters on Facebook groups to discuss what they have found. Peter describes the exciting possibilities:

A lot of these other plants that are outside of the dieting traditions, they're not used to being dieted in the same in the same way. And that also like that makes it both kind of pioneering work for you to diet, a plant that is not used to being dieted. But in a way, it's also pioneering work for the plant. Because it hasn't been dieted, maybe for a really long time, maybe never, [...] all our friends who have dieted birch, they all say the same thing that the birch tree is like super keen. And they just like they really want to be dieted, like once they feel that interest from people. They're like, yeah, please come on, I want to share all these things!

However, it can also be risky. Eucalyptus, for instance, has been dieted successfully by some Noya Rao dieters, but others have found its intense, dominating energy too jealous – Eucalyptus wanted to push Noya Rao out as the dieter's main diet plant! Ida encouraged everyone to start with kitchen herbs, who have surprising and accessible wisdom, and reminded everyone that not all plant allies need to be dieted; there are other, less demanding relationships of simply connecting with a plant without inviting it to inhabit our bodies. She told a humbling story of her

own ambitions of dieting at home:

[This is a story of] a combination of like, ignorance and greed and like, natural fascination in myself, of being so drawn to these grand, mysterious things. And we were doing a ceremony for some friends next to the King Oak in Denmark, which is the oldest tree in Denmark. And I've always had a very strong connection to this tree I visited all through my, my childhood with my father. And I was like, oh my god, I want to diet like the oldest tree in Denmark, because that's like, super epic, and like the most Whoa. And, of course, I didn't. But I went there with some offerings some kind of like, you know, I did do something to meet the tree, but I didn't spend months of like establishing a relationship and all that. And in ceremony, the spirit of the oldest tree in Denmark came to me. And that was a force of power that I've never ever encountered before. And it was definitely not something I was even close to being able to hold. It was extremely intimidating, and super, super scary. And that tree came to me and was like "Who do you think you are? Who do you think you are just coming here one day, asking me to be your ally? Princes, kings, magicians through hundreds and hundreds, even thousands of years have come to me and apprenticed for decades before I revealed my wisdom. So just like, remember that humbleness is extremely important. And plant spirits are so much more than humans in that, for example, that Oak that has seen the rise and fall of civilizations, you know, and just really to pay respect and honor that. So, some of these plants like Mandrake, for example. I was super fascinated about because it carries that magic and all of that. But are we actually able to hold that energy in a grounded way? I would say very, very few people are. And there's nothing wrong with not being able to hold that energy. There's so much more value in having very grounded self-reflection on where you're at and what capacity you have.

Claire, on the other hand described the experience of encounters with a plant at home that seemed to be reaching out to her:

I always had this thing where I would find four leaf clovers, like, way more than anybody I know. Just like randomly find them. And after I came back from Peru, they just kind of like appeared to me, sometimes I'd be walking down the street. And I'm not a clumsy person. And I would just like trip randomly over nothing. And I would look down and there would be a four-leaf clover. Things like that would happen. And so I thought, maybe they want me to diet it. And I went to this field one morning. And I said, Okay, if any of you are open to being dieted, and should be my teacher, please reveal yourself. And that day, I walked around and I found like they were just coming out of everywhere! I left there with a bundle of four-leaf clovers, by the stems like this, that was like, I don't know, close to 100! It was crazy when I made that invitation how they just revealed themselves!

Dieting plants at home allows dieters to integrate their jungle experiences and learned skills into their home environment. Noya Rao remains the most influential diet; she must be consulted before adding new diets and she can guide the dieter in their selection and integration of new

diets. Facilitators often portray dieting at home as a way to rekindle relations with plants who may have had intimate, communicative relationships, if not diets, with humans in the past. In opening themselves to other plants, dieters extend their awareness to the intentions and affect of all plants, determining which plants can offer what lessons and energies. The accumulated personal and societal histories of places, plants, and people shape the lessons and energies each plant can offer. In Ida's experience with the King Oak, for example, she was attracted to the tree because of her ambitious personality. The tree, in its grandiosity did not acquiesce to her request, and through her experience she learned a powerful lesson. In Claire's experience, conversely, the plant reached out to her, and she was able to recognize its reaching through the attunement she honed in the jungle.

