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Escucha los Cantos: Non-Human Agency in Peruvian Vegetalismo and Shamanic Pilgrimage

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Owain J. Graham

March 2024

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Jonathan Ritter, Chairperson
Dr. Amanda Lucia
Dr. Liz Przybylski
Dr. Anthony Seeger
Dr. Leonora Saavedra

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2024

The Dissertation of Owain J. Graham is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Escucha los Cantos:
Non-Human Agency in Peruvian Vegetalismo and Shamanic Pilgrimage

by

Owain J. Graham

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Music
University of California, Riverside, March 2024
Dr. Jonathan Ritter, Chairperson

Academic discussions of the globalization of the psychedelic brew ayahuasca have called attention to ayahuasca tourism and its tendencies toward exotification of Indigenous peoples, extraction of knowledge and resources, and the reshaping of ritual practices to appeal to market interests. These discussions tend toward fatalistic conclusions that ayahuasca tourism will inevitably result in the erasure of Amazonian lifeways. I draw on four years of hybrid ethnographic research in the Peruvian Amazon and in online discussion forums for ayahuasca and Amazonian shamanism to present the case of two Amazonian medicine centers who take an alternative approach to ayahuasca tourism, which I refer to as *shamanic pilgrimage.* By recontextualizing ayahuasca in its historical role as a support to other medicinal plants, Centro Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina leverage global interest in ayahuasca to access the economic advantages of the global tourism market while mediating against its deleterious effects. This is

accomplished by requiring pilgrims who wish to drink ayahuasca to do so as part of a deeper practice of "being with plants." This extended period of liminality forces engagement with Amazonian, animist epistemologies.

I focus on the role that *icaros* (healing songs) play in structuring rituals and in facilitating relationality between pilgrims and non-human beings of the forest. Using Peircian semiotics, I analyze the process that healers go through to learn icaros, and I analyze the use of these songs in various medicine rituals that do and do not involve ayahuasca. I also employ semiotics to show that icaros carry the same types of meaning in ayahuasca ceremonies as they do in other rituals. However, they function differently as the synesthetic experiences that ayahuasca often induces collapse the typical order of semiotic processes, allowing healers to modulate the experiences and processes of healing of ayahuasca drinkers. I draw from neuroscientific studies of the past ten years, which show that psychedelic experiences can catalyze significant ideological shifts. In my research, pilgrims regularly reported encountering non-human entities during dietas and ayahuasca ceremonies. As a result of these experiences, pilgrims often became personally invested in the wellbeing of Amazonian peoples and the forest ecology.

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Introduction

In recent years, the psychedelic Amazonian brew *ayahuasca* has become a prominent topic of discussion across nearly every form of traditional and new media. Celebrities from actress Jada Pinkett Smith to NFL star Aaron Rodgers to journalist Michael Pollan have openly discussed their use of ayahuasca for reasons of mental health, spiritual development, and personal exploration. Conversations about ayahuasca and the related practices of Amazonian shamanism have become commonplace on some of the most popular podcasts in the world including the Joe Rogan Experience. Simultaneously, there has been a steep increase in the number of anthropological studies focusing on ayahuasca shamanism, ayahuasca tourism, and the globalization of ayahuasca (Labate and Cavnar 2018). The rise in global engagement with the Amazonian brew has garnered considerable criticism. In a piece written for the now-defunct website BitchMedia.com, Bani Amor outlines some of the complexities and ethical questions that have arisen due to the increase in cross-cultural encounters engendered by interest in ayahuasca. “[Trying ayahuasca] was something I felt I needed to earn, to prepare for, and to respect, because at that time I saw tons of tourists who just wanted to get high on the brew for the cheapest price, or who would shame me for taking medication and seeing “Western” practitioners [Western medical doctors], while assuring me that ayahuasca would cure me overnight” (Amor 2018). Amor goes on to point out some of the obvious issues regarding the current state of the globalization of ayahuasca while taking a stance informed by identity politics: for people of color, drinking ayahuasca can be a step

toward healing and solidarity with their ancestors; however, for white people, drinking ayahuasca is an appropriative, drug-fueled vacation from their privileged spaces in their home countries; it is “the latest trendy tonic for White People Problems” (Amor 2018). From this standpoint, Amor asks:

> So what happens to a people whose traditional healing rituals become solely performed for tourists? What happens to a practice such as ayahuasca ceremonies in the hands of uninvited guests? And in a world where colonization is still in progress, how can we take part in ancestral traditions that aren’t ours without taking them apart or taking them over? (Amor 2018)

In this dissertation, I explore these issues while adding context and my own questions based on four years of hybrid ethnographic research in the Peruvian Amazon and in online forums for the discussion of ayahuasca and Amazonian shamanism. When I first traveled to the Amazon in 2019, I was still formulating my research questions, and, in this regard, I would consider the first several weeks of the project to be pilot research. My preliminary questions were:

> 1. In the area around the city of Tarapoto, which has a distinct history and relationship to tourism from more popular hubs that emerged earlier (e.g., Iquitos and Pucallpa), how is tourism affecting the practice of *vegetalismo* (which, for now, I will gloss as plant-based Amazonian shamanism)?
>
> 2. What role do icaros (healing songs) play in facilitating or mediating the effects of tourism? Are they part of the constructing of the exotified “authentic” ayahuasca shaman (and if so, how do they play this part?), or are there ways in which they are used to resists such decontextualized reinterpretations of vegetalismo?

While this dissertation still addresses these questions, the framing of my project changed between my research trip in 2019 and the next time I was able to return to the Amazon in 2022. This change occurred because the two medicine centers in which I conducted the majority of in-person ethnography for this project were operating in a way that, based on

my review of the available literature and media on the topic of ayahuasca tourism and vegetalismo, I did not expect. Their strategies also differ significantly from the dominant modes in which ayahuasca tourism is practiced and facilitated. Namely, while ayahuasca was an important part of the practice of the healers at these centers and a main draw for those who visit them, the primary way in which these centers engage with tourists is through ritualized isolation diets, called *dietas*. Moreover, the healers at these centers told me that they were self-consciously focusing on dietas to maintain their traditional practices in the face of ayahuasca tourism. Having had these encounters in 2019, my adjusted research questions became:

> 1. How does a focus on dietas and the broader practice of vegetalismo rather than ayahuasca ceremonies function to resist the momentum of ayahuasca tourism as practiced by the majority tourists and centers in the globalization of ayahuasca and vegetalismo?
>
> 2. Given that the majority of research on icaros has focused on their use in relation to psychedelic ayahuasca experiences, how are they conceptualized, used, and experienced by healers and participants in rituals that do not involve ayahuasca? And how are icaros involved in or resistive to the decontextualizing processes of globalization?
>
> 3. In light of the increase in clinical studies and therapeutic uses of psychedelics, closely related to the globalization of ayahuasca, what can ethnographic research offer that might encourage clinicians to engage seriously with culturally situated knowledge of psychedelic use and the broader practices in which psychedelics have been used? How can cross-disciplinary research facilitate collaboration between systems of knowledge production such as vegetalismo and clinical research, considering Centro Takiwasi as an example of such collaborations?

Throughout my research, the answers to these questions always came back to how people relate to the plants themselves. Healers at Centro Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina and the particular groups of tourists, whom I refer to as pilgrims, consistently highlighted the importance of engaging with plants as agentive, conscious, non-human beings as the

means through which healing and learning are achieved in vegetalismo. By focusing on dietas, these two medicine centers maintain ayahuasca's historical role as a support to building relationships with the non-human beings who make up the ecology of the forest and counteract the dominant trend of decontextualizing ayahuasca from this broader practice. It is through building these relationships that the plants confer medicinal effects and knowledge. This strategy for engaging with global interest in ayahuasca represents a development within ayahuasca tourism that seeks to address the questions raised by Amor, mediating against ayahuasca tourism's deleterious effects.

Warden (2015) argues that the commodification of Indigenous culture involves, first, a process of conceptually linking Indigenous-ness with a cultural practice or the production of cultural artifacts and, second, the removal of those practices and artifacts from their social context. This facilitates their reinterpretation and repackaging for sale in the global marketplace. Ayahuasca tourism as practiced in the majority of cases has, more or less, followed these processes, tying the practice of ayahuasca shamanism to certain Indigenous groups while inventing new ritualized contexts for the brew's use (Brabec de Mori 2014; Labate 2014). Employing strategies that parallel what Bunten and Graburn (2018) call "Indigenous tourism movements," Centro Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina leverage the rising interest in ayahuasca to engage with tourists in a way that recontextualizes ayahuasca in a broader shamanic practice; encourages tourists to confront Amazonian epistemologies; and supports projects to further economic, cultural, and ecological independence and sustainability for local Amazonian communities. In this dissertation, I refer to this strategy of engaging with the networks of global tourism as

shamanic pilgrimage, building on Fotiou's work on ayahuasca-focused shamanic tourism (Fotiou 2010, 2014). I use the terms *shamanic pilgrimage* and *shamanic pilgrims* because the way in which these individuals engage with Amazonian shamanism relies on extended periods of liminality during a ritualized journey away from human society in which pilgrims are confronted with Amazonian epistemologies and ontologies (Turner 1966; Turner and Turner 1978).

Amor's questions are a response to ayahuasca tourism that reflect a cynical perspective that has already concluded that Amazonian healing practices will be completely supplanted by touristic ayahuasca ceremonies. Centro Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina respond to the same situation, covering the same issues, with a different question: What would happen if healing and respect for traditional medicine and Amazonian cultural knowledge were the focus of touristic encounters rather than the psychedelic experience induced by ayahuasca?

Icaros

I was first attracted to studying Amazonian cultures when I encountered anthropological accounts of ayahuasca ceremonies in which healers combine music and the psychedelic brew to effect healing (Taussig 1987, 1993). I quickly found that these healing songs, often called *icaros*, have a complex history and, in many areas of the Amazon, are sung for healing without the use of ayahuasca. The origin of the word *icaro* most likely comes from the Kukama language, a language from the Tupí-Guaraní family that is spoken by the Kukama-Kukamiria people. In Kukama, *ikara* means "song."

Through an often-violent history of intense cultural mixing due to Spanish colonization and the efforts of Catholic missionaries, the word *ikara* was adopted into a blended version of the Quechua language, which was made the *lingua franca* of Indigenous people in the Spanish missions of the Amazon basin (Brabec de Mori 2011). In these spaces, a complex of shamanic practices involving ayahuasca developed. In this context, *ikara* became the Quechua word *ikaray*, "to sing an icaro," or "to blow smoke in order to heal" (Doherty Vona et al. 2007: 76). This reflects a nearly ubiquitous perspective among Amazonian Indigenous peoples that the breath signifies life-force. When wielded by a knowledgeable person the breath can be charged with healing power through the use of melody and tobacco smoke (Hill and Chaumeil 2011). Throughout this dissertation, I highlight the ever-present use of the healers' breath in rituals. The songs that structure the rituals, the use of tobacco smoke, healers "sucking" negative energies out of their patients, blowing perfumed liquids on them, and using their breath to charge medicinal beverages with positive energy are all instances of ritually empowered breath active in healing.

As I explore the processes of ayahuasca tourism and shamanic pilgrimage throughout this dissertation, icaros are an ever-present thread. These songs have been disseminated through digital recording technologies and have become a way for people outside of the Amazon to connect with shamanic practices and with their personal processes of healing through Amazonian shamanism. However, these same technologies also make icaros, which have historically been a form of semi-secret shamanic knowledge, readily available for reinterpretation and appropriation.

Ayahuasca

Ayahuasca refers to a vine (*Banisteriospsis caapi*, Fig. 1) native to the Amazon rainforest and to the medicinal, shamanic brews of which the vine is the principal component. In the Quechua language, ayahuasca means "vine of the dead" or "vine of the spirit" (*aya*, "a dead person" or "the spirit of a dead person," *waska,* "vine"). In the context of the ongoing globalization of ayahuasca, the word usually acts as a synecdoche referring to the decoction of *B. caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*, which is called *chacruna* (Fig. 2) in the area where I did my research (O'Shaughnessy 2017: 39). In this most referenced form, ß-carboline alkaloids from B. caapi act as temporary monoamine-oxidase inhibitors, potentiating the psychoactivity of N,N-dimethyltryptamine, found in P. viridis, which would otherwise be inactive (McKenna et al. 1998). The result of this combination is a brew that often produces psychedelic, visionary experiences and physical purgative effects (vomiting and, less often, diarrhea). Many other plants may be added to the brew, changing its effects. Each *curandero/a ayahuasquero/a* (a healer-shaman who uses ayahuasca) develops their own recipe, rendering potential permutations of the ayahuasca brew virtually limitless (Schultes 1986; McKenna at al. 1986). As such, it may be more appropriate to consider ayahuasca to be a class of shamanic medicines, among which the version that combines B. caapi with P. viridis is one subclass that, itself, varies widely.

For example, aside from psychedelic ayahuasca, Takiwasi uses a decoction of B. caapi alone in a therapeutic ritual they call *purgahuasca*. This version of the ayahuasca ritual was developed through a collaboration between Takiwasi and the Awajún people,

Figure 1. An ayahuasca vine at Centro Takiwasi. Photo taken by author June 20, 2022.

Figure 2. A chacruna plant at Llucanayacu. Photos taken by author April 1, 2022.

especially the curandero Walter Cuñachi (I provide more information about Takiwasi's relationship with the Awajún in chapter four). It emphasizes physical and psycho-emotional purging, as it lacks the components usually tied to visionary effects provided by P. viridis or, in other cases, tryptamine compounds from *Diplopterys cabrerana*, which is preferred by Awajún healers (Horák and Torres 2013; Politi et al. 2021). Despite the lack of tryptamine alkaloids in the purgahuasca brew, many participants report experiencing visions, raising the possibility that harmala alkaloids in the ayahuasca vine can elicit visionary experiences on their own (Politi et al. 2021; Horák et al. 2021).

At Takiwasi, to ensure consistency, the preparation of ayahuasca has been overseen by the same person for nearly two decades. While the specifics of the recipe are carefully guarded, it does include B. caapi and P. viridis (Horák 2013: 57). At the other center where I conducted research, Mushuk Pakarina, Maestro Orlando makes all of the medicines he uses himself. Making large batches of ayahuasca can be quite an undertaking, so he will sometimes enlist the help of community members from Llucanayacu (the community where the center is located). Ayahuasqueros of the Upper Amazon often recognize variations between different subtypes of the ayahuasca vine, differentiated by color (yellow, white, red, black) or elements of the cosmos (thunder, sky). These distinctions are usually based on the effects of the plant when ingested and not on the plant's physical appearance (Beyer 2009: 220). Through years of experience and collaboration with Indigenous and mestizo healers, Takiwasi has come to exclusively use "yellow" ayahuasca for purgahuasca and "black" ayahuasca for brews containing admixture plants such as P. viridis (Politi et al. 2021).

The Field Sites

I conducted the ethnographic research on which this dissertation is based in the high Amazon of the department of San Martín, Perú, in the area surrounding the city of Tarapoto. I also conducted digital ethnographic research, following the online activity of Centro Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina. I conducted further research online, following online discussions of ayahuasca and Amazonian plant-based shamanism through various online forums as a way of gauging prominent trends in the globalization of ayahuasca shamanism.

Tarapoto is the commercial center and most populous city in the department of San Martín with approximately 183,000 inhabitants, including the districts of Morales and La Banda de Shilcayo (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática 2022: 101). The largest Indigenous ethnic group in San Martín is the Quechua-Lamistas. This group emerged as an "aggregate of mixed forest serfs around the frontier town of Lamas. . . during the seventeenth century" (Scazzocchio 1979: 16). This group formed when Spanish missionaries and colonists under the leadership of Martin de la Riva Herrera, Corregidor (mayor) of Cajamarca and Chachapoyas, forced several Indigenous groups (Tabalosos, Lamas, Amasifuynes, Cascabosoas, Juamuncos, Payanazos, Muniches, and Suchiches) into a *reducción* (labor camp) at the newly founded city of Lamas (Scazzocchio 1979: 217-18). This occurred as the result of an armed campaign to "'pacify' the areas of the Río Mayo and lower Huallaga" (Ministerio de Desarrollo Agrario y Riego 2021: 108-09). Figure 3 shows a map of the Northern Peruvian Amazon with color-coded areas indicating the presence of Indigenous/Native communities.

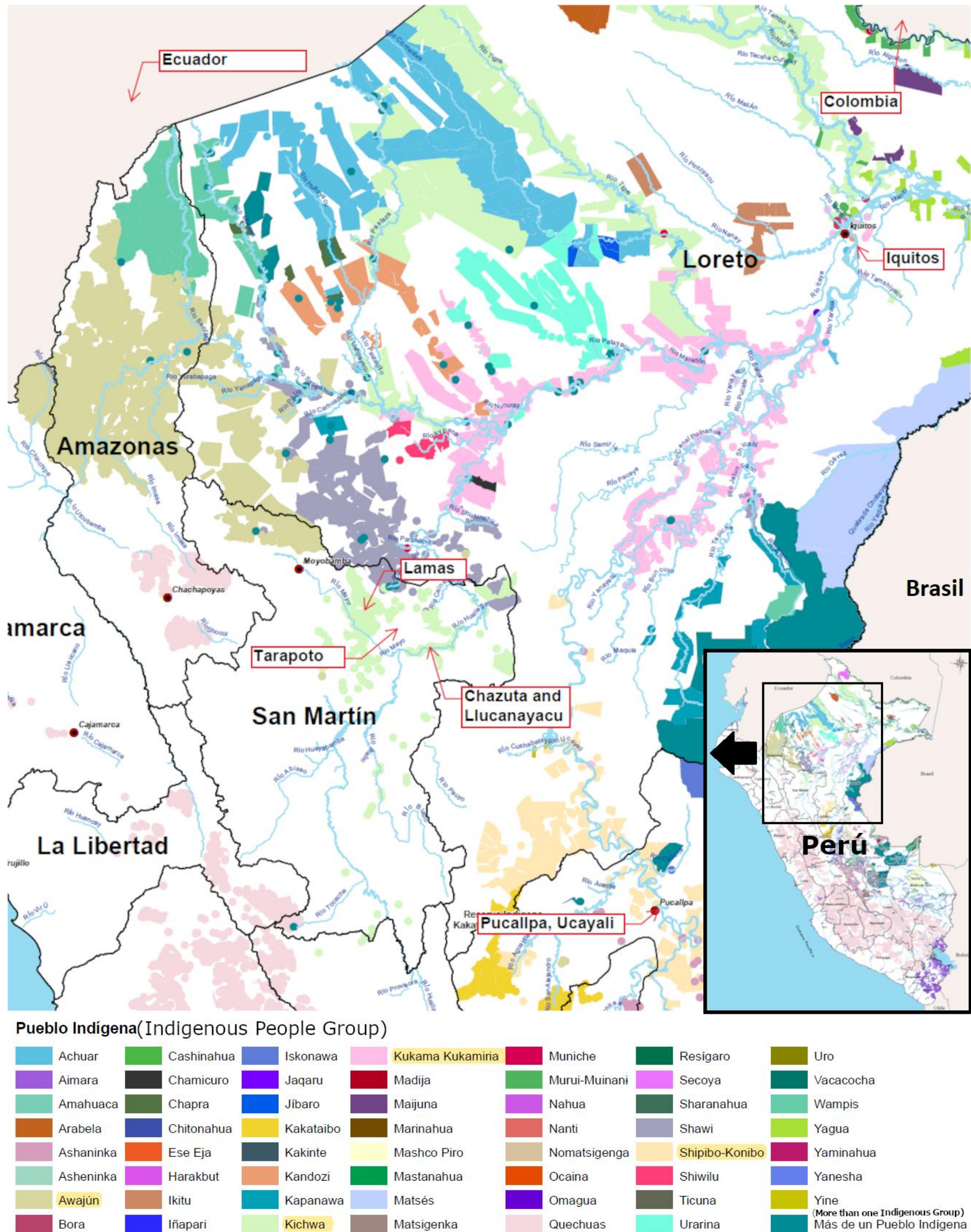

Figure 3. Map of the Northern Peruvian Amazon, used with permission from Peruvian Ministry of Culture. Kichwa (including Quechua-Lamista) communities are indicated by light green, Shipibo-Conibo by light yellow, Kukama Kukamiria by bold pink, Awajún by olive green. The full map is available at https://bdpi.cultura.gob.pe/mapa-interactivo.