Becoming Good Relatives

Near the end of the course, the facilitators provide some classes on serving ayahuasca, including the practical aspects such as storage and contraindications. The facilitators often told us not to store ayahuasca in the fridge, because "You don't put your friend in the fridge." They usually prefaced it with, "maestro says," but I never heard Enrique say it myself. They sometimes added that ayahuasca is from a hot place and so doesn't like the cold, or that the same goes for the other medicines. The statement encapsulates many of the lessons of Inkan Kena – participants are encouraged to think about the feelings of ayahuasca, especially by interpreting her features and affordances. They relate their own bodily experiences of feeling cold after having consumed ayahuasca (a common result) to ayahuasca's perspective. They consider the relationship with her as the path to understanding their reciprocal obligations – she is specifically not to be put in the fridge because she is a friend. But there is also a levity and play in the

statement. People laugh. It is taken seriously but also not quite seriously. The friend status of ayahuasca is not in doubt. However, the fridge bit just happens to work well with that teaching moment. After all, our friend Ayahuasca can be stored in a Coca-Cola bottle in the back of the closet or cupboard!

The admonition not to put your friend Ayahuasca in the fridge reminded me of Wall Kimmerer's analogy of wantonly stealing grandma cookies:

If you're visiting your sweet grandma and she offers you homemade cookies on her favorite china plate, you know what to do. You accept them with many "thank yous" and cherish the relationship reinforced by cinnamon and sugar. You gratefully take what has been given. But you wouldn't dream of breaking into her pantry and just taking all the cookies without invitation, grabbing her china plate for good measure. That would be at a minimum a breach of good manners, a betrayal of the loving relationship. What's more, your grandma would be heartbroken, and not inclined to bake more cookies for you any time soon. (2013: 193-194)

She uses the example to illustrate how being good kin to nature means treating nature with respect, appreciation, and reciprocity. In order to enter into good kinship relations with the natural world, learning to listen to the animate world around us is imperative. Inkan Kena is one place in the world where that dream is alive, where plants teach and people listen. Their striving to listen to and enter into relationship with non-human others presents hope and, like Wall Kimmerer's book, allows an imagining of "a different relationship, in which people and land are good medicine for each other" (2013: 12).

In this section, I will discuss what I call "good relative-ity," an approach to difference and Otherhood that Inkan Kena offers and that provides a template for non-dualistic non-monistic approaches to Others, human or non-human. The three elements that compose good relative-ity are changing boundaries, relationality, and fluid relativity.

Self/other boundary management is key to the many practices in the previous chapters. In Chapter 3, dieters learn to soften their self-boundaries to allow a plant spirit to enter them.

Simultaneously, they must avoid contamination by others who might prevent them from establishing or maintaining a clean diet connection. They develop sensitivity to both attune to the plant's needs and identify when to clean their connections from contamination. Similarly, with healing, they sometimes activate strong boundary protection and other times allow a degree of self-porosity. Purging for others, for instance, is a healing tool. Experiencing the world through another's eyes or allowing another to enter one's body or visions are common experiences. As we have seen in Chapter 4, the goal of dominating is to exercise control over this and not relinquish oneself to the will of whatever entities might come along. Allowing the arkana entities or energies to enter just a little bit is the culmination of this learned skill – at the end of the diet, dieters exercise their ability to let in a small amount of irritating substance, but not too much.

In learning to serve ayahuasca and hold space as facilitators, one of the key lessons is to cultivate a “loving ambivalence” that allows the practitioner to separate themselves from the patient when necessary. As Adam said, “If our sense of self is tied up in others, we will become attached to their process [...] we want them to heal but we don't need them to heal.” He told us about the time that he adopted his partner's gluten intolerance for a year because he was trying so hard to help resolve her gluten intolerance. In another cautionary tale, he told us about the time he became too invested in the healing process of his cousin and as a result became “super crossed.” He ended up unpleasantly experiencing the painful inside of his cousin's head and screamed and vomited everywhere. At the same time, the ability to be open to the energies of others is lauded as a sign of aptitude to be a good healer. The trick is to learn how to manage it – through not only the messages from the plants but also the practice of dominating the plants.

In an article that examines the tension between individualism and collectivism in Australian ayahuasca circles, Gearin (2016) addresses the phenomena of purging for others. Defining

ayahuasca practices in those communities as focused on ecstatic divination and purging, he argues that in divination, the individualist self enacts healing through inner knowledge acquisition. On the other hand, purging exposes dividual notions of the self in which personhood is distributed across bodies. Relying on Strathern's (1988) concept of dividualism, in which the person is "multiple, partible and distributed across bodies, minds and objects," he asserts that assessments of ayahuasca practitioners as individualistic do not adequately reflect collectivist practices or shared notions of personhood (Gearin 2016: 203). However, he does find that individualism and collectivism conflict, speculating that "the pathological relational fluids of the purge may signify a psychic confrontation with relational modes of sociality by a decidedly individualistic culture" (210). Thus, for Gearin, the purging of others' energies might double as a moment of reckoning at the contamination point between individualism and dividualism as well as the contamination point between self and other. The purge helps to heal the divide. Gearin's study, like my own, challenges the ascription of simplistic individualism and universalism to ayahuasca cultures. I would add that the ayahuasca at Inkan Kena teaches the skill of manipulating boundaries between self and other, distributing, parting, and multiplying selfhood.