The Spanish subsequently forced these Native groups to adopt the Quechua language as their main means of communication. This was largely done to enable the colonists to communicate with the linguistically diverse Indigenous Amazonians and to facilitate their education in the Catholic catechesis. The Quechua language later became a mark of ethnic distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Scazzocchio 1979: 245).

During the mid- to late-nineteenth century, Quechua-Lamista people became a minority population as increasing numbers of settlers arrived from other parts of Perú, Europe, and the United States. This was because, after Perú gained independence from Spain in 1821, Simón Bolivar decreed that individuals could settle and own unclaimed land, and most of the land around Lamas had not been recognized as belonging to the Indigenous population (Scazzocchio 1979: 17, 239).

Land availability became a serious issue for Quechua-Lamista people once again after the completion of the Marginal Highway (Highway 5) and an airport in the city of Tarapoto (approximately twenty kilometers from Lamas) led to an extreme rise in population and commercial activity between 1960 and 1978. During this period, settlers annexed large swaths of land previously occupied by Quechua-Lamista people (Scazzocchio 1979: 17-18, 28). While Quechua-Lamista communities exist throughout the San Martín region, mostly along trade routes such as the Marginal Highway and larger rivers, Lamas has remained the core of the Indigenous population. It has been continuously occupied by the largest concentration of Indigenous people in San Martín since its founding in 1656 (Scazzocchio 1979: 33-35).

The Peruvian Ministry of Culture counts the Quechua-Lamistas among the Kichwa peoples, or forest-dwelling “descendants of Indigenous or original communities that were ‘Quechua-ized’ during different periods, especially during colonization” (Ministerio de Cultura, “Kichwa,” my translation). This differentiates them from mountain-dwelling Quechua-speaking populations. It should be noted that when the people of one of these Kichwa communities refer to themselves, they often do so using the name of the locality with which the group identifies. For example, Kichwa/Quechua people who live along the Río Napo might refer to themselves as Naporuna (“people of Napo” in Quechua). In San Martín, most Quechua-speaking people I encountered self-identified as Quechua-Lamista (Quechua from Lamas), however the community in Lamas differentiate themselves from other Quechua-Lamistas, referring to themselves as Llakwash (Scazzocchio 1979: 48). Included in the Kichwa peoples are Quechua-speaking communities located in Northern Perú (in the department of Loreto) and into Ecuador along the Pastaza, Tigre, and Napo rivers. The most recent census data estimates that the total Kichwa population in Perú is approximately 82,000. Around 21,500 of those individuals live in the department of San Martín with around 3,000 living in the district of Lamas (Instituto Nacional de Estadítica e Informática 2017).

The Kukama (Cocama-Cocamilla/Kukama-Kukamiria) are another Indigenous group important to discussions in this dissertation. Their communities are mostly located in the department of Loreto along the rivers Marañon, Tigre, Urituyacu, and Huallaga between the cities of Tarapoto and Iquitos (Ministerio de Cultura, “Kukama Kukamiria”; Rivas 2011). The Peruvian Ministry of Culture’s census (Instituto Nacional de Estadítica

e Informática 2017) estimates the population of Kukama people at just over 37,000 individuals. Brabec de Mori (2011) proposed that the Kukama were major contributors to the ayahuasca shamanic complex that likely developed in the Spanish missions. One of their lasting contributions is the term *ikara* "song", which developed into the term *icaro*, discussed above and in chapter three.

The Shipibo-Konibo (Shipibo-Conibo, Shipibo) also hold a prominent place within ayahuasca tourism and the globalization of ayahuasca. Often assumed to be the heirs of one of the most ancient and "authentic" traditions of ayahuasca shamanism (Labate 2014), this group's main population centers are located in the Central and Southern Peruvian Amazon, along the Ucayali, Pisqui, and Madre de Dios rivers (Ministerio de Cultura, "Shipibo-Konibo"; Brabec de Mori 2015). The Peruvian Institute of Statistics' census (Instituto Nacional de Estadítica e Informática 2017) estimates the population of Shipibo-Konibo at just under 33,000 individuals. Contrary to what many assume, Brabec de Mori (2011) argues that the Shipibo-Conibo may not have encountered psychedelic ayahuasca until after European contact and perhaps as recently as the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century, during the Rubber Boom.

Also relevant to this dissertation, Awajún (Aguaruna) communities live in the far north of the department of San Martín, along the Río Mayo. Their settlements cross San Martín's borders into the west of the department of Loreto and the northern half of the department of Amazonas, along the Río Nieva and Río Chiriaco. As discussed in chapter four, Takiwasi has maintained relationships with Awajún healers and communities for many years. Along with certain Quechua-Lamista communities, the Awajún are probably

the Indigenous group with whom Takiwasi has been most closely involved throughout the center's more than thirty years of existence. The 2017 Peruvian National Census estimates the Awajún population to number approximately 38,000 individuals (Instituto Nacional de Estadítica e Informática 2017).

The Huni Kuin (Cashinahua, Kashinawá), are an Indigenous group who mostly occupy an area in Southeastern Perú that extends into Brazil in the Purús Communal Reserve. Much less numerous than the Indigenous groups mentioned so far, the estimated population of Huni Kuin in Perú totaled 1,831 individuals in 2017 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática 2017; Ministerio de Cultura, "Cashinahua"), and an estimated 11,729 individuals live in Brazil (Lagrou 2018). The most significant ethnographies of the Huni Kuin of recent decades are by Deshayes and Keifenheim (2003) and Lagrou (1998). In my research, I found that Huni Kuin healers are increasingly involved in ayahuasca tourism and featured in advertisement posts by ayahuasca retreats in online discussion forums. Though this point is anecdotal, I found that a number of members of a U.S. branch of the Santo Daime (a Christian church that originated in Brazil and uses ayahuasca as their main sacrament [Labate and MacRae 2010]) hold the Huni Kuin in high esteem as ayahuasca shamans. Some members of that church have spent time in a Huni Kuin community in Brazil. That is to say, despite their relatively small numbers, the Huni Kuin have begun to gain notoriety through the globalization of ayahuasca. Further research into connections between the Santo Daime, ayahuasca tourism, and the Huni Kuin could be important in the continued globalization of ayahuasca.

The Peruvian Ministry of Culture and the National Census, as of 2017, count fifty-five distinct Indigenous ethnic groups in Perú, fifty-one of whom live in the Amazon basin. The census counted 2,703 Native communities with a combined population of 418,364. It should be noted that these figures are taken as a combination of the number of people who self-identify as belonging to one of forty-four recognized "*pueblos indígenas u originarios*" (Indigenous or original communities) and the number of people who speak at least one of forty cataloged Indigenous languages in a majority of their lives (Instituto Nacional de Estadítica e Informática [Volume I] 2017: 17-18). These numbers do not distinguish between subgroups; for example, Quechua-Lamista, Naporuna, and other Quechua/Kichwa-speaking groups are all counted among the Kiwcha peoples. This is the case even though the communities may internally consider themselves to be distinct (e.g. Llakwash differentiate themselves from other Quechua-Lamistas who may differentiate themselves from the Naporuna, etc.). Though in some cases the data is incomplete, the Peruvian National Census and the Peruvian Ministry of Culture's website (https://bdpi.cultura.gob.pe/pueblos-indigenas) are valuable sources of information about the Native peoples of Perú. The inclusion of ethnographies in the bibliographies of these resources makes more detailed, qualitative, information readily available.

Centro Takiwasi

The Takiwasi Center for Drug Addiction Rehabilitation and Research on Traditional Medicines was founded in Tarapoto, Perú in 1992 as a collaborative project between Dr. Jacques Mabit (a medical doctor from France, whom I came to know as Dr.

Jacques), Dr. Rosa Giove Nakazawa (a medical doctor from Lima, whom I came to know as Dra. Rosa), and Maestro Aquilino Chujandama, among others. Maestro Aquilino, a healer from the Native community of Llucanayacu, Chazuta, initiated Mabit into the practice of curanderismo. Centro Takiwasi combines Western medicine and psychotherapy with traditional Amazonian medicine to treat patients struggling with substance addiction. The center treats local and international patients and holds a place as a bulwark against cocaine basic paste addiction, which has run rampant in the region since it became the center for the illicit production of coca in the 1970s (Giove 2002; Kernaghan 2009).

Amazonian elements of Takiwasi's model primarily come from the *vegetalismo* of local healers from the surrounding area, mostly Quechua-Lamistas and *mestizos* (people of mixed ethnic heritage). The center has also been influenced by collaborations with many master healers from a diversity of demographic backgrounds (Horák 2013: 39). Trying to pin down the many strands of influence that have mingled through the creation and continuation of Centro Takiwasi would be a project in itself, and, in a way, beside the point. As Labate points out, "it is difficult to distinguish between indigenous and mestizo ayahuasca practices, since their origins are frequently historically intermingled, and both remain in constant mutual dialog through the present" (Labate 2014: 182). It seems to have been a rule that continues until today that, to become curandero/as, apprentice healers of the Western Amazon travel to learn from healers in other communities. Scazzocchio wrote that, for Quechua-Lamista apprentice healers, after completing two years of supervised dieting with a maestro, training was completed

when the apprentice made a journey down-river to learn from healers in other Indigenous communities (Scazzocchio 1979: 180). The healer Maestro Orlando Chujandama recounted to me that both he and his grandfather (individually) traveled through Ecuador, Colombia, and Brazil to learn medicine. Even Luna, who used the term vegetalismo to refer to mestizo shamanism, wrote that all of his vegetalista interlocutors reported having connections to Indigenous groups (Luna 1986: 158). Since cultural mixing seems to be a feature of this shamanic practice, it makes sense that the curandero/as I met used the terms "curanderismo," "vegetalismo," and "*medicina tradicional*" (traditional medicine) interchangeably. At Takiwasi, I noted, however, that "traditional medicine" was used more often than the other two terms. This simultaneously highlights the importance of Amazonian traditions in the center's hybrid model (combining Western-style psychotherapy with curanderismo) and its therapeutic goals (Giove 2002)—i.e., at Takiwasi, "medicine" does not include some of the "shamanic" elements of vegetalismo such as divination and shamanic warfare (Horák 2013: 39, 42). By this I mean that the curandero/as at Takiwasi acknowledge the existence and importance of these phenomena, but their focus is on healing. As far as I was told, when they interact with shamanic warfare, it is only to defend themselves.

Takiwasi works with Amazonian healers as well as with doctors trained in Western medicine and psychology to employ a treatment program that combines aspects from both areas. The singing of songs is integral to many of these treatments, especially those coming from Amazonian traditions. The center's name comes from the Quechua language, meaning "song house" or "house of song" (*takiy*, "to sing"; *wasi*,

“house/dwelling structure”). The name attests to the role that music plays in the center’s work. While Takiwasi’s main purpose is to serve individuals struggling with addiction, my research with the center focused on their work hosting visitors (domestic and foreign) for *dietas* (ritualized isolation diets). By hosting paying visitors for dietas, Takiwasi, which is a non-profit NGO, supports a significant portion of their work in addiction rehabilitation and in pharmacological and cultural research related to traditional Amazonian medicine. For more on the history of Takiwasi and an overview of the center’s treatment protocol see Giove 2002; Horák 2013; O’Shaughnessy 2017; O’Shaughnessy et al. 2021; Rumlerová 2018 (in Czech); and Rush et al. 2021.

Mushuk Pakarina

Mushuk Pakarina, Ciencias Ancestrales, Centro de Dieta y Sanación is the name of the medicine center owned and operated by Maestro Orlando Chujandama (Quechua-Lamista, pictured in Fig. 4). The center’s name is a combination of Quechua and Spanish meaning “New Dawn/Sunrise, Ancestral Sciences, Center of Diets and Healing.” Mushuk Pakarina and Takiwasi’s beginnings are enmeshed in that Maestro Orlando’s grandfather, Maestro Aquilino Chujandama was the curandero who introduced both Dr. Jacques Mabit and Maestro Orlando to the practice of vegetalismo. Maestro Aquilino was also involved in the founding and early development of Centro Takiwasi. When he died in 1993, he personally requested that Mabit offer his grandson, Orlando, a job at Takiwasi. At that point, though Maestro Orlando had been initiated into vegetalismo by his grandfather at age eleven, he was not a practicing curandero. He accepted Mabit’s offer and took a job

working on the maintenance crew and taking care of plants at Takiwasi. Over the next five years, Maestro Orlando took every opportunity he could find to do dietas, and he was soon facilitating medicine ceremonies. After five years, he left Takiwasi and traveled through Europe, making a living by hosting ayahuasca ceremonies. After a few years of travel, he started a medicine center with some of his family members in Llucanayacu. That project only lasted a few years before he had a falling out with those family members. He left that enterprise in dire straits for having put all of his money into it. As a

Figure 4. Maestro Orlando Chujandama.
Photo taken by author at Mushuk Pakarina March 17, 2022.

final effort, he took a loan from a North American friend he had met during his travels. With that money, Maestro Orlando bought a piece of land in Llucanayacu from his cousin. The land used to belong to Maestro Orlando's grandfather, and, since 2009, it has been the location of Mushuk Pakarina. Though Maestro Orlando had gained some notoriety as a curandero during his travels, he became much more widely recognized after he was mentioned in a conversation on the Joe Rogan Experience podcast in 2011. I cover that aspect of Maestro Orlando's story in chapter four.

Terminology

Throughout this dissertation, I use terminology relevant to the different discursive contexts with which I engaged while carrying out my research. When I use the terms "shaman" and "shamanism" I am usually referring to the anthropological category and social role that goes by that name in academic literature. I also use this term when referencing or quoting from discussions in which Amazonian healers and their practices are referred to as shamans and shamanism, respectively (e.g., in online forums [covered in chapter four], certain touristic contexts, and in academic literature). The healers I work with refer to themselves as *curanderos* when they are men and as *curanderas* when they are women. The term *vegetalista* (a subset of curanderos who primarily use medicinal plants for healing) was used interchangeably with curandero and curandera. In some cases, it was offered as a clarification: a vegetalista is a curandero/a who relies on plants in healing. The related terms for their healing practices are *curanderismo* and *vegetalismo.* The curandero/as used these terms and the term *medicina tradicional*

(traditional medicine) almost interchangeably. This is an alternative that some anthropologists have recommended as an umbrella term for the practice (Labate 2014). Maestro Orlando also used the term *ciencias ancestrales* (ancestral sciences) to denote that curanderismo involves a method and a technique, and to denote that the body of knowledge that comprises curanderismo is not just an inherited tradition but is living and evolving as curandero/as continue to learn. Scholarship on curanderismo has tended toward the use of masculine-gendered words to refer to healers because, even while researchers recognize the presence of women healers (curanderas), most of them are men (Echazú Böschemeier and Carew 2018). At the medicine centers where I conducted my research, I did find that most healers were men. However, women healers were present in prominent roles. While it is common practice in Spanish to use the masculine form of words to refer to groups of people that include both men and women, I do not want to obscure the role that women play in these spaces. As such, when I refer to a healer or healers in a general sense, I use the masculine and feminine Spanish word-endings together: curandero/a.

The healers with whom I conducted my research in the department of San Martín, Perú, typically distinguish between "shamans" and "curandero/as." From their perspective, anyone who regularly referred to themselves as a shaman—especially an ayahuasca shaman—was doing so to market themselves to tourists, which rendered their credentials as a curandero/a questionable.

The -ismo suffix in curander-ismo and vegetal-ismo is roughly equivalent to "-ism" in English. Much like Maestro Orlando's favored term, ciencias ancestrales,

curander*ismo* delineates that there is an epistemology that corresponds to the practice of traditional medicine. In the case of the curandero/a vegetalistas with whom I work, that epistemology is roughly congruent with aspects of what anthropologists have theorized as Amerindian perspectivism and (new) animism (Brabec de Mori and Seeger 2013; Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2004). Fundamental to this epistemology is an understanding that plants, animals, and certain geographic features are entities possessed of awareness, volition, and their own type of consciousness. Perspectivism and animism overlap in that they offer possibilities for reconsidering the ontology of non-human beings. However, they diverge in notable ways. The foremost of these differences is that perspectivism mostly deals with human-animal relationality (paying little attention to other entities) and places all animals, including humans, in a hierarchy based on hunting practices. From each animal's own *perspective*, they are human; any animal that hunts them appears to be a predator (e.g., jaguar, anaconda); and any animal that they hunt appears to be prey (e.g., deer, fish, monkey, peccary) (Viveiros de Castro 1998). As such, perspectivism encounters difficulties incorporating assertions by Amazonian peoples that plants, rivers, and mountains are also "persons" or what Kohn (2013) refers to as "selves." Since the contributions of Descola (1992, 2011) researchers have largely rethought previous conceptions of animism in which mountains, bodies of water, plants, etc., were thought to be inhabited by spirits. In this framework of so-called "new animism" those things are, themselves, considered to be living entities with which humans can potentially relate. The view that I encountered among curandero/as combined significant aspects from both of these strands of scholarship. The "perspectivist-animism" of the curandero/as that I

worked with recognizes plants, animals, mountains, rivers, and certain objects as "selves." These selves are not necessarily conceived of in a competitive, predator-prey relationship, however, nor do they think of themselves as human. They are ambivalent figures, shape shifters, capable of both harming and cooperating with humans. Kohn's intervention (2013) bridges some of these gaps by proposing an analysis of perspectivism via evolutionary theory and Peircian semiotics. In his analysis, the predator-prey hierarchy is rethought as networks of selves that interpret each other. Certain types of selves have the power to interpret or transform others into non-selves. In other cases, selves can recognize each other, even across species lines. This leaves room for cooperation between different types of selves. Curanderismo amounts to a method for building cooperative relationships with the various selves of the forest and gaining their help in order to heal.

Estar con plantas (being with plants) is a phrase curandero/as frequently use to refer to an ongoing process of ingesting plants (*tomar plantas*, "to take plants") in order to learn from them and be healed by them. This phrase reflects the perspective of curandero/as that spending time in contact with plants—absorbing their "energy" and building a relationship with them—is the fundamental mechanism of healing and learning in vegetalismo. When a person is "with" a plant during a *dieta* (ritual isolation diet), they are said to be *dietando* (dieting) that plant. This could be confusing from the perspective of those for whom English is their first language, as "dieting" could be understood to mean "abstaining from," while, in this case, it means the opposite. A person who is dieting a plant is spending an extended amount of time abstaining from all forms of

sustenance except for bland, boiled foods and water while regularly ingesting concentrated, liquid preparations of the plant that they are dieting in order to build a relationship with it.

Energía and *espíritu(s)* (energy and spirit[s]) are words that curandero/as often use to refer to subtle aspects of living beings. Energy and the *cuerpo energético* (energetic body), as conceptualized by curandero/as, are discussed in Horák (2013: 82-83) and O'Shaughnessy (2017: 67-72). Both of these researchers conducted extended studies of Takiwasi's rehabilitation program. My research confirms their descriptions of these concepts, which makes sense since we spoke to some of the same curandero/as. There is an aspect of all living things (humans, plants, animals, rivers, mountains, etc.) that permeates the physical body and goes beyond it in physical space; in certain cases, it can be separated from the physical body and pass into or out of it; this is energy. Maestro Orlando described energy as a manifestation of will and *fuerza* (force/strength/capacity). Under normal circumstances it is invisible to non-curandero/as, but it can sometimes be felt. There are negative energies and positive energies. Examples of negative energy are stress, anxiety, and energetic injuries (inflicted by spirits or curandero/as) which can manifest as illness in the injured person. The most common instances of positive energy that were explicitly discussed by curandero/as were healing energy and protective energy. For instance, plants heal by conferring energy to those who are "with" them, and a curandero/a may compound the energy of plants with their own energy that they have accumulated through dieting.

The energetic body, which every living being possesses, "constitutes a certain kind of cover of the physical body, is a certain type of interphase between a visible and invisible world. . . . [It is a] coat that protects us daily against numerous energies" Horák 2013: 82). Ingesting certain plants and undertaking a dieta are events that can render the energetic body permeable. This facilitates curandero/as' and plants' ability to heal through the removal of negative energy and addition of positive energy. The primary means by which curandero/as add positive energy to their patients' bodies is through the application of their breath, by *soplando* (blowing—either breath empowered by the curandero/a's own energy and/or empowered by tobacco smoke, perfume, or song, all of which are externalized representation of plants and their energy). The primary means by which curandero/as remove negative energies are through plant baths (see chapter three), inducing vomiting (see the section on purge rituals in chapter three), or through the act of *chupando* (sucking). Chupando typically does not involve physical contact between the healer and their patient. It involves the curandero/a filling their mouth with tobacco smoke, perfume, or (at Takiwasi, where the ritualized use of Christian elements is common) holy water, placing their mouth above the affected spot on the patient's body and loudly sucking to remove negative energy. The energy thus removed is captured in the smoke or liquid in the curandero/a's mouth, protecting the healer from its negative influence.

Curandero/as also use certain tools that can help break up what they refer to as "energetic blockages" as part of the process of removing negative energies. The two tools that I observed curandero/as using for this purpose are the *shakapa* (a percussion

instrument made from a bundle of the dried leaves of a plant referred to by the same name) and the maraca. According to the curandero/as, the sounds created by shaking these instruments during a curing session represent the cleansing forces of wind and moving water, respectively.

Spirit is a word that curandero/as used to refer both to non-corporeal beings that inhabit the forest and to the aspect of plants with which humans can interact during dietas and altered states of consciousness, such as those induced by ayahuasca. Much like Harrison explained through her historiographic analysis of Quechua words such as *supay* and *waka* (and, working in an Amazonian context I would add *aya)* which can all be glossed as "spirit" (Harrison 1989: 44-45). Historically, these words that have different meanings in Indigenous cultural contexts were collapsed into the Roman Catholic worldview in which there are clearly delineated types of good spirits (angels, saints, God) and evil spirits (Satan and demons). Since Indigenous people were not Christians before contact with Europeans, early Spanish missionaries assumed that all Indigenous terms for "spirit" must be referring to demons (Harrison 1989: 47). In my experience, curandero/as are reversing this process. They use the Spanish word *espíritu,* "spirit," to refer to many different plant spirits, forest spirits, and water spirits all of which are conceived of as ambivalent entities who can be helpful partners or dangerous enemies; they can also be completely indifferent toward humans.

Maloca is the term typically used to refer to the buildings in which medicine rituals such as ayahuasca and purga ceremonies are held. Historically, malocas were large communal houses for Indigenous communities, especially common in the Northwestern

Amazon. After contact with Europeans and due to cultural mixing between Native groups, families in some of these communities began to live in their own dwellings, but malocas retained some of their use as a space for social relations and community meetings (Gutierrez 2020). As communal ayahuasca ceremonies became increasingly common, they were held in malocas, leading to this type of structure being related with vegetalismo ceremonies (Labate 2014). Below are photos of the malocas at Mushuk Pakarina and Takiwasi (Figs. 5 and 6).

Figure 5. Maloca at Mushuk Pakarina. Photo by author March 8, 2022.

Figure 6. Maloca at Takiwasi. Photo by author June 20, 2022.

Methods

I undertook this project assuming the position of tourist-researcher with all of the complexities and potential paradoxes that that role entails. Researchers of tourism have pointed out that it is important to consider that tourism is, in many ways, a vestige of colonization (Bunten and Graburn 2018). Thus, those who engage in research through tourism have a responsibility to reflect on the potential effects of their research activities and on how they engage with the communities in which they conduct their research (Slocum, Kline, and Holden 2015). In the first chapter of this dissertation, I develop the concept of shamanic pilgrimage as a particular way of engaging in tourism. I use this term to highlight that, while still being a type of shamanic tourism (Fotiou 2010, 2014) its

focus is the extended liminal state engendered by ritual isolation diets that encourage tourist-pilgrims into sustained confrontation with Amazonian animist perspectives. As I was involved as a participant-observer in the same spaces and practices as the shamanic pilgrims with whom I carried out this research, I was, for all intents and purposes, a pilgrim-researcher.

In this dissertation, I seek to make the experiences and perspectives of my interlocutors, both healers and pilgrims, the focus and basis of my discussions. However, through the processes of conducting field research, analyzing the data I collected, and writing this document in consultation with my academic mentors and healer-interlocutors, I realized that a certain amount of exposition regarding my own experiences would be necessary. It is my hope and my intent that the moments of auto-ethnographic writing in this dissertation serve to support and clarify the accounts given by my interlocutors. A recurrent theme throughout the discussions herein is the insistence by curandero/as that personal experience is the best, if not only, way of understanding vegetalismo. As ethnography is a type of meta-discourse in which I, the researcher, am interpreting and re-presenting the accounts of my interlocutors for any who might read this document (Kisliuk 2008: 202), investigating my own experiences in dialog with those of my interlocutors stands to provide some benefits. This is especially apparent for my project, as the types of experiences had during vegetalismo rituals are rare in daily life (even for the Amazonians I met; hence, the existence of the rituals), intimate, and largely internal to each individual involved. This is why curandero/as emphasize personal experience over conversational learning. One is much more likely to understand and be

able to engage with the concepts posed by vegetalistas if they have first-hand experience with the phenomena being described. As a pilgrim-researcher, I have participated in the various rituals discussed here. Thus, I can draw on my own first-hand experiences—including those that stretch the limits of linguistic description—as I attempt to explicate the embodied processes of healing and learning through encounters with plants that my interlocutors experienced. By investigating my own experiences, I am able to provide some of the context of direct contact that would otherwise be lost.

As Hagedorn's research (2001) on the music involved in Cuban Santería shows, the researcher recounting their own experiences highlights how their understandings have deepened and changed as their research progressed. Especially in cases when learning requires first-hand experience of the subject matter, auto-ethnography can "provide a grounded, situated context in which to consider [the researcher's] work" (Hagedorn 2001: 12). It is my intent that the auto-ethnographic segments of my dissertation, grounded in my own experiences of building relationships to curandero/as, plants, pilgrims, and the various other humans and non-humans I encountered as a pilgrim-researcher, provide a helpful dialog in which to ground the rest of the project.

The majority of this project is based in participant-observation ethnography at Centro Takiwasi, Mushuk Pakarina, and in the online forums in which these centers are active. As I discuss in chapter four, the online portion of this ethnographic research was mostly focused on Takiwasi and Maestro Orlando's Facebook pages and on Takiwasi's website, which are the main portals through which the centers interact with pilgrims and disseminate information about curanderismo. While in Perú, I employed a combination of

"deep hanging out" (Geertz 1998), taking detailed field notes, semi-structured interviews, and participant-observation in isolation diets and various medicine rituals, which I describe in chapter three. During isolation diets, I was allowed to have a notebook and audio recorder with me, so taking field notes was straightforward during those periods. Taking notes during other medicine rituals was not possible, but I found taking detailed notes as soon as possible after completing each ritual (either the same day or the next day) to be the best way to process and record my observations. When possible, I supplemented these note-taking sessions by listening to my audio recordings of the rituals.

I made audio recordings of all interviews that I conducted. I then personally transcribed and coded the interviews. I made audio recordings of the rituals that involved the singing of icaros when curandero/as deemed it appropriate. Audio recordings were made using a pair of Shure KSM-137 microphones (in some cases a single microphone) running into a Zoom H-6 portable audio recorder.

I took photographs of relevant ritual spaces and plants at both medicine centers using a Canon T7i DSLR camera. Opportunities for taking photographs and videos were limited because most pilgrims preferred to remain anonymous, and part of my agreement with Takiwasi was to not take photographs in which any rehabilitation patients or visitors to the center might be identifiable. This is largely to do with the legal status of ayahuasca in many countries. Furthermore, observation without participation was not allowed for most rituals. As such, audio recordings were possible, but taking video recordings or

photographs of rituals was not. For these reasons, visual documentation of this project was limited.

In order to respect cultural values surrounding icaros as semi-secret forms of knowledge, I do not include transcriptions of the melodies of any of the songs I was allowed to record. I do include analysis of excerpts of lyrics. These excerpts are intentionally brief but are detailed enough and supported by enough ethnographic data such that they are sufficient for analysis and to sustain the arguments I make about how they function in rituals. I have permission from curandero/as to discuss their icaros in this manner. I have likely been overly cautious in limiting this information. It is my plan to continue this line of research after completing my dissertation. As I continue to collaborate with curandero/as, I will be able to determine more clearly how much information about the songs is appropriate to include in publications.

I conducted eighteen interviews with shamanic pilgrims which lasted from forty-five minutes to two hours and thirty minutes depending on how much information they were willing or able to share with me. I asked questions about their previous experience with psychedelics and vegetalismo and about their experiences during the various rituals that make up the dieta process including what role, if any, they felt the icaros played in shaping their experiences across the different rituals. I conducted twelve interviews with six curandero/as. These interviews lasted approximately one hour to one and a half hours each. Questions that I asked curandero/as included how they were initiated into curanderismo, what their experience of learning icaros and healing with them was like, how they conceptualized what icaros are, how they understood the processes of dieting,

healing, and learning from plants, and what their opinions of facilitating medicine ceremonies for pilgrims were.

In undertaking this project, I was aware that, as a white-skinned academic involved in tourism research in the Peruvian Amazon, it was likely that I would be perceived by some as potentially extending the processes of colonization through my presence and activities. As such, my strategy throughout this project was to enter into research relationships respectfully and deferentially and to seek out collaboration whenever possible. Whether it was good fortune or the result of this approach, I found myself conducting research at two medicine centers who were gracious enough to partner with me in the collaborative production of knowledge that is presented in this document.

Collaboration, I found, is at the foundation of how Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina conceptualize their participation in shamanic tourism, and it has been fundamental to my relationship with both centers. Maestro Orlando explained to me that he operates his center based on the concept of *yanapay* (collaborative, reciprocal help). The pilgrims that he hosts "collaborate with [him] economically"[1] and he collaborates with them and with the plants of the forest to facilitate healing. Further, though he does not advertise this fact to most people that he hosts, he extends the economic collaboration to his community, Llucanayacu.

Similarly, Takiwasi uses earnings from hosting pilgrims to support their work as a rehabilitation center, to pay the salaries of employees from the local community (some of

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[1] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. September 18, 2019.

whom are Indigenous healers), and to fund various projects supporting cultural and ecological sustainability in collaboration with Indigenous communities (for example, see the discussion of the Nuwa project in chapter four). These types of collaborative strategies are important to how I conceive of shamanic pilgrimage—on the part of the hosts—as distinct from more extractive practices in shamanic tourism.

My hope is that the effects of my research in and beyond academic circles will be to encourage creative, conscientious approaches to theorizing and practicing shamanic tourism, especially considering the growing interest in ayahuasca and the tendency thus far for ayahuasca-focused tourism to reinscribe the legacies of colonization. While the shamanic pilgrimage strategy is not above criticism, it raises the possibility for further development of models that mediate tourism's most destructive effects and support the autonomy of host communities, including Indigenous peoples. Similarly, though my research has involved collaboration at nearly every step, I am the one left in charge of writing this document. Though the concepts that I present here largely emerged through my interactions with curandero/as, pilgrims, and plants, the analyses and conclusions that are the result are undoubtedly shaped by the limitations of the networks of signs available to me at the symbolic level. There is surely much going on of which I am as of yet unaware or incapable of communicating.

Overview of the Dissertation

In chapter one, I provide an overview of ayahuasca-focused shamanic tourism, as practiced by the majority of tourists and centers, based on the available anthropological

literature, and I present the contrasting case of shamanic pilgrimage through an analysis of ethnographic data from my research with Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina. Brabec de Mori (2014) proposes that ayahuasca tourism began during the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s and was especially influenced by the publication of Burroughs and Ginsberg's *The Yage Letters* ([1963] 2006). While group ayahuasca ceremonies for the purpose of healing potentially existed in the Northern Amazon before colonization or, more likely, were developed during the intense cultural mixing of the early colonial period (Brabec de Mori 2011) some Indigenous healers seem to have adopted group ceremonies during the 1970s in order to appeal to tourists (Brabec de Mori 2014). Before the 1970s, Shipibo-Conibo healers used ayahuasca in a one-on-one basis with their patients, and only the healer drank ayahuasca as a tool for diagnosing their patient's illness (Brabec de Mori 2014).

In contrast with ayahuasca-focused tourism, shamanic pilgrimage places ayahuasca in a supporting role relative to other medicinal plants taken during dietas. At these centers, taking ayahuasca without being involved in another process of taking medicinal plants is not an option. Therefore, pilgrims must "be with plants," they must enter into a process of ritually building a relationship with plants before ayahuasca can be involved. This recontextualization of ayahuasca within the broader practice of curanderismo is a significant difference between ayahuasca tourism and shamanic pilgrimage.

In chapter two, I use Peircian semiotics to analyze how the ritualized actions of the dieta signify a distancing from the human, social sphere of existence and provide a

means to respectfully approaching the non-human selves—especially plants—that make up the forest. This is the first ethnography of which I am aware to include an in-depth analysis of vegetalista isolation diets. This serves to elucidate why curandero/as consider the dieta to be the fundamental technique and method of vegetalismo. It also shows how Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina's strategy for engaging with pilgrims through dietas reflects Amazonian cultural values, recontextualizes the use of ayahuasca, and encourages pilgrims to personally engage with animist epistemologies and ontologies.

Chapter three is partly a continuation of the semiotic analysis of dietas. This chapter focuses on icaros, which curandero/as learn from plant spirits through the process of being with plants, most often in dietas. Icaros may be learned outside of dietas, but this almost always involves an ongoing process of building relationships with plants. In semiotic terms, singing an icaro is a recreation of the curandero/a's experience of coming to closely relate with a plant. The melody and lyrics are a system of metaphorical symbols whose meaning is only known to the curandero/a and the plant who taught them the song. The mere existence of the song then is an index of the curandero/a's experience as they must have established a relationship with a plant in order to be granted a song and the knowledge and power that comes with it. Singing an icaro is also a sonic means of reconstituting the plant itself, manifesting it in the ritual space. Icaros are, then, iconic representations of plants, and they are a means of bringing the plants into a ritual space to interact with them directly through song. I provide an analysis of the use of icaros in five rituals that curandero/as at Takiwasi facilitate: plant baths, perfume rituals, purges, the taking of "containment plants," and ayahuasca ceremonies. Plant baths, purges, and

ayahuasca ceremonies are typically part of the dieta ritual cycle at Takiwasi. Maestro Orlando also facilitates plant baths and purges, but he does not typically include these in the dieta cycle. At Mushuk Pakarina, dietas include the ingestion of the plant(s) being dieted. Ayahuasca ceremonies are used to support this process, and ayahuasca is often included as a dieta plant in shorter dietas.

In chapter three, I also discuss the contested history of icaros and ayahuasca shamanism. Brabec de Mori (2011), Gow (1994), and Shepard (2014) are among a group of researchers who propose that notable commonalities between shamanic practices involving ayahuasca throughout the Western Amazon are due to dissemination of the shamanic complex that developed in the *reducciones* (labor camps) overseen by early Spanish missionaries and colonists. As discussed above, Lamas was founded as part of this same process. Brabec de Mori argues that ayahuasca played a much smaller role in shamanism practiced by Indigenous groups farther south, in the area around Pucallpa until tourists began searching it out in the 1960s and 1970s (Brabec de Mori 2014). In contrast it seems that ayahuasca has been a staple of Quechua-Lamista shamanism since well before the tourism industry became active in Tarapoto. Ayahuasca has played a role in the maintenance of Quechua-Lamista ethnic identity for quite some time (Scazzocchio 1979: 182), possibly since the ethnic group began to form in the seventeenth century.

Chapter four is concerned with the online portion of my ethnographic project. In this chapter I provide an overview of the most active online forum for the discussion of ayahuasca shamanism, facebook.com/groups/ayahuascaworld. This case study represents a snapshot of current developments in the globalization of ayahuasca. I found that

discussion of ayahuasca in the forum is often carried out within an assumed framework of eclectic spirituality that parallels what is often referred to as "New Age" spirituality. As such, it decontextualizes and reinterprets elements of vegetalismo (primarily ayahuasca ceremonies and the dieta) while exotifying certain Indigenous groups, especially the Shipibo-Conibo. In part, this is due to advertisement posts for ayahuasca retreats published by retreat centers. Commonalities between the imagery and language used by retreat centers and non-Amazonians looking for information about ayahuasca shamanism suggest that online forums can enable feedback loops that reify decontextualized, reinterpreted forms of ayahuasca shamanism. However, there is a significant minority of group participants who strive to resist these decontextualizing and exotifying trends. These individuals highlight the importance of Amazonian cultural perspectives and self-education on the part of non-Amazonians who want to participate in ayahuasca ceremonies.

Icaros are also caught up in the globalization of ayahuasca shamanism. I found similar processes of reinterpretation through eclectic spirituality to be involved in the online dissemination of one of Takiwasi's most well-known icaros, "Ábrete Corazón." In this section I discuss some of the complexities that digital recording technologies present in relation to icaros, and I discuss curandero/a's perspectives on the matter.

In contrast to the activity in the ayahuasca Facebook group, Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina use their online presence as part of what I have referred to as the pilgrimage strategy. Takiwasi's facebook pages are used primarily to share information about Amazonian curanderismo and Amazonian cultures, to stay in contact with people who

already have a relationship with the center, and to raise awareness about the center's ongoing projects with local communities. Maestro Orlando's online presence is, for the most part, very straightforward. He uses his personal Facebook page to stay in touch with those who have visited the center and to post updates about visitors beginning and completing dietas. His Facebook page is also a primary way that people interested in visiting Mushuk Pakarina for a dieta can contact him. On the other hand, Maestro Orlando's online presence is complicated by the fact that he has facilitated ayahuasca ceremonies for some celebrities and individuals with substantial online followings. These individuals have gone on to discuss Maestro Orlando on popular podcasts, such as the Joe Rogan Experience. Maestro Orlando considers the increased attention he has gotten because of this to be a welcome source of much needed income and a responsibility that he takes very seriously. He is aware that most visitors are seeking experiences with ayahuasca, but he requires them to participate in dietas in hopes that this will encourage long-term, personal investment in the practice of curanderismo and in the community of Llucanayacu that hosts these visitors.

As Maestro Orlando explained to me in many ways throughout the years of our collaboration during this project, vegetalismo is fundamentally about facilitating a meeting and a recognition of similarity between ontologically different beings. Shamanic pilgrimage, icaros, dietas, and the various other rituals discussed in this dissertation serve to engender change—be it an improvement in health or an epistemological shift—through direct encounters between humans and the non-human selves of the forest.