Purges are one moment in ceremony in which participants learn about boundaries and their malleability. One of the common recommendations at Inkan Kena is to avoid touching others unless you are certain your energetic body is closed and protected sufficiently. Frequently after ceremony someone would tell me that they accidentally brushed someone provoking a purge. However, touch is used to administer to people who are struggling in ceremony, especially when channeling plants. Thus, it is not so much about keeping the body/self closed or open, but knowing when, where, how, and how much to open the boundaries.

Other authors (Latour 2004; Stewart 2005; Shapiro 2015) have attended to bodies and bodily

attunement to the environment to challenge notions of separation between humans and non-humans or self and other. For example, Shapiro (2015: 373) says “bodies are sites for both actively absorbing the world and being put into motion by its constituent medley of humans and nonhumans” and Stewart (2005: 1024) says “the body consumes and is consumed. Like one big pressure point, it is the place where outside forces come to roost.” In what Stewart (2011) calls “atmospheric attunement,” bodies are constantly sensing, judging, and responding to the world. It is work to become sensitive to that which invades our bodies, such as chemicals, but it is also work to be unaffected by it (Shapiro 2015). The diets demonstrate a particular way of not only becoming affected but also taking an agentic role in the comings and goings of others in the self. The body is not just a site which blurs the distinction between self and other, it is a site for managing the boundary between self and other.

Furthermore, the *multiple, divisible, distributable, porous selves developed through diets are relational*. By this, I mean that the divisible self can be dissected into multiple selves with interpersonal, intersubjective relationships. The distributed self, relatedly, interacts with other selves on multiple levels. Additionally, these relationships hold obligations and norms of interaction that are scalable and that move across relational networks. The relationship obligations between an individual dieter and their diet reverberate, impacting other relationships such as between Don Enrique and Noya Rao or between Don Enrique and his students collectively. The diet inside one dieter can have a relationship with the diet inside another, separate from but related to the relationship between the people.

Through the diets, everyone who diets the same plant or even different plants has a special relationship to each other. For instance, sometimes a person might think they were falling in love with another person only to realize it was their diets drawn to each other. Claire gave one

example of this when she felt an instant friendship with another dieter only to realize it was due to a resonance between their diets:

The first time I met Ann-Marie, we worked together over the summer, and we had not worked together before. And it was just like this instant, like, beyond an instant connection. It was like this instant, like, I love you, I'm loyal to you. You're my like, sister for life kind of thing...And we realized that my strongest diet and her strongest diet are like, very connected. And it was a very interesting revelation, because it was like, wow, like, Okay, wait, no, this is my diet really likes your diet. Which was wonderful, you know, it really helped our relationship, like it was based already on this beautiful sort of symbiosis or this beautiful alignment. And then we could build our own personal relationship from there. (Facilitator, Claire⁶⁰)

Moreover, the person who opens the diet (Don Enrique) for someone else holds the primary diet connection, with every other dieter connected through them. When Don Enrique said he would get punished by the plants if one of his students sinned against the plants and when he said he would give us 30% of his energy, he was alluding to this connection. Ida explained, "If you open a diet for another person, and that person gets crossed, that goes to you, too. So, it's a very serious thing to open a diet for another person, not just for the other person, but for you as well." The link goes both ways. Since Don Enrique holds all our diets, his connection influences our connections but also vice versa. My connection with Noya Rao can influence his connection which can also influence Claire's connection. This is why almost none of Don Enrique's students open or hold diets for others. It is a serious commitment. Of all the people I interviewed, Reed and Adam were the only two who open and hold diets.

The collective formed from all of the dieters, plants, and their diets at Inkan Kena is greater than the sum of its parts. The facilitators often espoused the conviction that each person on a given course was there for a reason. We all perfectly complemented each other as chosen by the plants to come together for that course to do the work together that we needed to do. "Everyone

⁶⁰ The same Claire as appeared previously as Participant, Claire. When I first interviewed Claire, she was a student on the course, but in our subsequent interview, quoted here, she was a facilitator.

is medicine for you,” I wrote down in my field notes. An individual’s medicine often comes from their ability to trigger others, provoking a surfacing and then resolution of the problem. Ida, in explaining the technique of “authentic relating,” which is a practice with roots in Western psychotherapy and New Age philosophies, emphasized the importance of using triggers to move energy:

And the way that we work with it here, like we've already spoken about in several occasions, is how you can utilize whenever there is a strong charge, if it's negative, or positive if you want to use those terms, or if it's like, repulsion or attraction, if there is a strong charge, that's energy. And if you look at that, beyond duality, that's a potential that if you engage with it, in a conscious way, you can harvest or direct that energy with an agenda. Instead of just letting it be affecting you, you can like move with it. And so, the basic principles of the response-ability is based upon observing without judging, or evaluation. So instead of evaluating, oh, Adam is doing something and is triggering me a lot. Instead of evaluating what Adam’s doing, is that right or wrong? Is it unfair? Or is it fair, instead of like, categorizing what the action is, then just like observing what is happening within yourself? I'm being triggered. I can feel my heart start to be faster, starting to sweat, I get agitated, I can't sit still, I'm being affected. (Facilitator, Ida)

By observing rather than emotionally engaging with the trigger, she says, we can practice responsibility or “response-ability. [Our] ability to respond.”

Authentic relating is not the only practice syncretically absorbed into the classes at Inkan Kena. The breathwork of New Ager Stanislav Grof and the “feeding demons” meditation practice of American Buddhist Lama Tsultrim Allione are two other practices that are integrated into the course. Furthermore, the divisibility of the self at Inkan Kena has roots in New Age theories of the self, such as Starhawk’s tripartite self – divided into the higher self, the younger self (emotion, unconscious), and the talking self (rationality, conscious). In Starhawk’s example, the talking self can interact with the other selves as if they were external entities. The “feeding demons” meditation practice, similarly, guides the students to practice interacting with parts of their selves as entities.

Rosemary led the workshop entitled “Feeding Your Demons” the first time I participated.

She explained that through our lived lives (in society) we learn to consolidate the many beings inside us into one being. However, it can be helpful sometimes to disaggregate them and talk to separate parts of ourselves as separate beings. Rosemary told us that although we identify as a whole, unified being, in fact, we are already made up of many pieces, many selves.

Because we've been living in our bodies, our entire life, we've kind of identified ourselves as this one whole thing, right with the pains and the stories and the different aspects of ourselves. And sometimes, and oftentimes, we haven't been able to be given the tools to differentiate who is speaking, what is speaking, what they're saying. And it's beautiful in ceremony too. [...] It's not just like, a one-off thing, you're done, you're healed. We get to practice this at any time, and to be able to pull these different aspects of ourselves, energies, and have conversations with them. [...] So in this process, you may find that you have a bunch of allies that you didn't know that were living in your body that you thought were pains or stories that you were trying to repress, or there are beautiful gifts that you've held in your body for this entire time and they've just been repressed and they've just been forgotten about.

In the meditation, we identified and personified a piece of ourselves that was causing us problems. Summoning them before us with all the might of our imagination, we addressed them “in a loving way, instead of try[ing] to kill them off” and engaged in a dialogue asking them what they needed. Rosemary framed it as “kind of taking things apart, having a look at them individually, and integrating them back together.” Through feeding demons, the facilitators encourage participants to play with multiplicity within their selves. They stimulate an underlying theory of selves as divisible into relational beings who can have discussions and care for one another. This meditation helps frame how students experience the diet as they learn to hold entities inside who are part-self part-other with varying degrees of Self or Otherness.

Like the demon inside, the diet inside plays a therapeutic role. Dieters practice a particular kind of relationship with their diets – a part of themselves but also a part of other humans and also a part of an actual plant in the Amazon – which influences how they relate to human and non-human others more broadly. Luhrmann’s charismatic Christians from Chapter 1 also, she contends, turn God into a therapeutic interlocutor inside the self. Drawing on psychoanalysts

Heinz Kohut, Ana-Maria Rizzuto, and Donald Winnicott, she likens the intimate Christian God her informants experience to a psychoanalytic self-object, an object that stands in for a person in the world such as a parent or a psychotherapist and holds the emotional valence of the social relationship. I am not content, however, to relegate the plants to therapeutic self-objects like the child's toy that becomes a transitional object standing for the love of an absent mother. That is part of their role at times, but the materiality and agency of the plants are all their own and cannot be reduced to a self-object. Additionally, the rules relegating the relationship (such as the underlying assumptions about the porosity of self or relational obligations to the plants or human others) are different. The diets provide practice for a particular kind of relationship, and it *is* therapeutic, but it gestures outward – toward an animate world. It influences and is entangled with human and intraself relationships but it cannot be reduced to human relationships or intraself relationships.