Chapter One
Shamanic Pilgrimage:
A Strategy of Resistance within the Globalization of Ayahuasca

Introduction

When I first traveled to the Upper Amazon to the city of Tarapoto, my plan was to conduct research at ayahuasca centers that catered to tourists. There I would study the role that songs played in shaping the cross-cultural spaces in and around ayahuasca ceremonies. I formed this plan based on the available academic and popular literature on the topic of ayahuasca-focused shamanic tourism. What I expected to find—with its own idiosyncrasies—was a cultural space organized around the ambivalent and ambiguous interests of "locals"; "tourists"; and the multinational, political and economic interests of governments, banks, and NGOs (Lafant 1995: 33). Informed by the work of Picard (1996) and Bruner (2005) I expected that I might find a form of emergent "touristic culture." That is, a collection of practices that could be considered "authentic" to, or representational of, the cross-cultural encounters that make up cultural tourism. This is a different way of understanding what MacCannell had previously theorized as performances of "staged authenticity" put on for tourists—in part to protect some practices from commodification and in part because the daily lives of locals, modernizing in their own way, might not be as appealing to tourists as the object of their imagination: exotic natives, paradoxically contemporary yet representing pre-modern humanity and a heightened connection to nature (MacCannell 1973, 1999). This is more or less the understanding that one would likely come away with after reviewing the available literature on cultural tourism.

Researchers focusing on ayahuasca tourism more specifically have pointed out the mixed effect that it has had on the lives of local Amazonians, on the practice of Amazonian curandero/as, and on the forest ecology. Giove (2001) Dobkin de Rios and Rumrrill (2008) and Fotiou (2016), among others, have pointed out that ayahuasca tourism has led to the emergence of a "shamanism" that is shaped by the processes of commodification and what Urry called the "tourist gaze" (2002). Astute locals facilitate ayahuasca ceremonies for (relatively) wealthy foreigners in search of a mystical, psychedelic experience with "grandmother ayahuasca." "Shamans" present themselves as the unacculturated natives of tourists' imaginations, and, especially for shamans emerging from the younger generations, the years of dieting and learning that have historically been part of becoming a curandero/a are eschewed for the monetary gain that comes with being an "ayahuasca shaman" (Giove 2001, 2013). This has an overall deleterious effect on Indigenous and mestizo curanderismo in which curandero/as are often morally ambiguous characters who hold knowledge about plant-medicines, the spiritual sphere of existence, and ways of relating to the forest that can be used to heal and to harm. In ayahuasca tourism, the curandero/a is replaced by the "ayahuasca shaman," a benevolent, Native healer-therapist who might have minimal, if any, experience with medicinal plants other than ayahuasca (Labate 2014). Among the processes of globalization and modernization, ayahuasca tourism, then, directly threatens to supplant the social institution of curanderismo (Fotiou 2016). At the very least this presents a situation in which cultural and economic forces incentivize a shift from the social role of the curandero/a to that of the ayahuasca shaman.

What I found was that, in the San Martín region of the Upper Peruvian Amazon, Centro Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina are two locations that are practicing curanderismo in a different way. That is to say, they are acutely aware of the effects of ayahuasca tourism and have sought to negotiate a way of accessing the benefits of working with foreigners while mediating against the more culturally corrosive effects of ayahuasca tourism. In this chapter I present an overview of the immediately relevant literature on ayahuasca tourism as a branch of cultural tourism, and I juxtapose that against a related, yet intentionally differentiated, parallel development (represented by Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina) that I am referring to as *shamanic pilgrimage*, which is better understood with the additional analytical tools provided by pilgrimage studies, indigenous tourism studies (Bunten and Graburn 2018) and cooperative tourism studies (Carson and Pennings 2017).

As the ethnographic study of shamanic tourism specifically involving ayahuasca and vegetalismo is fairly recent, some of the most relevant literature on it is to be found in doctoral dissertations and a few articles written by young scholars. For this reason, I draw heavily from the dissertations of Evgenia Fotiou (2010) and Nolan Warden (2015). Fotiou has continued to researched the topic of shamanic tourism in the Western Amazon since completing her dissertation (Fotiou 2014, 2016). Warden's dissertation, focusing on Wixárika (Huichol) communities in Mexico, contributes valuable argumentation about the interplay of political-economy and identity. He proposes that the commodification of culture and identity can result in the fetishization of the items and practices commodified. Through this process, these elements of culture, once removed from their social context,

lose their specificity of meaning. This leaves them open to reinterpretation, appropriation, and use in new contexts. Decontextualized items that ostensibly come from Indigenous communities, once fetishized thus, come to represent a generalized, exotified, Indigenous-ness, retaining only a generalized connection to the significance they would have as objects with socially defined use-value in their context of origin. Through the process of commodification, elements of culture are reinterpreted by those who make and sell them as well as by those who buy them, and their value is affected by their connection to Indigenous-ness rather than being primarily defined by their usefulness (Warden 2015: 39-40).

Warden's conception of identity is a three-part model based, in part, on Turino's approach (2008) to parsing different modes of social performance for creating and interacting with music. Both of these models include participatory and presentational modes, but Warden replaces Turino's high-fidelity recordings and studio audio art with the commodity mode of identity (Warden 2015: 32-34). Warden found that the participatory, presentational, and commodity modes of identity are interwoven with each other. As Wixárika musicians and artisans make music, yarn paintings, and beadwork items for sale, those items are imbued with an "essence" or "aura" of "Huicholness" as part of the process of commodification. Indigenous identity is inscribed into these items of culture through the use of overt signs of "Huicholness" in their creation, such as the use of bright colors, woven and sewn patterns in textile and clothing items, and Wixárika language and reference to important cultural practices in music. Warden argues that through this process of commodification it is the fetishized Huicholness that is being

bought and sold, with less importance placed on the "specific medium or object-form of the commodity" (Warden 2015: 40). Thus, it is possible for one to engage with "authentic Huicholness" by buying an item or listening to music that is presented as having been created by "Huichol" people without ever needing to build social relationships with Wixárika people (Warden 2015: 39). Once these items are sold at a sufficient difference from the people who make them, "Huicholness can be disconnected from the Wixaritari themselves and become self-referential" (Warden 2015: 435).

Though Warden only hints at the basis of his model in Peircian semiotics, he is clear about its reliance on the work of Turino, especially his 2008 book *Music as Social Life* (Warden 2015: 32-34). As such, pointing out some of the basic semiotic mechanics underlying Warden's model is helpful in clarifying the differences between shamanic tourism and shamanic pilgrimage and how the modes of identity/culture are at work in them. This is appropriate also because Turino's model is based in Peircian semiotics, and he is the primary proponent of semiotic analysis as a method for ethnomusicological research. Through historical processes, a cultural group develops a practice of making objects that have specific characteristics. To cultural insiders and outsiders, these elements may have different meanings at the symbolic/linguistic level of analysis. However, any such meaning is grounded at the iconic level (the meaning that an object has due to its own characteristics) and at the indexical level (meaning accrued through co-occurrence with other objects and experiences) by its social and temporal connection to the people who made it. In this way, colors and patterns come to have certain meanings, including representing aspects of the cultural identity of the people who made

them. When such items are created and used in the same cultural sphere, they play a role in the processes of the creation and negotiation of identity in that sphere. Thus, these items are active in the participatory mode. When these same items, via the same sign objects (colors, patterns, song lyrics in an Indigenous language, etc.) move outside of their initial cultural context, they are active in the presentational mode, which implies a change in the meaning-making frame and in how the items are used. In the case that Warden discusses, these sign objects represent something about Indigenousness to cultural outsiders. Especially as artifacts and practices move into the commodity mode, where even minimal interaction with the people who make the things in question is not necessary for purchasing them, sign objects can be so far removed from the social context of their creation that they might come to represent only "Huicholness" or even simply "Indigenousness" with little to no meaningful connection to actual people. There is an implication of an indexical relationship between the item and the Indigenous people who made it and for whom it holds more specific social meanings; this is the item's aura[2] of Indigenousness, and it is this aura more than the item's potential use value that is bought and sold in the commodity mode of identity (Warden 2015: 40, 433).

[2] Here, I am using the word "aura" as Warden adapted it from the work of Benjamin (1968). Though Warden does not cite Benjamin, he uses the term "aura" in a Benjaminian way, describing the aura of originals being destroyed as they are copied. For Benjamin, an aura is that element that an art object contains due to "its uniqueness" (Benjamin 1968: 223). He argued that once technology advanced to the point at which unique object could be copied to a level of high exactness, the aura of the copies was destroyed as the process of reproduction "detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" (Benjamin 1968: 221). Warden pointed out that in the case of objects that are marketed and sold specifically because they were made by indigenous people, the objects' auras are maintained even as the object is removed from its original social context (Warden 2015:40). Further, he argues that, in a sense, it is the aura itself (Huicholness, Shipibo-ness, Indigenousness) that is being commodified (Warden 2015: 443).

When taken together, Bruner's (2005) and Warden's (2015) analyses show that cultural tourism includes and relies on the presentational and commodity modes of identity. Most importantly, cultural tourism, as described by Bruner, enables engagement with displaced, fragmented elements of culture without the necessity to build social relationships with the members of the culture that created them. These same processes of commodification within tourism have enabled the recontextualization and reinterpretation of the use of ayahuasca and given birth to ayahuasca tourism and the "ayahuasca shaman."

In the context of ayahuasca shamanism, along with the commodification of ayahuasca itself, certain aspects of Indigenous cultures are active in the presentational and commodity modes of identity. In the networks of the globalization of ayahuasca and shamanic tourism, signs of Shipibo identity are among those most commonly active in the presentational and commodity modes. Labate described the situation thus:

> The Shipibo people of the Ucayali (or, more recently, the Shipibo immigrants to Iquitos who work in tourist lodges), in particular, are viewed as emblematic of indigenous ayahuasca shamanism: a quick Internet search finds descriptions of the Shipibo as "ayahuasca masters" and "sacred guardians of the ayahuasca ceremony." Because of this particular fame of the Shipibo, mestizo shamans, foreign practitioners, and even native healers from other indigenous groups "shipibize" themselves by using Shipibo style painted tunics, necklaces, paintings, and other trappings. (Labate 2014: 186)

A notable example of this trend can be found in the series *Greater Than a Tourist*[3]—specifically, the volume written to provide information about Tarapoto and the

[3] The *Greater Than a Tourist* book series is published by CZYK Publishing. According to the "about" section on greaterthanatourist.com, CZYK Publishing was founded by Lisa Rusczyk, Ed.D., in 2011. The website touts that the series now has over 700 books including volumes that focus on major U.S. cities and state and national parks, European cities, the Brazilian Amazon, and India to name just a few. These books are ostensibly written by local authors to provide potential visitors to these sites with insights about local

surrounding area of the department of San Martín (Upton 2017). This book series is written to "help travelers either dream or experience different locations by providing opinions from a local" (Upton 2017: How to Use This Book). In the case of this series, to qualify as a "local," an author needs only to have lived in an area for over three months. While Upton is somewhat successful in providing a perspective of Tarapoto that is better informed by her experience living in the area than what is available on popular travel websites such as Tripadvisor.com, the book recapitulates stereotypes commonly present in discourse about ayahuasca shamanism in non-Amazonian contexts. For example, she highlights authenticity and authority of the Shipibo people in matters of shamanism. Though the Shipibo historically come from Pucallpa in the Ucayali region and though there is a significant population of Quechua-Lamista people in the San Martín region, Upton states that, "Shipibo are the most highlighted here in Tarapoto" (Upton 2017: Shipibo). The information she provides for tourists about the Shipibo is as follows, "Deeply influenced by natural elements and deeply rooted in the beliefs of the plant spirits, they are a shamanic-beliefs based people [sic]. Many consider the Shipibo shamans to be the highest authority for plant medicine" (Upton 2017: Shipibo). She goes on to encourage tourists to buy Shipibo textiles featuring "elaborate geometrical designs" (called *kené*) as this would be among "the greatest souvenirs." She recounts a controversial yet oft-repeated idea that the kené are visual representations of icaros, a

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culture and suggestions about food and experiences less commonly known to outsiders. The draw of the series is that it is supposed to provide readers with condensed, insider knowledge of a given locale that would supposedly be unavailable to the average tourist—hence the name of the series. CZYK also hosts the Greater Than a Tourist Podcast and publishes language phrasebooks, food guides, and travel guides for specific locales. For example, *Easy Puebla Spanish Phrasebook*, *Eat Like a Local: Istanbul*, and *Travel Lika a Local: Bengaluru India*.

type of musical score. This idea, according to Brabec de Mori (2012) was a hypothesis generated by the German anthropologist Gebhart-Sayer (1986, 1987) who proposed that interpretation of the meaning of the kené was an old practice, lost to the Shipibo. However, she proposed that the patterns seen during ayahuasca visions could be produced by singing, that they were later physicalized as kené, and that certain "shamans" could decode the patterns back into their song form. Brabec de Mori proposes that this idea was picked up by researchers and re-presented by them to Shipibo healers to whom this practice and use of kené was previously unknown. This practice of *terápia estética*, "aesthetic therapy" (Gebhart-Sayer 1986) has since taken root as a reinvented tradition. "This practice can be observed mainly in the native community of San Franscisco de Yarinacocha, where most tourists and inexperienced researchers reach out to meet Shipibo people for the first time" (Brabec de Mori 2012: 273).

The continuation of Gebhart-Sayers's hypothesis in literature for tourists, and Labate's description of "shipibized" ayahuasca shamans show how Warden's concepts of presentational and commodified identity work together in ayahuasca tourism. A type of heightened "authenticity" is presented for sale in connection to ayahuasca ceremonies via easily recognizable expressions of "Shipibo-ness."

Once sufficiently decontextualized from social use or presentational modes that involve social interactions, Shipibo kené have come to represent Indigeneity and the exotic character of the rainforest in a general sense. The clearest example of this that I found was at a souvenir stand at one of the main markets in Tarapoto. This stand was selling mass-produced hats, handbags, and wallets featuring kené and embroidered with

the lettering “Tarapoto Peru,” with a palm tree standing in for the letter T. These items were being sold alongside stuffed-animal monkeys, T-shirts with pictures of cartoon parrots on them, and dreamcatchers—another decontextualized, commodified, item imbued with an aura of Indigenousness (Fig. 7). This is only possible because these sign objects have accrued meaning through their auratic attachment to Shipibo-ness through the participatory and presentational modes and were then decontextualized in the commodity mode. Because the items are present and active in spaces where social interaction with a Shipibo person—let alone the people who made the items—that the items come to have the aura of Shipibo-ness while existing quite apart from social interactions that could potentially lead to relationships with Shipibo people. This means that these same items, further decontextualized, can rely on the same signs of Shipibo-ness to represent a generalized Indigeneity.

Maestro Orlando and the team of curandero/as and therapists at Takiwasi are well aware of the threat to cultural and ecological sustainability that the commodification of ayahuasca poses—as exemplified in the writings of Giove (2002, 2016) and as expressed by curandero/as in interactions I had with them at the centers, which I discuss later in this chapter. This is one of the reasons that they insist on retaining the use of ayahuasca within a practice of curanderismo that relies on many plants and many techniques, of which the ayahuasca ceremony is only one—albeit an important one. And this, I argue, is one of the defining factors that situates both Mushuk Pakarina and Takiwasi apart from the dominant strands of shamanic/ayahuasca tourism discussed above.

Figure 7. Photos of Shipibo kené used on hats, bags and other items for sale at a popular market in Tarapoto. Photos taken by author August 4, 2019.

Before continuing, it is important that I clarify my use of the terms derived from the word "shaman" in this discussion. I do so strategically in that I am intentionally seeking to enter my research into the ongoing academic conversation in the social sciences and humanities on the topics of Amazonian shamanism, ayahuasca, and ayahuasca tourism. In this sense, *shaman* and *shamanism* are umbrella terms used by academic researchers to refer to a range of practices and social roles found in many parts of the world that share certain characteristics. "Shamans" heal, divine the location of lost objects, and interface between humans and spirits, among other functions, but, according to Eliade's classical study of the topic, the defining characteristic of a shaman is that they do their work through ecstatic experience; that is, their spirit leaves their physical body, and, in this state, they are able to access the knowledge and power to do their work

(Eliade [1951] 2004: 3-4, 7-8). Understood as such, the healers with whom I conducted my research do fit into the anthropological category of "shaman." However, as I discuss in more detail below, the curandero/as with whom I am collaborating object emphatically to the use of the terminology of shamanism when referring to them and their work. They see it as an imposition from the outside, largely due to tourism. As such, I am deploying the term *shamanic pilgrimage* here to indicate the strains of academic literature and thought that I found helpful in developing my understanding of the phenomena I discuss here and to make the information found herein more easily applicable in related discussions. The appropriate and most commonly used terms that my collaborators use to refer to their work are *curanderismo* and *vegetalismo*, indicating that their goal is healing and that the source of their power and knowledge is their relationship to the plants of the rainforest.

"Shamanic" Tourism: The Reinterpretation of Vegetalismo through the Globalization of Ayahuasca

Brabec de Mori (2014) traces the first waves of ayahuasca tourism in the 1960s and 1970s to the publishing of *The Yage Letters* (Burroughs and Ginsberg [1963] 2006), and the popularization of writings by anthropologists including Carlos Castaneda and Michael Harner from that same time period (Brabec de Mori 2014: 208). Fotiou (2014) contrasted ayahuasca tourism with drug tourism because the latter implies pleasure seeking. While those who travel to take ayahuasca are often seeking a transcendent experience, they are aware that it will likely involve physical and psychological difficulties. Many of these travelers are seeking self-improvement through direct spiritual

experience that they hope ayahuasca will facilitate. For these reasons, she argues that it should be considered separately from drug tourism, and this is why she refers to the phenomenon as shamanic tourism. Fotiou noted two strands of ayahuasca tourists: those who add an ayahuasca ceremony onto their existing itinerary after arriving in South America and those who travel expressly for the purpose of taking ayahuasca. She pointed out that the former group are much less likely to return to the Amazon or seek out ayahuasca again (Fotiou 2010: 26). She wrote, "most of these tourists hear about ayahuasca for the first time when in Iquitos or have heard about it from other travelers. During my fieldwork few people came to Iquitos exclusively for shamanic tourism" (Fotiou 2010: 26). However, there have been some important changes in levels of awareness about ayahuasca in the Global North over the past decade. Discussions of ayahuasca in popular media have led to the rapid spread of awareness of it and an increase in the number of people traveling to seek out ayahuasca ceremonies. As I discuss in more detail in chapter four, one of the most influential examples of this phenomenon are discussions of ayahuasca and other psychedelics on the Joe Rogan Experience Podcast (JRE). Especially important is episode number 127, which aired in August of 2011. If *The Yage Letters* sparked the first wave of ayahuasca tourism, this podcast episode sparked the most recent wave. In that two-part episode, Aubrey Marcus, a guest on the show, recounts a series of ayahuasca ceremonies he participated in that were overseen by my interlocutor, Maestro Orlando Chujandama. Among the many people that the JRE podcast has influenced to seek out ayahuasca were several of the pilgrims I interviewed and that episode in particular first motivated Maestro Orlando's apprentice to

seek him out. Only a few years later, Labate (2014) wrote about the rapid expansion of ayahuasca shamanism out of the Amazon and the notable rise in travelers seeking ayahuasca. Maestro Orlando, the curandero at and owner of Mushuk Pakarina occupies a complex place in this discussion. He is aware that ayahuasca is the catalyst for the rise in interest in Amazonian shamanism, and, to an extent, he plays into that interest when he travels to oversee ayahuasca ceremonies. This is how he became a topic of discussion on Rogan's podcast. However, he uses the interest in ayahuasca to direct tourists toward interacting more deeply with curanderismo through ritualized diets (*dietas*). Takiwasi, similarly, primarily interfaces with foreign tourists in the context of dietas, which are the focus of chapter two.