Dieters cultivate fluid, contextual relativity. Discernment, as we have seen in Chapter 4 and in the previous section of this chapter, has several different meanings at Inkan Kena. Like for Luhmann's Christians, it can signify "distinguish[ing] the presence of God from human dross" (2012: 86). It can also align with older Christian traditions of sorting God from demons. However, it can also mean exercising a loose attachment to truth, or an attunement to a fluid and contextual relativity. The porosity of boundaries and the relational, multisubjective aspect of self I've already described provide the need for shifting truth. Discerning truth becomes about an embodied knowledge that attunes to the when, where, and how rather than the what. Csordas (1990), also working with charismatic Christians, describes his interlocutors' need to "'discern' when, where, and whether to utter the inspired words, but the utterance is invariably in the first person, with God as the ostensible speaker" (1990: 29). The messages from the plants, too,

require discernment along with an interpretation that shifts over time and in different contexts. Part of this is undoubtedly an accommodation, possibly subconscious, to the fluidity that Enrique displays. Spending their time listening to the plants, Enrique, and the facilitators, dieters such as Ian learn to tolerate uncertainty. As one of Luhrmann's informants said, "It's God stuff, [meaning] it's a mystery, it's still not clear" (2012: 119).

However, exposure to spiritual guides and a Shipibo man with a penchant for giving contradictory answers does not fully explain the flexible orientation of dieters at Inkan Kena. Some of the relativity certainly derives from vestiges of New Age thinking. New Age thinkers embrace moral relativity, only denouncing as evil that which impedes the spiritual evolution of humanity (Hanegraaff 1996). Stanislav Grof also proposed that something could be true and untrue at the same time. At Inkan Kena, people often share this thinking, believing that even suffering and negative events are understandable within the broader spiritual evolution of humanity and that judging others will only come back to bite you so it is best to remain neutral. Still, another scholar researching ayahuasca tourism in Pucallpa (Dudek 2022) found that although tourists traveled to the Amazon with positive views of Shipibo shamans, their interactions with the jungle and with Shipibo healers activated a core repulsion. Investigating these aberrant perceptions, as he calls them, Dudek hypothesized that the agency of the environment mobilized Western Christian impulses to the dualism of good/bad and light/dark. His informants present this interesting contradiction of participating in Shipibo ayahuasca ceremonies while saying disparaging things about Shipibo shamans, calling them liars, frauds, witches, selfish, cruel, or greedy. For example, one of his informants commented they are "destroying their own culture and rituals" (2022: 73). Another said about the Shipibo:

Having a long history and culture that, I'm saying this not in a way as to try to judge them, but I'm just saying that...I will use a metaphor that involves an animal. I love

snakes, for example. So if I encounter a snake, and it's beautiful, and I want to handle it, I would be a fool if I just stuck my hand in front of the snake I didn't know. It's the same thing with the Shipibos. (72)

[They are] sexual predators. (73)

There were just a lot of things that just didn't seem right, in that place. But one guy got possessed during the ceremony, a young Russian guy. I mean it was a full-on exorcist. (makes devil/ vomiting sounds) Vomiting. Pissing in the middle of the maloka. And they were chuckling to each other. And his apprentice is this French shaman...François actually once scared me more than Emilio. (82)

For them to call on a demon is the same as calling on an angel, whatever works at the moment to get what they want. (85)

A third complained:

They have no spirituality here. When you look at their chakras, their chakras stop at the throat. There is nothing above that. So from the throat down, they are masters, absolute masters. From the throat up, they don't exist. There is no spirituality whatsoever. (72)

A lot of them don't even really know what they are doing either [laughs]—it's just for us. It's entertainment. (81)

I mean there are some really clever stuff they do. They can put you on a diet for a month, call the spirits of the plants into your body, you do your diet for a month, and then in the closing ceremony, they will steal your diet from you. (81)

Dudek surmises that while Western ethics are predicated on black and white, right and wrong, Amazonian shamanism is based on ambivalence, provoking irreconcilable discomfort in his informants.

While I have been exposed to some similar sentiments at Inkan Kena, they mostly take the form of students accusing other Shipibo shamans of witchcraft. There are also some incidents of friction and students appalled by the staff's treatment of animals, mirroring Dudek's informant who couldn't reconcile a master shaman beating a dog and screaming at children. It could be that I am simply not exposed to the Enrique defectors. It is also true that I focused for this work on the people most committed to the work of these specific plants at this specific place. But I think that a confluence of circumstances make it more likely that students will accept Enrique's

fluidity: 1) the presence of Noya Rao increases trust in the plants, 2) the distance of Inkan Kena from a Shipibo community reduces student exposure to the day to day lives and gossip of Shipibo people unlike Dudek's (2022) research in Pucallpa, and 3) perhaps most importantly, the interpretation and instruction by facilitators who teach about fluid discernment and provide a buffer between Enrique and the students. Many of the long-term facilitators exhibited the most moral relativity. To give an example for contrast, one woman who only participated in the course once threatened to write a blog about how Enrique was a sham shaman because of the treatment of his dogs. On the other hand, Reed, the facilitator with the most experience, once told me a story about a time he was sitting at the tree with Enrique when he saw something moving in the tree. Pointing at it in wonder, he was still trying to figure out what it was when Enrique lashed out his machete and slashed the small bat in the tree. Reed shrugged with a chuckle and told me that *his* Noya Rao told him to be kind to animals, but it was different for Enrique. Sometimes, the facilitators play a role in shielding those aspects of Enrique from the other students.

This project has been about the facilitators and their lessons and the long-term students who keep coming back more than the tourists or one-timers. While Dudek's moral dualists are a part of the Peruvian ayahuasca scene, so too are people like Reed who accept the indeterminacy of Noya Rao with humility and wonder.

Facilitating demands attunement to others along with a contextual, relational, boundary shifting, playful approach. Holding ceremony is an exercise of that attunement. Those who serve must ask not "What is true?" but: "What is needed right now? Am I the right person for it?" They must know not only how to hear the call but how to heed the call. Part way through the course, students are invited to begin helping their peers in ceremony if they call out in the dark – "help!" We first must hear it (no small task when you are in your own visionary experience). If

we hear it, we should not rush to help. Rather, we must pause and feel into ourself and the energy of the room: Am I the right person to help? Am I tuned into the plants or am I in the middle of my own process? Is my energy clean? Can I walk across the dark, obstacle filled room quietly to locate the person and administer to them without getting sick or faint myself? This is one of many moments throughout the course in which we must practice attunement, discipline, discernment, and reciprocity in order to be a good relative, this time to our fellow humans. To provide a healing experience, the facilitator must learn to bridge worlds. As Ida said, to be a facilitator back home:

Most likely you will be serving for people that probably will never go here that don't have any idea about demons and Jackie Chan DVDs and purgatives and all that crazy juju. And therefore I would say specifically, if you are going to work with people that are not, like integrated in this type of realm, it's very, very important that you make sure that you are also grounded in other modalities that can approach people in a way that's more familiar to them. [...] just to never get stuck on any definition of this is how it is, this is what this is.

She is referring to Don Enrique's use of Jackie Chan DVDs in vapor baths to treat demons. While she believes in his methods, the patients that people on the course go home to work with might have very different beliefs. To be a bridge, to be a healer, we have to straddle the line between this and that. We have to let truth flow.

Concluding Thoughts: Integrating the Chapters

Not everyone who joins the course subscribes to the teachings I've described in the previous chapters. On my first week at camp, a man left because the course was not what he expected. He told me, "I don't want to become a plant! I wanted to connect to ether."⁶¹ The Noya Rao extract,

⁶¹ By which I take him to mean an elevated transcendental, universal, spiritual energy with a celestial, rather than earthly, connotation.

he added “tasted like sewer water.”⁶² Having invested thousands of dollars that he would not get back and only stayed for a few days out of the eight-week course, he decided it was better to return home than waste any more money or any more lost income from missed days of work. Another person that left soon after the course also had a physical reaction of repulsion. Upon visiting the tree for the first time, he vomited inexplicably, which most interpreted as a spiritual reaction. That participant also insisted on stubbornly following his own invented set of rules for the diet, such as drinking the Noya Rao extract more frequently than advisable. These cases of diets gone wrong or failed participants illuminate by contrast the characteristics of a successful diet. Their bodily reactions and denial of the merging or the rules set by Enrique and the facilitators highlight the material bodiliness of the experience, the implied goal of “becoming a plant” or inhabiting a plant perspective, and the importance of attention to the guidelines given by the teachers. Additionally, in the case of the first man, his mention of “ether” underscores how this process contrasts to other spiritual pursuits. The plant diets connect dieters to earthly, material plants rather than immaterial and inaccessible celestial beings. Accordingly, the process is messy – not all love and light.