In his 2014 piece on the effects of foreigners (tourists and others from the Global North seeking to enter into shamanic apprenticeships) coming to Shipibo communities in search of ayahuasca, Brabec de Mori points out that, in the Shipibo case, the version of the ayahuasca ceremony in which many participants drink ayahuasca together in a ritualized fashion is the result of tourism. Historically—and, in cases when foreign tourists are not involved, currently—Shipibo healers will drink ayahuasca when healing, but their patients will not drink (2014: 222). This style of ayahuasca use usually occurs unceremoniously in comparison with the hyper-ritualized ceremonies held for tourists. "During the whole session, relatives and patients may come and go. Some of them may fall asleep, or at times talk to each other about any topic and noisily kill mosquitoes without heeding the singing médico(s) [healer/doctor]. All present would wear everyday garments, including médicos" (2014: 222). These ayahuasca sessions are performed to

remove illness from the patient's body and send it back to another healer/sorcerer from whom the illness originated. This is because, as Brabec de Mori describes it, the Shipibo ethos is based in reciprocity, which is "the most important principle for keeping the world in order" (2014: 217). Thus, "a Shipibo médico is per definition at the same time both a healer and a sorcerer, because healing consists of neutralizing an enemy's action on the patient, and overthrowing this enemy by striking him with his own weapons" (2014: 218). The logic of this method for healing is based on what Fausto (2004: 171-72) calls "predatory animism." This is similar to the concept of multi-natural perspectivism, which was proposed by Viveiros de Castro (1998) and later shown by Kohn (2013) to be key in some Amazonian Quechua/Kichwa conceptions of shamanic conflict and the relationship of humans to the non-humans of the forest. Perspectivism is an ontological proposition in which all living things exist and think of themselves within a predator-prey hierarchy. At the same time, each creature, from its own point of view, understands itself to be human; it understands that which hunts it to be *poma* ("puma/predator")—e.g., a jaguar or an anaconda—and it understands that which it hunts or eats to be *aycha* ("meat/prey")—e.g., an agouti (Kohn 2013: 119, 138). Curandero/as and shamans are ambivalent figures because they are the only humans who can inhabit multiple perspectives at once. They can be humans and they can be jaguars, predators and prey: it all depends on perspective (Kohn 2013: 97, 143-44). Maestro Orlando recounted a story to me about curandero/as in the past who lived longer and were much more powerful than curandero/as of today. They could physically transform into jaguars. He told me that this was largely because they did not eat the "modern" diet which makes people weak. Sometimes, the diet of

these curandero/as included cannibalism. This makes sense if, following Kohn's explanation, transforming another human into meat transforms the eater into a predator. "Once one recognizes the personhood of animals, there is always the danger of confusing hunting with warfare and commensality with cannibalism" (Kohn 2013: 118-19). In Quechua-Lamista communities in the San Martín region, at least since the 1970s, the discourse around shamanic power has centered on the concept of self-control and self-discipline. "Shamans" accumulate power through diets and the most powerful only heal because to harm others requires the expenditure of power, which temporarily leaves one open to attack. However, healers are constantly tempted to gain advantage over their adversaries by turning to sorcery (Scazzocchio 1979: 178-81). Maestro Orlando told me as much:

> In the world of the plants, there are two things you can learn. The plant will teach you good, and the plant will teach you evil. Whichever plant you take will teach you this. It depends on you, yourself, what you are like. One needs a lot of experience. The bad is very close. Evil is two steps away. If you want to learn negative energy, you learn it very quickly. It's easy. Taking *ajo sacha* [wild garlic, a master plant we were discussing—see Fig. 8 and table 1]—if you don't diet while taking ajo sacha, it's good for that [learning sorcery/negative energy]—I'm telling you. But the good, one needs a lot of experience ("*hay que caminar mucho,*" literally, one has to walk a lot).[4]

Beyer recounts how the people of a Shapra community reported to him that they "no longer had shamans," rather, they "now sought out *médicos*, doctors, because of the destructive blood feuds" (Beyer 2009: 48). While the word reciprocity might invoke ideas of cooperation and balance, in a perspectivist-animist context, it implies that

[4] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. September 9, 2019.

balance is only temporarily maintained by undercurrent of potential violence which gives understandings of illness a significant social dimension that it typically does not have in modern biomedicine.

Figure 8. Ajo sacha, “wild garlic” (*Mansoa alliacea*) at Mushuk Pakarina. Photo taken by author April 1, 2022.

The “modern ayahuasca ceremony,” in contrast to the “traditional Shipibo” use of ayahuasca described by Brabec de Mori, is highly ritualized, including healers formally opening and closing the ceremony, participants and healers wearing garb that displays Shipibo kené art or otherwise signals the Native-ness of the ceremony (e.g. feather crowns), and rules of personal conduct for participants (Brabec de Mori 2014: 222-23).

Table 1.
Diet Plants and Containments Plants

Local Name	Latin Name	Uses and Effects	Notes
Ajo Sacha (Fig. 8, p. 57)	Mansoa alliacea	Treats joint pain. Taken in diets to help clarify thoughts and make decisions.	Characterized as a masculine, solar plant. *Ajo sacha* means "wild garlic" in Quechua. It smells and tastes strongly of garlic.
Ayahuasca with chacruna admixture (Figs. 1 and 2, p. 8)	Banisteriopsis Caapi (with Psychotria viridis)	During a diet, emphasizes effects of other diet plants; clarifies lessons taught by other plants.	Not typically a diet plant at Takiwasi. Not taken during long diets at Mushuk Pakarina.
Bobinsana (Fig. 10, p. 83)	Calliandra angustifolia	Regulates menstrual cycle. Potential treatment for infertility. Taken in diets to increase connection to emotions, increase psychological and emotional flexibility without uprooting or destabilizing perspectives.	Characterized as a feminine plant connected to water. Flexibility combined with rootedness is metaphorically linked to the plants deep and broad root system and strong, flexible branches.
Camalonga	Strychnos sp.	Spiritual and energetic cleansing, protection from spiritual attack.	When taken as a containment plant, requires extra care to avoid sugar. Those who take it often report a slight tranquilizing effect and vivid dreams.
Chiriq Sanango (Fig. 14, p. 134)	Brunfelsia grandiflora	Treats rheumatism and arthritis. Also treats instances of emotional coldness	Characterized as a cold plant. *Chiri* means "cold" in Quechua. Prepared

		such as introversion, an inability to process or speak about one's emotions. One of its uses, especially noted by Maestro Orlando, is to help process fear, being frozen in fear. The plant does not to remove fear but helps one confront their fears.	by compressing scrapings of the root in cold water. In higher doses, it causes chills and numbing of the mouth, lips, and extremities, accompanied by tranquilization. Curandero/as emphasize this plant's temperamental nature. Caution is required for post-dieta. Faltering slightly, even encountering strong smells such as perfumes and industrial cleaners, can reverse a dieta's positive effects and cause psychosis requiring immediate attention from a curandero/a.
Chuchuwasha (also called chuchuwasi)	Maytenus macrocarpa	Treats musculoskeletal issues; restores proper physical alignment to the body. Teaches ethical alignment and integrity. Gives physical strength and increases libido, especially for men.	Is a tree. Often taken in a mixed preparation with other trees and woody stranglers. Curandero/as refer to these mixtures as *palos*, "sticks, trees, timber."
Uchu Sanango (Fig. 15, p. 135)	Tabernaemontana sananho	Fortifies the will, tames the ego, reigns in irritability and anger. Increases	Is characterized by curandero/as as cleansing fire. *Uchu* means "hot, spicy" in

		libido. Corrects mistaken or cluttered thought.	Quechua. Those who take it often report bone and joint pain and feeling uncomfortably warm. Preparation involves cooking in hot water to remove some of its spicy taste.
Ushpawasha Sanango (Fig. 11, p. 91)	Tabernaemontana undulate	Heightens emotionality, especially emotions connected to memory. Often increases vividness of dreams.	Curandero/as often refer to this plant as *memoria del corazón*, "memory of the heart" because it so regularly heightens recall of forgotten memories, especially their affective dimensions. This plant is also spicy, though not as intensely as uchu sanango. Is also cooked during preparation to remove spicy taste.
Yacu Sisa	Dicranopygium yacu-sisa		Related to water and mermaids. *Yacu sisa* means "water flower" in Quechua. The flower has a strong, pleasantly sweet smell.

Purge Plants

Local Name	Latin Name	Uses	Notes
Ayahuasca (Fig. 1, p. 8)	Banisteriopsis caapi	Considered to be a purge plant as it often induces vomiting even in it's concentrated,	

		psychedelic form. Not included in *purga* rituals, rather a more dilute form, without psychedelic components is taken in the *purgahuasca* ritual at Takiwasi.	
Azucena	Lilium candidum	Cleanses negative energies related to sex.	
Paico	Dysphania ambrosioides	Treats issues related to the kidneys, adrenaline, and anxiety. On a spiritual/energetic level, cleanses spirits and negative energies whose effects manifest as anxiety and stress.	
Rosa Sisa	Tagetes erecta	Mental/psychological cleanse—helps stop excessive rationalization. Combined with tobacco which helps with mental clarity once counterproductive thought patterns have been calmed.	As a purge, this is combined with a small amount of tobacco juice. The purge requires drinking four liters of warm water to induce vomiting.
Saúco	Sambucus peruviana	Intestinal and respiratory cleanse. Curandero/as said it also has anti-parasitic properties.	In my experience, it is the purge plant most likely to induce diarrhea
Tabaco	Nicotiana rustica	Clears negative energy, negative emotion, and hesitancy while providing protection from negative energy. Provides	Is a masculine plant connected to fire. Tobacco leaves are boiled to achieve the liquid preparation for purges. The same plant is smoked in

		positive energy, confidence and instills social integrity and wisdom.	every ritual, combining fire and air to empower the healer's breath.
Verbena	Verbena sp.	Cleanses the liver and negative emotional energy, especially anger.	
Yawar Panga (Fig. 16, p. 228)	Aristolochia didyma	Full system detox. Focused especially on cleaning the blood by first acting on the liver and gallbladder. Its properties of cleaning the blood extend to metaphorically to removing energies accumulated due to generational trauma, referred to by curandero/as as "cleaning the bloodline."	The most intense and long-lasting of the purges. Requires drinking and vomiting a minimum of six liters of cold water. Curandero/as say that the intensity of the purge lessens with repeated exposure.

Table 1. This table provides an overview of some of the plants used by curandero/as at Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina. It includes short summaries of the plant's uses and relevant notes for further context. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. For more extensive information, see Beyer 2009 (appendix A) and Bussman and Sharon 2015.

In these encounters with tourists, the central focus is healing or learning through the *experience of drinking ayahuasca*. This style of ayahuasca ceremony was adopted once tourists began arriving in the 1960s and '70s. Healers "quickly recognized that sharing ayahuasca with a large group of participants. . . yielded notable advantages: attention, payment, and visitors who return or recommend them, promising continuous economic growth" (Brabec de Mori 2014: 208). While the curandero/as I spoke with were

forthcoming about shamanic or spiritual attacks being part of vegetalismo, they expressed the sentiment that Scazzocchio described, cited above. They are focused on healing and learning, and they want to facilitate the same for those who come to their centers. Insofar as they are involved with shamanic warfare, it is only in protecting against it. While this seems like a clear enough statement, when perspectivist animism is involved, being a healer or a sorcerer can simply be a matter of whose side you are on (Brabec de Mori 2014: 219-220). What Brabec de Mori is referencing here has been called "assault sorcery" by some ethnographers (Whitehead and Wright 2004). In certain contexts, it is integral to how curandero/as understand the healing process to work. Some illnesses are considered to be caused by a curandero/a sending a *virote* (an energetic dart) to inflict illness on a person. The only way to cure such illnesses is to seek the aid of another curandero/a to remove the dart and return it to the offending curandero/a, inflicting the illness on them (Beyer 2009: 83-85).

While it is clearly the case that, for some Indigenous groups, ayahuasca use is/was the domain of healers alone, there are accounts of its communal use that predate William Burroughs's time in the Amazon by at least one hundred years. For example, botanist Richard Spruce recounts participating in an ayahuasca ceremony held for the men of the community of Panuré in 1852 (Spruce [1908] 2016), Gordon MacCreagh recounted the use of ayahuasca during a Jurupari festival in the Tiquié region near the border of Colombia and Brazil (MacCreagh [1926] 2016), and Reichel-Dolmatoff conducted extensive research in the 1960s among Tukano communities in which he recounts communal ayahuasca use (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971, 1975). As a generalization, healers

(not patients) in Indigenous groups who live near large, Amazonian rivers tend to drink ayahuasca for healing. Groups who live in the forest farther from large rivers tend to use ayahuasca to prepare for hunting and for social cohesion (Brabec de Mori 2011: 28). It is possible then, that the roots of the communal drinking of ayahuasca for healing developed in the Northwestern sector of the Amazon in the reducciones of the Spanish missions and, later, during the Rubber Boom of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, in rubber camps. Especially in these two cases, Indigenous people from riverine and deep-forest areas were forced into close contact and, "suffering from identity problems" (Brabec de Mori 2011: 28), combined the healing and communal modalities of ayahuasca use. The shamanic complex of vegetalismo, in which Quechua terminology became synonymous with the practice, emerged from these same spaces of crisis (Brabec de Mori 2011, 2015: 657).

That is not to say that the relatively recent rise in ayahuasca seekers from the Global North has not resulted in significant changes in ayahuasca-related practices. The development of the pre-ayahuasca diet (Gearin and Labate 2018); the availability of women-only ceremonies overseen by female curanderas/shamans, largely due to instances of male curandero/shamans sexually assaulting women during ayahuasca ceremonies (Labate 2014; Peluso 2014); and the highly formalized group ceremony of the kind described by Brabec de Mori (2014: 222) as the "modern ayahuasca ceremony" have emerged since the 1970s, becoming more common over the last ten to fifteen years.

Shamanic Pilgrimage

Fotiou (2010) has made a case for analyzing shamanic tourism through the theoretical lens of the anthropology of pilgrimage citing the similarities between religious pilgrimage and shamanic tourism. She points to their shared characteristic of liminality in that religious pilgrims and shamanic tourists both journey away from their normal social spaces in search of self-transformation (Fotiou 2010: 49-51). I agree, and would also point out, as have others, that there are significant overlaps between the travel patterns and economic activities of tourists and pilgrims (Reader 2015: 30-31). By pointing out the link to pilgrimage, Fotiou highlights that, while still being tourism, ayahuasca-focused, shamanic tourism involves a complex mixture of serious spiritual seekers along with less serious "day trippers." As such, she asks us to consider that shamanic tourism can be thought of among the "strategies of resistance and negotiation" (Fotiou 2010: 52) emergent from increased local-global contact. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the parallel development within shamanic tourism that I refer to as shamanic pilgrimage. I use this terminology because the strategies that Centro Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina use, expressly to attract serious seekers, weed out "day trippers" and re-contextualize ayahuasca among the host of other plant medicines that curandero/as use to heal. I am not trying to draw a clean division between shamanic tourism and shamanic pilgrimage. In discussing shamanic pilgrimage as a parallel trend within this branch of tourism I hope to highlight the complexities presented by the globalization of Amazonian shamanism and curanderismo. I also hope to elucidate some of the less-commonly discussed strategies being employed in the ever-more-frequent cross-cultural encounters engendered by non-

local people's search for healing through Amazonian shamanism and Amazonian peoples' search for cultural and economic wellbeing.

Pilgrimage

In studies of pilgrimage, much attention is understandably given to the physical-spiritual journey from home to a sacred or otherwise significant site. Turner and Turner (1978) applied an interpretive model of ritual involving structure (the social order of daily life) and antistructure (the reordering of social hierarchy during ritual) to piece together an analytical typology to define what pilgrimage is as much as to describe the cultural processes involved in it. In this model, the time that pilgrims spend with other pilgrims on the journey is where much of the work of antistructure happens. Once pilgrims form a temporary community of travelers, they enter the liminal state. They are "betwixt and between" the normal social order of daily life that came before the pilgrimage and the state of social order that will come afterward. It is during this period of transience that previous social roles and relationships are dissolved, and a relatively egalitarian "antistructure" or state of "communitas" emerges in which all ritual participants are equal in their deference to the ritual process and to any officiants who might be overseeing it (Turner 1966: 94-96). In some cases, communitas occurs spontaneously among groups of people during transient liminality away from social roles that would define a hierarchy and accord them differentiated status. Sometimes, the onset of communitas is clearly communicated, as in Sallnow's research when, upon embarking on the start of a pilgrimage with a Quechua group in the Andes, one of them turned to

him and said, “Now. . . we’re all brothers” (Sallnow’s translation from Quechua, 1987: 179). In describing Andean pilgrimage, Sallnow (1987) emphasized that pilgrims seek to “connect two worlds,” that is, leave daily life to enter liminal communitas with each other and with “divine power.”

In my research I found that, though a certain type of communitas emerged between dieters when they were gathered in the days before and after their dietas, that was not the type of communitas that dieta, as a ritualized journey, is used to engender. Rather than sharing a long journey with fellow travelers, dieters coming from a diversity of geographic regions including North America, Europe, Oceania and urban centers in Latin America, typically traveled alone. Though the location—being in the Amazon with the plants—was significant, the journey from home was ritually uneventful except as a sign of initial distance from the structure of daily life. Without exception, every dieter that I interviewed came to Tarapoto by themselves. Most flew in, though one added a long car trip through Ecuador on their way, and one came by boat from Iquitos to Yurimaguas and then by car to Tarapoto. The more ritually significant journey that dieters take is to the edge of human society, to commune with the non-humans of the forest. This is similar to what Peña referred to as “co-performative witnessing” in which pilgrims “place [their] bodies in the immediate context of devotional practices” (Peña 2011: 150-51). A significant difference in the case of dieters is that they place their bodies in a context of ritual practice and make their bodies the meeting place in which communitas with non-human beings (plant spirits) is initiated. In this way, dieting is a type of pilgrimage active in an “eco-social system,” as I explore in chapter two, the

behavioral restrictions of the dieta signal the dieter's intent to enter into an intersubjective relationship with plants. In the diets of curanderismo, as in the Himalayan pilgrimages studied by Whitmore (2018), involve relating to non-human selves (Kohn 2013) recognizing that they are one of "many different kinds of subjects of which humans are but one subset" (Whitmore 2018: 23). To this point, I find the Roman concept of the Vitruvian hut, from architectural scholarship, to be relevant, though I am not trying to draw any historical or cultural link to Amazonian ritual diets, as such a connection would be tenuous at best. The so-called "rustic" or "primitive" hut represents the meeting or transition point between human society and nature, as outlined by the Roman architect Vitruvius. As a concept in architectural theory, the Vitruvian hut is a "mediator between humankind and nature" (Bogdanović 2023: 211). While this concept was employed in positivistic discourses about linear societal progression that have nothing to do with the current discussion, I found it to be an interesting companion to the *tambo* that each dieter inhabits. They are, physically, the same type of structure: four posts with a roof (Fig. 9), and they both represent a liminal stage between the human and non-human. While the Vitruvian hut came to represent architecture and society as rooted in nature, even as society distances humans from it (Bogdanović 2023: 211-13), the tambo represents a journey away from human society. It signifies communion—even communitas—with the non-human beings of the forest.

Figure 9. Photo of a tambo at Mushuk Pakarina. Photo taken by author March 8, 2022.

Pilgrimage sites are often located in geographically liminal zones, especially less hospitable ones—though this is by no means universally the case. Mendoza (2017) highlighted that the Qollquepunku glacier that is the end point of the Qoyllor Rit'i pilgrimage festival in the Peruvian Andes is situated in a "liminal zone that connects the inter-Andean valleys and the ravines that descend toward the Amazon, and that was a key area for the meeting of communities from both regions" (Mendoza 2017:131). Sallnow wrote that, "the focal shrines of pilgrimage are themselves peripheral, typically located

apart from administrative and ecclesiastical centers and sometimes in the wild, away from human habitation altogether" (Sallnow 1987: 7). While those who travel to drink ayahuasca might find liminality and communitas in joining other travelers during a ceremony, leaving the structure of human society behind to join the anti-structure of the forest is the goal of traveling to the tambo and undertaking a dieta. As such, I propose that the dieta, and travel to participate in a dieta, can be understood as a type of pilgrimage.