The chapters of this dissertation describe the process of the diets and present them as a process of learning animacy through the embodiment of others. Inkan Kena is a teaching place where people learn to listen to plants. But they do it through merging themselves with the plants, thereby developing particular kinds of selves and relatedly, particular approaches to engaging with Others and the boundary between self and other. The processes of and negotiations involved with merging are the foundation of the animacy because they orient the dieter toward certain stances toward Others. Most significantly, they discover – in immediately real, embodied ways –

⁶² Note, it does not taste unpleasant to me or anyone else I’ve asked. To me, it tasted like mildly citrusy woody water, sometimes sweeter and fruitier, sometimes slightly more stringent.

that Others can be you and also not you. They learn to differentiate and collapse self and other and, in so doing, move beyond both approaches to the boundary. William James (1890) argued that both “dissociation” (differentiating between objects) and “association” (connecting them) are crucial to the human experience. His terms are useful for further explaining the arguments of this project. Both represent important developmental processes but vary culturally in how they are balanced against one another. James, for instance, found possession to be a malady of the self, underscoring how some “associations” can be culturally off limits. Like a developmental process for understanding relationships between objects and humans, the diet is an intentional developmental process undertaken by adults to rearrange those understandings and underlying structures, or culturally influenced ontological stances.

The chapters began with a discussion of the motivations driving Don Enrique and his pupils together, propelled by a sense of an illness in the West, associated with an overabundance of “dissociation.” The second chapter illustrated how Amazonian encounters, especially between indigenous people and Westerners but also between nature and humans, have been burdened by either excessive associations (unity) or excessive dissociations (separation), but that ayahuasca-influenced interactions as well as Shipibo shamanic theory signal a potential for a third option based in the mobilization of the embodiment of others for healing. Chapters 3 and 4 detailed the practices and discourse of the diet teachings at Inkan Kena. Through those chapters, I articulated a set of four morally-laden, developed skills that the diets teach – attunement, discipline, reciprocity, and discernment – which together form a template for proper relating to Others. I showed how the diets are understood as a merging – bodily practices which guide an embodied experience of multiplicity as dieters allow a plant to inhabit their bodies. Lastly, in this chapter I tied those skills to a broader approach to Otherness which, most importantly, foregrounds

fluidity, flexibility, and skillful boundary manipulation. Broadly, the diets are about learning to relate to Others using a type of relationally contextual moral relativity that also entails moral obligations. That is, dieters must attend to the relational moment.

My views on ontology, like those of many ontological anthropologists working in the Amazon, is influenced by Viveiros de Castro's (2015) perspectivism. His oft-cited structuralist theory posits that in the worlds of indigenous peoples of the Americas, social relationships, rather than material nature, are the substrate upon which life is built, such that each being views themselves as a human whose predatory-prey relationships determine both their bodily form and how they see others. Thus, a jaguar drinking blood perceives himself just as a human drinking the Amazonian yucca drink, *masato*, would. Perspectivism is also referred to as "multinaturalism," in which many natures interpret or embody one culture, contrasted to Western "multiculturalism" in which many cultures interpret or embody one nature. Viveiros de Castro and others working with ontologies in the Amazon often walk a tightrope between taking indigenous perspectives seriously and romanticizing or reifying indigeneity (Turner 2009; Ramos 2012). Viveiros de Castro has been convincingly criticized for presenting a view that is too static and generalized, but his move to sociality rather than materiality as the immutable substrate for life is provocative and has influenced my conception of relative-ity. I seek to retain that core, while infusing the idea with essential fluidity and flexibility. Also, my work attempts to find ontological difference in messy contact zones rather than relegating it to indigeneity. Taking indigenous ontology seriously without reifying indigeneity necessitates seeking out areas of ontological resistance that exceed those boundaries and that demonstrate ontological transformation. Attending to the animacy of plants and humans in the contact zone and troubling the divide between "Western" and "indigenous" ontologies provide promising paths forward for

an academic understanding of both ontology and the ayahuasca encounter.

The stickiness of a dualist/monist trap is evident in many of the ontological scholarship today. Even clever theorists at the forefront of the ontological turn intent on avoiding the trap of dualism or monism sometimes slip out of one into another. Viveiros de Castro's theory subscribes to what I am categorizing as separationist or dualist (or now, following James, "dissociationist") tendencies, by focusing on drawing boundaries between beings and categorizing the world into bounded boxes. However, other ontological theorists (Kohn 2013; Bennett 2010) have tended toward unsettling boundaries, often addressing posthumanism by problematizing the boundedness of agents and destabilizing divides between humans and non-humans. Instead of reifying divides, these theories almost stray into monism, finding a common substance or substrate that connects humans from non-humans. For instance, Bennet, focusing on materiality, finds agentic matter in humans as well as in what might be categorized by some as inanimate objects. Kohn describes all life as semiosis. However, Mol's (2002) concept of "enactment," perhaps affords a way to conceptualize multiplicity beyond a monist frame. Enactment posits a theory for acting and being in the world rather than for analyzing or understanding it. There is a spatial-temporal aspect. The reality of objects and subjects are constantly in motion, so truth and reality are contextual to space and time.