The pilgrim's journey, with its various difficulties, can be seen as a type of self-sacrificial payment for the benefit sought (Turner and Turner 1978: 6): to gain a blessing, be healed from an illness, or show gratitude for something already gained (Sallnow 1987: 2-3).

> Yet there is undoubtedly an initiatory quality in pilgrimage. A pilgrim is an initiand, entering into a new, deeper level of existence than he has known in his accustomed milieu. Homologous with the ordeals of tribal initiation are the trials, tribulations, and even temptations of the pilgrim's way. And at the end the pilgrim, like the novice, is exposed to powerful religious sacra (shrines, images, liturgies, curative waters, ritual circumambulations of holy objects, and so on), the beneficial effects of which depends upon the zeal and pertinacity of his quest. (Turner and Turner 1978: 8)

To this point, Mendoza highlighted the Andean concept of *pampachay* ("to flatten the ground/to forgive") and the process of *pampachanakuy*, which is the public enactment of repentance and reciprocal forgiveness of wrongdoing. Her interlocutors gave this as a primary reason for walking the whole distance of their pilgrimage rather than taking a truck (Mendoza 2017: 138-39, 141-42). The behavioral restrictions that a dieta entails include sexual abstinence, social isolation in the forest, abstaining from salt or any other seasoning while eating only boiled foods and drinking only water. While observing these

restrictions, a dieter ingests concentrated, liquid preparations of *plantas maestras* (master/teacher plants). The dieter is said to be "dieting" the master plant(s) that is the focus of their dieta. Dieting certain plants can incur additional restrictions. In conversations with curandero/as about dieta, they often told me that the imposition of behavioral restrictions is, in part, a way that a dieter demonstrates their worthiness to the plants. When I finished the three-week, isolation portion of my dieta in 2022 and entered the post-dieta phase, Maestro Orlando reminded me what the restrictions of post-dieta are, and he told me that I could choose to observe a six-week post-dieta or an eight-week post dieta. The difference, he said, was that the benefit I would receive was directly tied to how disciplined I was and how long of a post-dieta I chose to observe. If I failed to meet the minimum post-dieta length, however, I would lose any benefit that I might have gained. What is worse, the energy of the plants that I had accumulated in my body would leave me and possibly harm me in the process. In this way, the reciprocal relationship that I, the dieter, had entered into with the plants by undertaking a dieta would be maintained. In a successful dieta, the dieter offers their body as a place to encounter the plants and observes the restrictions of dieta to make their body hospitable to the plants. If the dieter breaks the confidence of this relationship, they may not only lose the lessons and healing that they would have gained, but reciprocity may require that the plant injure the dieter (O'Shaughnessy 2017: 107).

In Andean cultures, the concept of *ayni* bears many similarities to the reciprocal relations involved in Amazonian vegetalismo, described above. Ayni is an ethos of reciprocity involving shared labor and goods based on common need rather than

exchange value (Harrison 1989: 53-54). I brought up the concept of ayni to Maestro Orlando when he was describing to me that he considers facilitating dietas for foreigners to be a type of collaboration. He explained that he is familiar with ayni, but that Quechua people in San Martín did not usually use that term. They have a rough equivalent, which is *yanapay*. I have normally heard this word translated as "to help" (Doherty Vonah et al. 2007: 246), but Maestro Orlando assured me that it implied ongoing collaboration. This makes sense as the sharing of labor between relatively dispersed families has historically been an integral part of how Quechua-Lamista communities have been founded and how Quechua-Lamista ethnic identity has been formed and maintained in the region (Scazzocchio 1979: 135-36). However, Maestro Orlando reinterpreted the concept to allow the incorporation of tourism: "They [foreign travelers] collaborate with me economically, and I collaborate to help them with the plants."[5] He also framed our working together for my research within the ethos of yanapay, saying, "I will collaborate with you for your project, and in the future, you will collaborate with me."

Similarly, Takiwasi considers the money that visiting dieters pay to be a type of collaboration. The research that I did at the center was also being done in the spirit of *colaboración* (collaboration).[6] From the beginning of my interactions with the center, our relationship was framed as collaborative. This included a mutual understanding that Takiwasi's research team and I might collaborate in research and publication efforts. So

[5] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. October 12, 2019.

[6] As most spoken interactions at Takiwasi take place in Spanish, and only a few of the curanderos and staff speak Quechua, the words yanapay or ayni were never used.

far, this has resulted in one article, published in a refereed journal (Graham, Rojas Saucedo, and Politi 2022). In my case, as a collaborating pilgrim-researcher—similar to the much-discussed role of tourist-researcher, (Bruner 1995, 2005)—and in the case of foreign visitors, economic payment was framed through the lens of yanapay/collaboration: not as exchange value for a service but based on shared needs and interests. While this reframing of economic exchange as collaboration may be what Brabec de Mori meant when he wrote about tourism facilitating the "introduction of capitalism into native societies" (Brabec de Mori 2014: 226), it may also represent what he meant by "maybe it does no harm [or, perhaps less harm?] if done consciously" (Brabec de Mori 2014: 226).

Shamanic Tourism and Shamanic Pilgrims

I am using the terms *shamanic pilgrimage* and *pilgrim* to point out a trend within shamanic tourism into which fall the activities of Mushuk Pakarina, Centro Takiwasi, and the diverse people who visit these centers primarily to participate in dietas. By using dietas as the mode for mediating contact with pilgrims and working within the ethos of self-discipline as reciprocal exchange, these two medicine centers strive to maintain their connection to tradition as expressed through concepts like *la medicina tradicional* and *las ciencias ancestrales*. What they also do is nudge pilgrims into closer confrontation with animist ontology. This makes it more likely that pilgrims will have to come to terms with personal experiences of non-human intelligences encountered outside the drastically altered state of consciousness induced by ayahuasca. The fact that the centers can also be

choosier about whom they welcome to participate in rituals, because facilitating dietas is much more involved than facilitating ayahuasca ceremonies, means they can justifiably charge more for their services (from both capitalist and reciprocal/yanapay perspectives). Brabec de Mori (2014), Labate (2014), and Fotiou (2010) all argue that the "modern" or "re-traditionalized" ayahuasca ceremony (to use Labate's term) has developed in line with the role that Amazonian "shamans" have historically fulfilled: to mediate between the local community and the "Other." This, as I have already laid out, brings with it a complex array of potential problems and benefits. Relying on dieta rather than ayahuasca alone is one of the ways that these centers strive to guard against some of the more serious problems that working with tourists can bring. This is, put another way, how these centers "compete with tour guides who have learned to make ayahuasca, memorized enough icaros to get through a ceremony, and become, in the words of performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, 'a hyper-exoticized curio shop shaman for spiritual tourists'" (Beyer 2009: 355; Gómez-Peña 2000: 37).

I agree with Fotiou and Chambers that a good starting place for describing tourism is "any kind of travel activity that includes the self-conscious experience of [a place other than one's home]" (Chambers 2000: xii, quoted in Fotiou 2010: 47). This is, however, an extremely general definition. Bruner clarifies that in his long career studying cultural tourism, he found tourists to usually be older, wealthier, and more socially established than the average person, even among members of the wealthiest nations (Bruner 2005: 15). This is to be expected, as those would most often be the people who have the time and money to afford to travel for leisure. Bruner theorizes that tourism has

three basic phases: 1) the "pre-tour phase," in which the narrative about the destination is developed (Bruner 2005: 22); 2) the "away phase," when tourists are accruing experiences of diverse people and places (Bruner 2005: 17); and 3) the "post-tour phase" when tourists share the media (pictures and videos) and tell the stories they have amassed to validate themselves as experienced world-travelers (Bruner 2005: 16, 26). Because there is social value attached to the number of places visited and experiences had, it is rare for tourists to return to destination locales (Bruner 2005: 17). Fotiou encountered a somewhat similar pattern among shamanic tourists in Iquitos, Perú. "During [her] fieldwork few people came to Iquitos exclusively for shamanic tourism. A limited number of travelers who are more adventurous might decide to try Ayahuasca out of curiosity just like they would try the local cuisine, but these will typically not develop a long term (sic) engagement with it" (Fotiou 2010: 26).

As opposed to the status as a world traveler that comes from displaying pictures and sharing stories from touristic journeys, as is commonly part of the process of cultural tourism (Bruner 2005), many of the pilgrims I interviewed expressed that they were glad to speak to me because 1) I made it clear that I would do my best to protect their anonymity, 2) I had personal experience with Amazonian plant-medicine and dietas and would be able to empathize with their experiences, and 3) there would be few people back home with whom they could discuss their experiences in depth. For some of them, it was important that they share aspects of their experience with their loved ones, especially when their motivations for undertaking a dieta included learning about themselves to be able to develop deeper, more loving relationships with those close to them—as was the

case with James (discussed below). It was more often the case that they were concerned about the possibility of people in their home communities, especially in professional circles, finding out that they had taken ayahuasca. They expressed that this was because of the pervasiveness of anti-drug sentiment and the legal status of psychedelics in most of North America and Europe. Rather than seeking status through novel experiences of far-off people and places, shamanic pilgrims were often working from the perspective that they had reached a dead-end of one kind or another within their respective socio-cultural milieus. In order to learn or heal, they would need to subject themselves to the processes of vegetalismo specifically by seeking out a dieta. This is similar to what Winkleman found in researching tourists seeking spiritual healing through drinking ayahuasca (Winkleman 2005), which later developed into a proposition that ayahuasca and other psychedelics have a role to play in treating so-called "diseases of civilization" (Frecska, Bokor, and Winkleman 2016). This is a tongue-in-cheek way of pointing out how post-industrial, Westernized lifestyles tend to produce psychological disorders, especially related to substance abuse, anxiety, depression, and psychological traumas. Even though ayahuasca tourism may have some negative effects on Amazonian communities, this does not mean that tourists from wealthier countries are not seeking help for real problems; in many cases they seek out ayahuasca because standard therapies in Westernized systems have failed them.

In contrast to Bruner's characterization of tourists, I found that shamanic pilgrims and the few shamanic tourists that I encountered to be more diverse, and these people were characterized by different demographic patterns and motivations than what Bruner

and even Fotiou found (see table 2). Shamanic pilgrims tended to be younger (usually in their mid to late thirties) and in transitional periods in their lives. In many cases, they came to these centers to seek help with crises that they were unable to find solutions for in their home environments—either because such help did not exist there or because what help they found was ineffectual. Thus, though they were often wealthy in comparison to Amazonian standards, it was often a serious financial strain for them to make their trip. To further contrast with Bruner and Fotiou's findings, all but a few of those who I interviewed traveled to the area expressly for the purpose of participating in a dieta specifically at Takiwasi or Mushuk Pakarina—as opposed to being added to an existing agenda. In those few exceptional cases, they were working for Takiwasi as interns for the center's research or therapy divisions and had decided to participate in a dieta during their time there.

I interviewed eighteen pilgrims, seventeen of whom participated in dietas at Takiwasi or Mushuk Pakarina. Without exception, they were college educated. Nine were men from Europe: two from Spain, two from Italy, two from the Czech Republic, two from France, and one from Belgium. I only interviewed one woman from Europe, who was from Spain. The next most represented world region was Latin America. I interviewed one man from Chile, one man from Perú, one woman from Perú, one woman from Chile (who was living in New Zealand at the time), and one woman from Argentina (who was living in the U.S.). Of those I interviewed, the only North Americans, both from the U.S., were men. One pilgrim, a man, was originally from Türkiye but lived in Australia during that time. While this group of participants is skewed in terms of gender

Total Pilgrims Interviewed = 18	Age Range 26-50 years old	Mean Age 36.5 years old
Religion/Spiritual Practice (Self-described)		
Spiritual but not religious (SBNR)	9	
Catholic + animism	6	
Animism without affiliation to organized religion or specified practice	1	
Atheist*	2	
Nationality	**Gender** (total: 4 women, 14 men)	
Argentinian (total: 1)	Women: 1	
Belgian (total: 1)	Men: 1	
Chilean (total: 2)	Women: 1; Men:1	
Czech (total: 2)	Men: 2	
French (total: 2)	Men: 2	
Italian (total: 2)	Men: 2	
Peruvian (total: 2)	Women: 1; Men: 1	
Spanish (total: 3)	Women: 1; Men: 2	
Turkish (total: 1)	Men: 1	
U.S. American (total: 2)	Men: 2	

Table 2. This table provides an overview of the basic demographic information of the eighteen pilgrims interviewed. Of the women from Latin America, only one of them lived in Latin America at the time of our interview. Two of them lived in the U.S. and one lived in New Zealand.

* Before the pilgrims participated in dietas, the number of self-identified atheists was four. At the time of our interview, two pilgrims had shifted their identification from atheist—one to SBNR, one to Catholic + animism—due to their experiences during their dietas. The two pilgrims who considered themselves to be atheists at the time of our interview mentioned that, while their spiritual beliefs had not changed, they were reevaluating their worldviews due to their experiences with vegetalismo. Specifically, they were reevaluating their positions on the nature of consciousness and the ontology of plants.

(four women and fourteen men), this is partly down to my own language abilities. Takiwasi hosted several more women dieters from Europe whom I was unable to interview because we did not share a language. While I was at Mushuk Pakarina, I was unable to interview either of the two pilgrims that Maestro Orlando hosted, both of whom were women, because, in one case, I was in the middle of my own dieta and, in the other case, she had planned to leave Perú the day she finished her dieta and did not have time to meet with me.

During my time at these centers, I did notice a slight tendency toward male pilgrims from the Global North and female pilgrims from Latin America. Though this is anecdotal and something that would need to be followed up on in further research, it would be important to test if these imbalances persist in a larger sample group and, if so, to understand why. There are likely many contributing factors which could include differences in income that limit ability to travel, differences in perceived and actual risk of traveling alone (as all of the pilgrims I interviewed did), differences in interest in psychedelics, and differences in individual assessments of the risks and rewards involved in spending a minimum of one week mostly alone in the Amazon forest.

While the pilgrims I interviewed were a diverse group, what they shared was a common sense that traditional Amazonian medicine stood to fill a significant gap in their lives. They turned to it having found their own cultures in modernized, westernized countries (or modernizing and westernizing countries, as the case may be) to be significantly lacking in culturally sanctioned, spiritual experiences and in methods for treating certain illnesses. Pilgrims either identified themselves as spiritual but not

religious or, especially regarding Latin American pilgrims, as Catholic. In the latter case, they usually provided the caveat that Catholicism is the most prominent organized religion in Latin America, so it was the religion they were raised in. They also described that they grew up in cultural environments that had significant animist elements and their own versions of traditional medicine or curanderismo.

The pilgrims sought out these centers specifically rather than traveling to the Amazon basin to find a center once they arrived. They typically first heard of the centers by word of mouth, though there are notable exceptions to this that I will discuss. Pilgrims were often experienced with psychedelics. Most commonly, if they had previously taken psychedelics, their first experience was with psilocybin "magic" mushrooms, either for spiritual exploration, to understand themselves and their consciousness better, or in search of healing (usually of a psychological issue). It was not uncommon, then, that they would continue to explore psychedelics and other psychoactive substances, having found their initial experiences to be significant. It was not uncommon that a pilgrim had previous experiences with mushrooms, LSD ("acid"), and MDMA ("ecstasy"). Only a few of the pilgrims I interviewed had experienced ayahuasca in other contexts, and only two pilgrims recounted previous experiences with isolated N, N-DMT (the psychedelic component in ayahuasca). Without exception, these people were in search of learning and/or healing that was unavailable to them within the bounds of Western medicine, education, traditional media, or organized religion. Many of them had spiritual and/or mystical encounters during a psychedelic experience, and, in searching for a frame within which to understand these experiences—a frame unavailable in their home culture—they

eventually found their way to either Takiwasi or Mushuk Pakarina. They traveled to Perú with hopes to explore traditional Amazonian medicine and ayahuasca in the context of a dieta.

In the following section, I present a case study of a pilgrim, Bruno (a pseudonym).[7] I paraphrase the story that told me of the chain of events that he considered to be significant in leading him to seek out Takiwasi and his experiences participating in rituals at Takiwasi.

Before coming to Takiwasi, Bruno (who was in his early thirties when I met him in 2019), had had a number of other opportunities to drink ayahuasca, which he sought out after having what he described as mystical, spiritual experiences with DMT. The most significant of these DMT experiences led him to research the substance more deeply, and this is how he found out about ayahuasca. The first opportunity he had to drink ayahuasca was with a group of Shipibo healers near Pucallpa, in the context of a dieta. On the day of the ayahuasca ceremony, however, he fell ill and was unable to drink the brew. Later, he was able to drink ayahuasca in three situations before he came to Takiwasi, and he described two of those experiences as failures because of a lack of ritualization in how the ceremonies were conducted. One of them involved extremely loud, recorded music accompanied by live drummers and a multi-colored light show, which he found to detract significantly from his experience with ayahuasca. He eventually had what he considered to be a successful ceremony in his home country in Europe. Bruno first learned of Takiwasi when, during his personal research about DMT

[7] Bruno (pseud). Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. August 18, 2019.

and ayahuasca, he found a documentary film about the center, L'Ayahuasca, le Serpent et Moi. He met someone in his home region who had spent time at Takiwasi and recommended that, if Bruno wanted to understand Takiwasi and its relationship to traditional Amazonian medicine, he should do a dieta at the center. Through that acquaintance, Bruno contacted Takiwasi and arranged to do some volunteer work at the center. However, participating in a dieta was out of the question, as all of the dietas during the period he proposed to be in Perú were booked. He decided to take on the three weeks of volunteer work anyway. This is how I met him at Takiwasi in 2019.

Bruno was one of three pilgrims whom I interviewed who had, at some point since learning about traditional Amazonian medicine, felt that they might have a calling to be a curandero/a. During his own personal exploration of the DMT experience, he had come to the conclusion that he would serve others better as a therapist, possibly working within one of the developing psychedelic-assisted therapeutic settings. To that end, by the time he came to Takiwasi, he was already in graduate school studying psychology, and his visit was partially motivated by his interest in the way Takiwasi integrates Amazonian plant-medicines and psychotherapy. In exchange for working in Takiwasi's library, he was allowed to be at the center and observe, albeit at a surface level, how the team of therapists and curandero/as worked together, melding respective approaches.

During his short stint at Takiwasi, Bruno inquired with the center about the possibility of taking plants outside of a dieta. He was invited to take plantas de contención*, "containment plants" (discussed in more depth in the chapter on icaros), and work with one of Takiwasi's therapists to process his experiences with the plants (as does*

*everyone who takes plants at Takiwasi). However, he was told he would not be able to take ayahuasca. Over the next two weeks, he participated in three purga ceremonies, and he took mucura (*Petiveria alliacea*) and bobinsana (*Calliandra angustifolia, *Fig. 10) as plantas de contención. According to the curandero/as, mucura protects against spiritual attack and, on a psychological level, helps people make clear decisions when they need to make changes in their lives. Bobinsana, helps people feel more connected to their emotions and physical body. In the last few days of his stay in Tarapoto, the curandero/as and Bruno's therapist determined that, after all, he should drink ayahuasca to clarify what he had learned from taking the other plants.*

Figure 10. Bobinsana in front of a house near the Río Shilcayo in Tarapoto. Photos taken by author April 7, 2022.

From speaking with his therapist, Bruno determined that the issue that the plants were helping him work through was his unhealthy relationship with his overprotective mother. He told me that this was something he had worked through on an intellectual level with another therapist, so he was surprised that it was coming up again. During the ayahuasca ceremony that closed his time taking plants at Takiwasi he went through an experience that was symbolic of a shift in his relationship with his mother followed by

clear instructions of the next steps he needed to take in his life to solidify the positive changes he wanted to make. He called these instructions his "homework." The following is a summary of his description of the ayahuasca ceremony.

He did not feel the effects of the brew strongly until he took a second drink a couple of hours into the ceremony. He started to feel cold and wrapped himself in a blanket he brought from his hotel room. The effects of the ayahuasca became so strong that he was unable to sit up. Bruno recounted that he fell over, still wrapped in his blanket and was laying on the floor for several minutes wondering if anyone was going to say anything to him or come to help him. No one did. After a few minutes laying on the floor, he suddenly "understood" that the blanket was a representation of his mother. The blanket was trying to protect him from the cold outside, but it was not working—he was still cold. What was worse, the blanket was wrapped uncomfortably tightly around him, and his arms were starting to ache. He spent a few moments debating with himself about throwing the blanket off. Would he be more comfortable and have the freedom to spread his arms? Would he be even colder outside the blanket? As he was thinking through these possibilities, Bruno "saw" (in his ayahuasca-induced visions) that he was an insect inside a chrysalis. He had grown too big for it and needed to break out. Eventually, he threw off the blanket. When he did, he felt liberated and euphoric. He spent several minutes stretching his limbs, touching them and thinking to himself "Damn, what arms; these are a man's arms." He returned to his seat and his thoughts turned to what was to come next. At that time, he was living with his mother and felt compelled to put some healthy distance between them. He then "saw" himself living in another city that he had

visited and liked quite a lot, and he thought "There, I'm moving there." Then, his attention returned to his mother and the blanket. He thought, "This is a really nice blanket, and it has helped me a lot. I am not going to just go throw it in the river; I am not completely done with it, but it can be beside me now rather than wrapped around me." He explained that, during the ayahuasca ceremony, the metaphors seemed silly, but the metaphor of the blanket being his mother worked for him because the physical experience helped him understand his situation, which he had intellectualized, more deeply.

Though he did not connect his shift in perspective and the making of a major life decision (to move out of his mother's house) to mucura, it is interesting that this is exactly the type of situation that curandero/as say that plant helps with. Similarly, the next phase of Bruno's ceremony could be linked to bobinsana's purported effect of connecting those who take it with their emotions.

After the episode with the blanket, Bruno began thinking about his brother, and "saw" him working hard and at his business and not doing well. Bruno was filled with an urge to help his brother, but they had recently become estranged due to a disagreement. He then felt an overwhelming desire to tell his brother that he loved him and that he wanted to help him. This, he said, would be abnormal for his family. They were not the kind of people who typically shared their emotions. He told me that his mother and father had only told him that they loved him once each. In the case of his father, that exchange only happened when he fell ill and was dying. He then received another piece of

"homework," which was to call his brother, his mother, and a few of his close friends and tell them all that he loved them.

I spoke to Bruno about this experience two days after he had it. At that point, he expressed to me that he was conflicted about what he had gone through. He had gotten "advice" that seemed to make sense, and, because some of the information was delivered through physical experience, he had been able to incorporate it and make it actionable in his life. This was made easier because the insights he received also came with instructions about what to do with it. Part of what he was struggling with was that that information seemed to come to him from an outside source, without his volition. However, he was struggling with what he described as his scientific approach to understanding reality, which had served him well up to then. He had experienced "something real," but he was not able to reduce his experience to neurochemistry alone. He was left with a sense, but a lack of specific detail, that the rituals were important, the songs were important. Somehow, they all went together to result in some kind of "psychological suggestion," he opined. But he had no idea how it functioned. In the end he had to accept that it worked, and there was something "real" about it; he could not make intellectual sense of it, however. But it did work.

In the days following the ayahuasca ceremony, Bruno had spoken to his friends and family and told them he loved them. He told me that they all expressed a desire to be more emotionally open with each other in the future. He had also spoken to two of his friends about moving. They were both wanting to move to the same city Bruno was interested in and proposed that they move in together. When I followed up with Bruno in

mid-2020, he had, in fact, moved. Despite the difficulties of the, then, ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, he expressed to me that moving had been the right choice for him, as had been doing the rest of the "homework" he received from taking plant medicine at Takiwasi.

Stephanie (a pseudonym), whose story I discuss at length in chapter two, sought out Takiwasi specifically because of the center's combinatory, therapeutic approach to hosting dietas. She was unable to travel to the U.S. to participate in MDMA-assisted psychotherapy trials to treat her post traumatic stress disorder because she was unable to afford that course of action. Even though it was much more affordable, she required financial assistance from online crowd funding to be able to travel to Takiwasi. After thoroughly researching the center, she was confident that the therapists and curandero/as would be able to provide the support she needed in case she had a crisis due to her PTSD during the dieta.[8]

While I met a handful of people in Tarapoto who more closely fit the profile of shamanic tourists focused specifically on ayahuasca (as described in Fotiou's work 2010, 2014), the only one of them that I was able to interview was a young Chinese woman, Abigail (a pseudonym) who had grown up in North America. She described herself as spiritual but not religious and said that she followed a consistent practice of meditation and yoga. While between jobs, she was funding her travels through South America by offering her services as a graphic designer to hotels and tourist lodges in exchange for room and board. On her way through Iquitos, she stayed a couple of nights at a hostel that hired a "shaman" to facilitate ayahuasca ceremonies in their bar area at night. She

[8] Stephanie (pseud.). Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. December 3, 2019.

described that this hostel actively tried to “sell [ayahuasca ceremonies] because I think it’s easy money for them.”[9] She participated in two of these ayahuasca ceremonies, which she described as being poorly organized and planned last-minute. She did not receive any information about how to prepare for the ceremonies or what to expect. She was not introduced to the shaman until just prior to the second ceremony and opined that the addition of this formality was due to there being more people participating the second night. She attributed some significance to the mystique of not knowing much about the shaman and preferred that she only met him at night and had no idea what he looked like. “I feel like there’s more shaman-ness to it, or else he’s just a person, and it’s kind of, you know, more mysterious.”[10] She and the staff at the hostel referred to the person who facilitated the ceremony as a “shaman,” but, from her recounting of the way he introduced himself and the level of experience he reported having, it is likely that he was a curandero ayahuasquero, not just an ayahuasca shaman. The bar area in which the ceremonies took place was separated from a shared dining space by only a mesh screen. Other guests at the hostel were playing cards and talking in the dining area throughout the ceremonies. Understandably, she found this to be distracting. She expressed that, because her experience with ayahuasca was not as profound as she had hoped, she might explore it again at some point, but, for the foreseeable future, she would be content with using yoga and meditation to further her spiritual journey.

[9] Abigail (pseud.). Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. April 24, 2022.
[10] Ibid.

James (a pseudonym) was in his early thirties when we met in 2019. He sought out Maestro Orlando after a process of several years of disillusionment with how the U.S., his home country, treats chronic illness and psychological disorders. In researching holistic medicine, he came across information about traditional Amazonian medicine and its reputation for effectively treating and healing illnesses that the medical system of the Global North is comparatively inept at handling with long-term pharmaceutical use. "It's like, no, we're going to medicate you for the rest of your life, you know? Knowing some people with conditions like that. . . and, kind of, seeing the fallbacks and some of the really marked disadvantages. . . . And how it didn't really fix the problem. It just kind of seemed like it was sweeping it under the rug." [11] He continued to research Amazonian medicine and eventually met a "shaman" with whom he discussed plant-medicine and eventually drank ayahuasca for the first time. James was struck by the way that this person described healing with plant-medicine. "I was intrigued by what he had to say about it and, just, the portrayal of this plant as, you know, he talked about it as 'it's not like Tylenol, it's like a person.'"[12] Shortly after this, James found himself in a difficult situation. "I was freshly out of a career as a professional who was deeply unhappy with what I was doing despite being very successful with it."[13] He told me he had been unhappy with the direction his life had been going in for several years. He finished a college degree and went straight into a career in which he was making a good living. After struggling in that situation for several years, one of James's friends suggested that

[11] James (pseud.) Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. October 23, 2019.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

he contact Maestro Orlando. His friend had done a dieta at Mushuk Pakarina and thought that James might benefit from one himself. James recounted that his initial, one-off ayahuasca ceremony with the other shaman was, "very useful in a lot of ways, but it was not as directed, not as focused [as the dieta]. And, I would say, probably not as immediately useful to what my goal is now, which is self-exploration, self-improvement, and answering some questions."[14] He clarified that his goals were mostly to do with learning to be a more caring, intentional person in his personal relationships. It is worth mentioning that the plant James was taking for his dieta was ushpawasha sanango (*Tabernaemontana undulata,* Fig. 11)—a plant that is sometimes called *memoria del corazón* (memory of the heart) because it helps people remember and heal from emotionally damaging events in their past. James told me that Maestro Orlando had told him, "That I lacked self-confidence and self-esteem, love for myself. And that I lost those sometime when I was a child. And I was taken aback instantly because I was flooded with, I would say, a dozen or more memories of all these things supporting the truth of the statement from this man that I'd never met before."[15] That occurred shortly before Maestro Orlando brought James ayahuasca to drink during his dieta. While under the effects of ayahuasca, James felt physical tension in his chest that he associated with insecurity and lack of self-confidence. Then, he experienced memories of times in his childhood and adult life when he had felt that same insecurity, and then he felt the insecurity and tension begin to dissipate. "And then that idea just continued to expand

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

throughout the following ceremonies: how this behavior of mine branched into other parts of my life and explained these other behaviors that I wasn't aware of, that I've been struggling with in relationships, with work and friends and significant others. And just showing me how that lack of trust in myself would lead me to overact."[16] During his dieta, he received specific instructions to call members of his family and his significant other and have specific conversations with them. He was "told" that having these conversations would help him mend some damage he had caused in those relationships and start to be more responsible for his own part in maintaining them in a healthy way. Though he did not share the specifics of these conversations with me, he explained how, just days after finishing his dieta, he had already followed through with those instructions and felt that his relationships were already showing signs of improvement.

Figure 11. Ushpawasha sanango at Mushuk Pakarina. Photo taken by author April 1, 2022.

[16] Ibid.

When I interviewed Alexander (a pseudonym) in 2022, he was in his early forties and had just completed a dieta at Takiwasi. He had originally come to Takiwasi some years earlier to participate in a seminar for French-speakers. The seminar involved three ayahuasca ceremonies and a short dieta. In his first ayahuasca ceremony, he encountered the Virgin Mary, who embraced him. He was overwhelmed by a sense of compassion and love and—in his ayahuasca vision which, he said, felt real even though he assumed it was not actually happening to his physical body—was then eaten by a giant snake. The curandero who oversaw that ceremony told him that the snake was a representation of ayahuasca and being eaten by it meant that he had a close, personal connection to ayahuasca. A few years later, he was diagnosed with a terminal genetic disorder, and his doctors in Europe told him he had only months to live. So, he attended another seminar at Takiwasi looking for either a miracle of healing or a way of coming to terms with death. In an ayahuasca vision, he encountered a group of old men: curanderos. One of the curanderos approached him, held out a strand of DNA in the familiar double-helix shape, and directed Alexander to take it in his hands and massage it. Two days later, during the short dieta, his symptoms left him, and, as he reports the situation, he was cured of his genetic disorder.

Since then, he had gone through a divorce, started a new relationship, and was in the process of moving from Europe to México. He participated in a dieta in 2022 to seek guidance from plant-medicines about his spirituality and whether ayahuasca's affinity for him meant that he was being directed to become a curandero. What he realized was that he had pieced together a confused spirituality in a "New-Age" style. He had gone through

his life picking up practices from "Buddhism, Hinduism, Egyptian, Amazonian, and Catholic—New Age stuff. And the curandero told me, 'Ok, put it away, it will be totally done after the diet.' So yesterday he confirmed to me, 'it will be done, and now you have to choose your spirituality.'"[17] The curandero explained that Alexander had seen "guides," (the animals, plants, and people from his visions) but that he could not connect to them or learn from them until he chose a definite spiritual path to follow. "He told me, 'It's closed because you have no spirituality, you have a fake spirituality.'"[18] Alexander left that dieta without finding all of the information he was looking for. He had concluded that Catholicism, of the animist-syncretic variety that most curandero/as in the region identify with, made sense for him as a spiritual framework. However, when I last spoke to him in 2022, he was still in the process of reevaluating his whole spiritual life, largely in an effort to make sense of the miraculous cure he had received years earlier. He was confident, however, that his way forward, spiritually, was through Catholicism. It is worth noting that he dieted ajo sacha (*Mansoa alliacea*) and coca (*Erythroxylum coca*), both of which, curandero/as informed me, are "vocational plants" or plants that help people find clear direction in their life when making difficult, important decisions. Alexander's confusion about his spirituality would make sense according to the typical pattern of how learning and healing take place during a dieta. As curandero/as explained to me, the plants metabolize the root causes of physical and psychological problems. As the dieter then purges what has been metabolized, they often experience the opposite of

[17] Alexander (pseud.). Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarpoto, Perú. May 1, 2022.
[18] Ibid.

their desired outcome. Someone dieting ajo sacha in search of mental clarity is likely to experience confusion throughout their diet. Toward the end of the ritual, the dieter having purged whatever was causing confusion, will then gain the perspective they were after. Alexander's experience seems to have followed that pattern, though he was figuring some things out as he entered the post-dieta.

Ana (a pseudonym) was a Peruvian woman in her early forties who had started participating in dietas at Takiwasi several years earlier as a way to connect to her spiritual roots, which she described as a combination of Catholicism and Andean/Amazonian spirituality based in plant-medicine. She had inherited these practices from both sides of her family. She had relatives on her mother's and father's sides of the family that were curandero/as. She told me that, within the Catholic side of her spirituality, she had a close, personal connection to the Virgin Mary. She described that she had eventually reconciled with Christ but had only been led to Christ through the protection of the Virgin Mary and healing through dietas. She had begun to participate in dietas and work with Amazonian medicine in search of relational healing in her marriage and emotional healing from abuse she had suffered from different male figures throughout her life. She told me that, she believes,

> When someone comes to do a dieta, it is because they are in a period of existential crisis or a difficult period, something they can't overcome alone. I don't think people come here like they go to Cancún, to the beach to relax. In my case, I was going through a very difficult period of depression, and I was having suicidal thoughts. And, being as I am a mother, I was experiencing a lot of remorse from having those thoughts. I wasn't able to make anything of my life or my role as a mother. My life and my marriage felt empty. I decided to do something about it—that was to come to Takiwasi.[19]

[19] Ana (pseud.). Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. May 23, 2022.

She went on to describe to me that all she was looking for in her first dieta was a way to figure out how to be content in her marital relationship and the roles she had taken on in her life. On the contrary, what she learned from the plants and explored in therapy was that,

> I had to recognize that my marriage wasn't working. So, I got divorced. And, yes, with work—because I've been working with the plants for five years now—I have been able to develop my spirituality. . . and I don't have depression anymore—no suicidal thoughts, nothing like that. I overcame it. And I've started to do things with my life that I really like to do. This is something that I've learned thanks to the plants and psychotherapy.[20]

During her dieta in 2022, one of the plants she was dieting was *chuchuwasi* (*Maytenus krukovii*), which, curandero/as told me, helps to heal transgenerational relationships and problems related to sexuality (physically and psychologically). She also dieted *wayruro* (*Ormosia coccinea*) which, I was told, among its many properties, is a plant that provides spiritual protection. Ana attributed dreams she had during the dieta to the effects of these two plants.

> I had a lot of dreams of wars between the Western and the Indigenous parts of my ancestors. And I had dreams about the relationships between men and women in my lineage where the women had to shut up, be martyrs, tolerate all of the abuses of power carried out by men. During the first three days of the diet, a lot of my dreams were about that violence. Later on, I started to sing; I had a feeling that I wanted to sing and feel connected to God, who was inside me. And I wasn't afraid of anything because God was with me. So, I had to write a song about that during the dieta.[21]

When I asked if she thought the song might be an icaro, she said it was not. She explained that she had been inspired to write other songs during dietas, and she

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

considered them to be “medicine songs” but not icaros. Rather, she said that they represented her developing reconnection with a part of her creative femininity that had been repressed by the messages she had absorbed throughout the course of her life about the social role of women, especially that they should be quiet. The songs are a way that she can find her creative voice and feel safe while doing it. Ana described that these things are lessons that she carries with her all the time now. She feels the protection of the plants with her whenever she needs to call on them “because they are in my veins.”[22]

The reports from these pilgrims point to an important aspect of shamanic pilgrimage that is mediated by dietas, as opposed to ayahuasca alone. As I describe in detail in chapter two, the goal of a dieta is to incorporate the plant into the being of the dieter, physically and spiritually. Dietas in which ayahuasca plays a supporting role provide an interpretive frame through which pilgrims are challenged to seriously consider and potentially incorporate Amazonian animistic views into their own understandings of the world. As Stephanie and Bruno’s accounts show, however, ayahuasca can still be an important part of this process, as the altered state of consciousness and neuroplasticity it induces (discussed in chapter three) can deepen and clarify information imparted by the plants being dieted. The vivid personal encounters that dieters have with non-human entities, both inside and outside of ayahuasca ceremonies, are key to catalyzing changes in their perspectives. I suggest that this is one of the ways that shamanic pilgrimage challenges the appropriative tendencies of the broader phenomenon of ayahuasca tourism (Brabec de Mori 2014).

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[22] Ibid.

Curandero/as and Centers

I interviewed and participated in the various rituals, which I discuss in the chapter on icaros, with four of Takiwasi's curandero/as and with Maestro Orlando and his apprentice. I was able to interview some of the curandero/as twice. In total, I conducted twelve interviews with curandero/as. Five of these were with Maestro Orlando. Because the curandero/as at Takiwasi have so many responsibilities to the rehabilitation patients and in their other roles at the center, it was difficult to find time for more than brief conversations. Aside from attending to patients and overseeing healing rituals, some of the curandero/as are also therapists; some of them are directly involved in the maintenance of the center's infrastructure; and some of them care for, collect, and prepare plants for use in healing. The curandero/as at Takiwasi commit extensive time to their many responsibilities. This made it difficult to navigate conducting my research without being too disruptive to these people's lives. Thus, outside of the handful of focused interviews I was able to secure, the most extensive interaction I had with curandero/as at Takiwasi was as a participant in rituals.

Conducting research with Maestro Orlando and Mushuk Pakarina was different in that we were able to have more prolonged interactions more often. This was due in part to the reduced number of visitors at his center in 2022. The number of pilgrims he was hosting had slowly been increasing since the beginning of 2022, as pandemic's travel restrictions were loosened. Even in 2019, after only having known each other for a few months, he was very straightforward and open with me about wanting to collaboratively participate in my project. As such, he was open to doing several structured interviews and

was happy to have me record any discussions we had when he stopped by my tambo to check on me during my dietas.

Of the curanderos/as at Takiwasi, five out of the eight that I observed and participated in ceremonies with were men and three were women. My count here is based on them having received icaros—either from master healers or plant-spirits—and having taken on the role of singing those songs during healing ceremonies. Some of them would likely have been considered apprentice curanderos/as rather than maestros/as because of their lower level of experience. As far as I observed, these individuals only assisted the more experienced healers and did not oversee rituals on their own. Because of the difficulty of scheduling interviews with Takiwasi's curandero/as, I prioritized interviewing the more experienced of them. Every curandero/a I interviewed would more than likely be considered a maestro/a due their expansive repertoire of icaros, knowledge of healing plants, and each having often well over a decade of experience as a healer.

One of the curanderos, don Edgardo Tuanama (Quechua-Lamista, self-identified), is from a nearby community in San José de Sisa Province, two of them are mestizo (from Tarapoto and Iquitos respectively), Dr. Jacques is French, and a curandero who joined Takiwasi in 2022 is from Northern Europe. He apprenticed for several years with a family of Shipibo healers outside Pucallpa and had been a practicing curandero for over a decade by the time he came to Takiwasi.