Relative-ity, inspired by Mol, stresses the when, where and how of boundaries rather than the what. Through it, I strive to combine and contain many of these notions. Dieters at Inkan Kena, at times, resist the constraining isolation of dualistic rationality and the difference-erasing harm of monistic universalism by sharing in a process that aims to balance self and other, community and individual, conflation and distinction.

To return to the diet, it is, importantly, also a healing process that connects healing and

morality to the management of difference and the self/other boundary. In Chapter 3, we learned about Amazonian ethnoetiologies which relate the ethical management of the boundary between self and other to both the environment and illness/healing. For Western “moderns,” too, healing, environmentalism, and morality are intertwined. Diets, in the popular sense, are already ways of managing this delicate balance. We already know our bodies are not only our own. Our food and other substances affect us and connect us to the world around us. The plant diet makes it explicit: Your “food” can take revenge on you for upsetting it. We desire to exercise some measure of control over the situation, but objectifying the food only brings further imbalance. Plant diets instead invite us to enter into an interrelational power struggle with these beings, shaping ourselves into moral subjects along the way. Healing has always been a moral project, and the diets are no exception. Plant diets are a process of healing predicated on the construction of proper relations inside and outside bodies. In order to repair ourselves we must always also repair our relationships to others.

To conclude, I thank you for letting this work inhabit your mind for a time as a part of your reading diet. Now that it’s over, feel free to enjoy some salty, oily peanut butter!

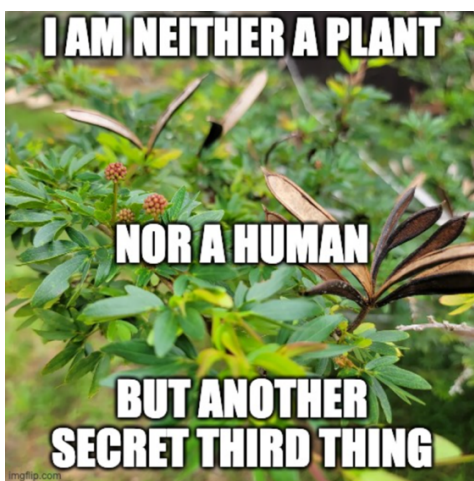


Image 1: Plant-human Meme – This image plays on a popular “secret third thing” meme, gesturing toward the complex, ambiguous nature and thirdness of diets, but also the theory of relative-ity.

Appendix: Photos



Image 2: Marosa



Image 3: Chiric Sanango



Image 4: Bobinsana



Image 5: Chulla Chaqui



Image 6: Noya Rao



Image 7: Shipibo Embroidery in Maloka



Image 8: Noya Rao Leaf in Maloka



Image 9: Ceremony Space



Image 10: Learning and Healing



Image 11: View from Tambo



Image 12: Toilet in Tambo



Image 13: Porcupine Encounters



Image 14: Hungry Cat at Dinner

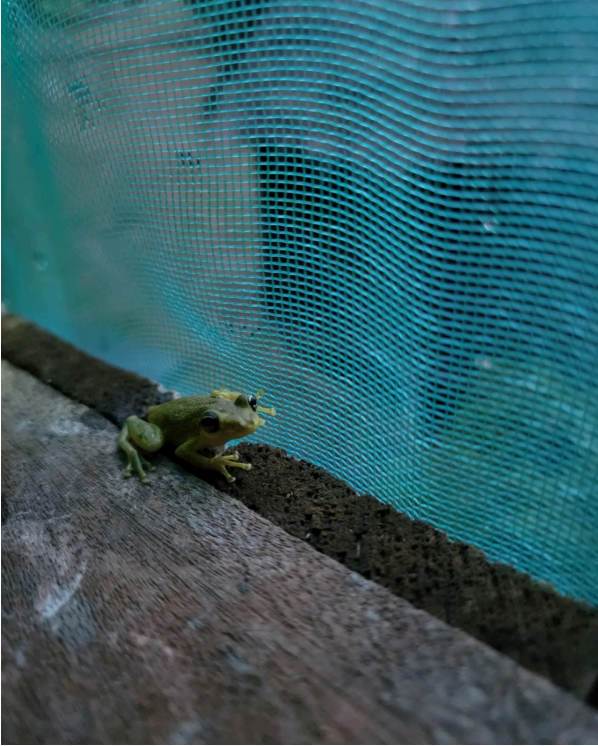


Image 15: Frog Inside Mosquito Netting



Image 16: Author and Enrique at Camp



Image 17: Path to Noya Rao



Image 18: View of Maloka from Kitchen Porch



Image 19: View of Maloka from Kitchen Porch 2



Image 20: Author on the Boulevard of Iquitos



Image 21: Upscale Hotel Lobby in Iquitos

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