Maestro Orlando is Quechua-Lamista,[23] from the community of Llucanayacu approximately two and half hours by car from Tarapoto. His apprentice was a man in his early thirties from North America. There are two other curanderos who own and operate traditional Amazonian medicine centers in Llucanayacu. Both are near relatives of Maestro Orlando, and one of them, Maestro Winston Tangoa Chujandama, Maestro Orlando's cousin, worked at Takiwasi as a curandero for many years. Their grandfather, Maestro Aquilino Chujandama, initiated Jacques Mabit into vegetalismo and was a cofounder of Takiwasi. Though I will not be able to go into the shared history of these curanderos in depth, it is important to point out that Maestro Aquilino Chujandama was one of the most respected curanderos in the region. I have heard him referred to as *el maestro de los maestros* (the master of masters). Many of the curandero/as currently practicing in the area around Tarapoto have worked at Takiwasi and are, to a degree,

[23] I am using the term Quechua-Lamista that I encountered most commonly when Quechua-speaking, indigenous people in San Martín described themselves. For Maestro Orlando, identifying as Quechua was a shorthand for the more complex way he thinks about his ethnic identity. During one of our early recorded interviews, he introduced himself as "Orlando Chujandama Huazanga. I come from the indigenous race that speaks Quechua." Throughout my time with him, Maestro Orlando used the words *indígena* (Indigenous) and *nativo* (Native) interchangeably, though he used "nativo" more frequently. On a few occasions, he specifically identified himself as Quechua but followed up with a clarification of "*descendiente quechua"* (Quechua descendent) or "*nativo de habla quechua*" (Native who speaks Quechua). As I got to know him better, he unpacked this further, ultimately telling me a story about his family being descendants of the Chanka people who became part of the Native community in Lamas and eventually founded Llucanayacu. I recount more of this story in this chapter. Scazzocchio (1979: 48-49) explained some of the complexity around self-identification of Native peoples in the San Martín region as it relates to the Quechua community in Lamas. Members of this community often self-identity as *Llakwash*. Scazzocchio spelled this word *Jakwash*. The J and LL approximate /ʎ/ (IPA), though I have also heard them pronounced closer to /ʒ/. As an ethnonym, Llakwash is used to differentiate *runa legitimio*, "legitimate people/community members" from other Quechua-speaking communities in the region: *chikan runa,* "strangers/foreign people" (Scazzocchio 1979: 48). This scheme differentiates both of these groups from un-Christianized, non-Quechua-speaking indigenous people who are sometimes referred to as *awka*, "stranger/savage/adversary" (Doherty Vohna et al 2007: 42; Scazzocchio 1979: 48). Indigenous people who speak Quechua and trace their lineage back to Lamas typically self-identify as Lamista/Quechua-Lamista (as did the curandero at Takiwasi). Scazzocchio also stated that the term Nativo/a is used more frequently since the Peruvian government began to officially recognize *Comunidades Nativas* (Native Communities) in 1968.

recipients of Maestro Aquilino's influence. At the very least, he played an important role in the development of Maestro Orlando and Jacques Mabit as curanderos and was an important node in the network of traditional Amazonian medicine.

Curandero/as at both centers use the terms *medicina tradicional* (traditional medicine), *curanderismo*, and *vegetalismo* to refer to their practice of healing through relationship with and use of plants. Labate (2014) points out that, due to the history of intense cultural mixing in the Western Amazon, these terms, which initially might seem too general, capture the historically contingent nature of curanderismo more accurately than formulations that seek to delineate specific practices of healing that belong to particular ethnic groups. This is not to say that there are not variations between communities; in fact, there are notable variations from healer to healer, but it is significant to note that there is a shared history, technique, and underlying ethos to Amazonian curanderismo and, especially in the North-Western Amazon, a shared epistemology of disease and healing. This is what curandero/as mean when they use these terms.

The curandero/as at both centers also differentiate themselves and traditional Amazonian medicine from shamanism, ayahuasca shamanism, and what they see as a trend of charlatan ayahuasqueros—*not curandero/as*—who are involved in the most extreme iterations of decontextualized shamanic tourism. In order to differentiate his practice from ayahuasca tourism more clearly, Maestro Orlando deploys the term *ciencias ancestrales* (ancestral sciences) to specify the technique for healing and learning

to heal that he learned from his "*antepasados*"[24] (ancestors: literally, those who went before). He was clear in describing to me that by "ancestors" he was referring to, specifically, his past relatives from the Quechua-Lamista ethnic group, whom his grandparents told him were descended from an offshoot of the Chanka people—a group that, as his grandparents' story goes, arrived in the Upper Amazon after fleeing Inca and Spanish invasion. He was also referring more generally to a social ecology, including plants, animals, rivers, mountains, and many groups of humans from many cultural backgrounds who had all contributed to a body of information and technique. Taken together, these things are the ciencias ancestrales. This shared network of relations and knowledge has been built over countless generations of inter-communal contact (both human and non-human). Scazzocchio recounted that *sinchi yachak* (powerful people of knowledge/master healers) from Quechua communities in the upper Amazon around Lamas and Tarapoto would complete their apprenticeships when, after being guided through two years of dieta by a master, they would travel to the lowlands to learn medicine from healers in other communities (Scazzocchio 1979: 180). Maestro Orlando was explicit that he learned first from his grandfather, Maestro Aquilino Chujandama, who had learned through dieting and traveling to meet other curandero/as (mostly "*nativos*," according to Maestro Orlando)[25] in the Peruvian lowlands, Ecuador, Colombia, and Brazil. Maestro Orlando had similarly spent a lifetime learning from his grandfather,

[24] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. March 22, 2022

[25] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. September 18, 2019.

through his own diets, and by traveling to those same areas. He also learned from the blended team of Indigenous, mestizo, and European curandero/as at Takiwasi, where he worked for a number of years following his grandfather's death in 1993.

For Maestro Orlando and the curandero/as at Takiwasi, what differentiated their centers and their practice of traditional medicine and the ciencias ancestrales from shamanism and the more deleterious effects of tourism is legitimation through a proper approach to building relationships with the plants of the forest. They purport to have learned this way of operating through experience dieting with plants and from collaborating with other curandero/as. Maestro Orlando was clear in stating that the ciencias ancestrales do *not* necessitate that a curandero/a come from a particular (i.e., Native) background. What is fundamental to the ciencias ancestrales is acknowledgement that the knowledge that comprises the basis of the ciencias is inherited from Native Amazonians, who were "the first scientists,"[26] Maestro Orlando stated. This acknowledgement is enacted by curandero/as who "do good work" and approach the plants with respect, through dietas. The ciencias ancestrales are traditional medicine. This does not, however, imply a static, ancient practice. Rather, it involves and requires continuous updating through the work of every new generation of curandero/as. This knowledge can only be gained through years of direct, personal experience taking plants. Furthermore, in order to be a curandero/a, one's character and constitution must be sufficiently strong so that the plants themselves select that person as "*lo adecuado*"[27]

[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

(adequate, or the right person for the job). This is a key point to understanding the conflict between *legitimacy* (represented by the ciencias ancestrales) and *authenticity* (represented by ayahuasca-focused shamanic tourism). An ayahuasquero can present themselves as "authentic," but the plants choose who is legitimate. This conflict is an instance of what Jackson, referencing Clifford (1997: 46), meant by "the 'tense interaction' between identity as politics versus identity as inheritance" (Jackson 2019: 43).

This illustrates the importance of non-human agency in curanderismo and in Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina's strategies to use dietas to engage with pilgrims. As I discuss in chapter two, the behavioral restrictions and motion away from human sociality that comprise the dieta are pre-symbolic (iconic and indexical) signals to the plants that the dieter is recognizing their selfhood (Kohn 2013) and respectfully approaching them for help. After that, it is up to the plant, with encouragement from the curandero/a to decide if and to what degree they will interact with the dieter. This is also why it is important to continue the behavioral restrictions of the post-dieta (which include sexual abstinence, avoidance of spicy foods, avoidance of sweet foods, avoidance of pork, and avoidance of fried and oily foods) lest the plant, who is now inhabiting the body of the dieter be offended. This would result in the plant exiting the dieter's body and possibly injuring them in retribution for the insult.

To demonstrate this point, I provide some extracts from conversations I had with Maestro Orlando here:

> Por eso mi abuelo decía, "el hombre que quiere aprender a ser curandero, que se ajusta los pantalones para que no lo caiga." Porque aprender medicina no es fácil.

> Aprender medicina no es tomar dos, tres veces y "ya soy curandero." Sigue el proceso: dietas, dietas. Tienes que cortarte todo en la dieta. Tu familia, tu comida, la ciudad, todo. . . . Yo, por ejemplo, yo no como chancho. No como varias de pescados. ¿Por qué? Porque la misma planta me selecciona la comida. Cuando uno dieta en tres, cuatro meses, dice 'éste, sí; éste, no; éste, no." Y yo hago eso.[28]
>
> (That is why my grandfather used to say, "The man who wants to learn to be a curandero should tighten his belt so his pants don't fall down." Because learning medicine isn't easy. Learning the medicine isn't take it two or three times and "now I'm a curandero." The process continues: diets, diets. You have to cut everything else out of your life during the diet. Your family, your food, the city, everything. . . . I, for example, don't eat pork. I don't eat many kinds of fish. Why? Because the plant itself chooses my food. When one diets for three, four months, the plant says "this, yes; this, no; this; no." And that's what I do.)

Fotiou pointed out that, during her research, she worked primarily with ayahuasqueros and travelers who attended ayahuasca ceremonies facilitated by those ayahuasqueros. She clarifies that,

> In Iquitos the word curandero is used to denote someone who can heal using plants or other methods. It is not necessarily someone who leads ayahuasca ceremonies even though sometimes they do. In several discussions with locals they stressed the fact that a certain person who did ceremonies was not a curandero and that a curandero is someone who can heal a wide range of conditions, using a variety of plants. . . . Ayahuasqueros are considered the weakest practitioners by the other specialists [curanderos]. All other specialists require a much more rigorous training and thus are harder to find. I only had the opportunity to work with ayahuasqueros and ayahuasquero paleros [ayahuasqueros who also know how to administer medicine from tree barks]. (Fotiou 2010: 64-65)

She goes on to say that, during her research, she was not able to observe ayahuasqueros making ayahuasca. This was partly because it is "very common for Shamans to be very protective of their knowledge. In a couple of cases the reason was that they did not make their own ayahuasca brew, but bought it from another shaman" (Fotiou 2010: 65). These

[28] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. October 12, 2019

passages from Fotiou exemplify a contrast that Maestro Orlando pointed out to me repeatedly:

> Yo conozco mi planta porque ésta es mi zona. Y él que quiere ser un curandero, debe conocer toda la variedad de plantas. Hay personas que son “curanderos”—no conocen ni las plantas porque compran. Así es: compran. Pero yo conozco mi planta. Yo sé que parte de la planta se utiliza y para qué se utiliza: tallo, raíz, hoja, o flores. Esa es la forma del curandero.[29]
>
> (I know my plants because this is my area/space. And someone that wants to be a curandero should know all the types of plants. There are people that are “curanderos”— they don’t even know the plants because they buy them. That’s how it is: they buy them. But I know my plants. I know what part of the plant to use and why to use it: stem, root, leaf, or flowers. That is the way to be a curandero.)

He went on to describe why this is important, not just for reasons of clarifying legitimate curanderismo in the ciencias ancestrales, but for pragmatic reasons that, to Maestro Orlando, have to do with reciprocal respect for the plants, for the people who visit his center to take plants, and for his role as a curandero. These reasons, of course, are partially what confers legitimacy:

> Yo lo preparo. Por eso, yo sé qué cantidad de dosis le voy a dar a una persona. No lo puedo dar sobre dosis. Porque si no, nos cae mal. . . . Y hay personas que quieren ser curanderos, pueden ir tomando años plantas y no son nada. Porque no es lo adecuado; no es el elegido; no es el seleccionado. . . . pero nunca llega a ser lo que la medicina ancestral necesita. . . . Hay mucha gente que viene, toma plantas, se va—ya son ‘curanderos.’ Y ahora le están tergiversando muchas veces a la ayahuasca y a las plantas medicinales con cuentos.[30]
>
> (I prepare all the plants that I give to people. That is how I know how much to give to a person. I can’t give people an overdose. If I didn’t do it that way, it would be bad for all of us. . . . And there are people that want to be curanderos, they can take plants for years, but they aren’t anything. Because they aren’t up to it; they aren’t chosen, they aren’t selected. . . . They will never be what the

[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

> ancestral medicine needs. . . . There are lots of people who come, they take plants, they leave—now they are "curanderos." And now, a lot of the time, they are distorting/misrepresenting ayahuasca and the medicinal plants with stories.)

Expressing a similar sentiment, don Edgardo Tuanama, one of the curanderos from Takiwasi told me,

> Mira, yo recomiendo, a todas las personas que vienen a Takiwasi, tener confianza porque en Takiwasi tenemos personas profesionales que tienden de planta, que tienden de las ceremonias de ayahuasca, que entienden sobre dar purga—la dosis. . . . No se nos puede decir que las plantas no son poderosas, no curan. Es dar resultados. Y eso—se ven las personas que son sanas.[31]
>
> (Look, I recommend, to all the people who come to Takiwasi, to have confidence because, at Takiwasi, we have professionals who take care of the plants, who take care of the ayahuasca ceremonies, who understand about giving purgative plants—the dosage. . . . They can't tell us that the plants aren't powerful, that they don't heal. It's about the results. And that—anyone can see the people who are healed.)

Ayahuasca Ceremonies and Dietas

As I came to find out, Maestro Orlando, like Takiwasi, does not, except on rare occasions, facilitate ayahuasca sessions at his center unless they are contextualized within a dieta. However, he is well aware that ayahuasca is, in large part, what is drawing global interest to traditional Amazonian medicine. As such, he sometimes travels to facilitate ayahuasca ceremonies. When I asked about this, he was straightforward that it was a way to meet people in person who might come to his center to have a more serious encounter with the plants, or, if they gained something from his ayahuasca ceremonies, they might recommend his center to a friend. To further complicate matters, for newcomers to his

[31]Tuanama, don Edgardo. Interview with author. Audio recording. June 7, 2022.

center, Maestro Orlando offers *dietas con ayahuasca*, "ayahuasca diets." As with his trips to facilitate ayahuasca ceremonies, these diets are a way of introducing people to vegetalismo through ayahuasca. These ayahuasca diets, not to be confused with the pre-ayahuasca diet (Gearin and Labate 2018), is a full-fledged dieta requiring isolation in the forest, abstinence from salt, sex, etc. However, along with dieting a master plant, the dieter is also taking ayahuasca two to three times per week for a maximum of three weeks. Throughout the course of my second diet with Maestro Orlando—though he did not tell me this explicitly until the end of the diet, during which I was not taking ayahuasca—while ayahuasca diets can be profound and lead to important insights and healing, they are an introduction and usually focused on the individual undertaking the diet. However, longer diets of a month or more that involve only two ayahuasca ceremonies (one to open and one to close the diet) are more focused on learning from the master plant being dieted. In both cases, ayahuasca plays a supporting role, but the longer diet assumes that the dieter has already been introduced to vegetalismo and is ready to explore it more deeply. It is important at this point that I clarify that this is how Maestro Orlando works. While the underlying ethos, to my understanding, is shared by most vegetalistas, this exact way of operating is specific to him, and was developed, as he described it, in consultation with the plants.

At Takiwasi, one must be involved in some process of taking plants, be it a dieta or plantas de contención, in order to participate in an ayahuasca ceremony. To my knowledge, none of the curandero/as at Takiwasi hold ayahuasca ceremonies anywhere else, not that they would have time to, given how busy they are with their various

responsibilities to the center. Dietas at Takiwasi involve one ayahuasca ceremony, to open the dieta. I heard, and it was confirmed to me by Dr. Jaime (Jaime Torres, Executive Director and curandero at Takiwasi), that Takiwasi used to open and close dietas with ayahuasca ceremonies. Through experience, they determined that the closing ceremony did not provide sufficient benefit to dieters to warrant the complications that it incurred.

Ayahuasca seekers, especially those who take on an apprenticeship, have commonly been cited as being motivated to learn Amazonian medicine in order to bring the lessons it has to teach about collaboration, reciprocity, and rethinking human relations to non-human life to the wider world (Brabec de Mori 2014; Labate 2014). Brabec de Mori is skeptical about whether involvement with ayahuasca can achieve such a goal, leastways without also eroding those exact values through the furthering of capitalist consumption (Brabec de Mori 2014: 226). Given the discussion I have presented here so far, I share his concern, especially while the majority of foreign travelers' exposure to vegetalismo is solely through exoticist ayahuasca ceremonies. However, it is possible that the combination of ayahuasca and dietas is more likely to produce the types of results that Brabec de Mori dares not hope for. Two studies on the neuropharmacology of psychedelics, one still in pre-print as of my writing, suggest that the neuroplasticity that they induce renders those who take them likely to reevaluate their worldview during the days and weeks following a psychedelic experience (Carhart-Harris and Friston 2019; Zeifman et al. 2022). Though an ayahuasca ceremony, on its own, could induce someone to reconsider their perspectives, moving that person directly into a dieta during the period of neuroplasticity seems, to me, much more likely to confront them with non-psychedelic

experiences that demand a restructuring of their worldview. While that person is more open to considering information outside their normal perspective, a dieta places them in a situation that begs them to expand their frame of reference and is designed to engender encounters with non-human intelligences.

While I completely understand that this could be a shocking prospect to some of those who read this dissertation (it was to me the first time I experienced it for myself), every single dieter whom I interviewed reported the types of experiences that I have recounted in this dissertation: highly organized, seemingly intelligent, instructive interactions—often resulting in healing—with what they understood to be the plants. It is just such experiences that led me and several of the dieters I met to "taking animism seriously" (Willerslev 2007: 181). As I discuss in the following chapters, these types of experiences challenge the assumptions of pilgrims not acculturated into animist epistemologies and ontologies. While some pilgrims, like Bruno, were left ambivalent—convinced of the power of his experiences while unsure of the ontological status of the plant spirits with whom he interacted—others, like Alexander and Stephanie, embraced the ontological shift of including non-human selves into their worldviews.

Indigenous Tourism Strategies

One of the primary concerns that research on ayahuasca tourism has raised is that tourism degrades local culture. Specifically, as I described above, the focus on ayahuasca has led a new generation of shamans to eschew the strenuous process of training to be a curandero/a—who knows and heals with many plants—in favor of the faster path to

economic advantage by facilitating ayahuasca ceremonies for tourists (Brabec de Mori 2014; Labate 2014). Brabec de Mori has also been vocal about the exploitative motivations of tourists and “gringo shamans” who apprentice with indigenous healers and then take their new-found knowledge of Amazonian medicine back to their home countries with no regard for the effects they are having in Amazonian communities (Castillo 2022, 49:30-50:12). In the following section, I describe some of the strategies that Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina use to encourage visitors to be personally invested in learning about local culture through plant-medicine, mitigate potential negative effects on ecological and cultural sustainability that their interactions with pilgrims might otherwise have, and distribute the economic advantage gained from serving pilgrims to local communities regardless of pilgrims’ level of personal investment in such efforts.

While I did not learn this until Maestro Orlando and I had gotten to know each other over the course of nearly three years, the money earned through Mushuk Pakarina and his work abroad goes beyond simply supporting his immediate family and the maintenance of the center. Though he does not generally communicate it to those who visit the center, Maestro Orlando has contributed significantly to projects improving the infrastructure of Llucanayacu. He donated the money for the construction of a community meeting hall (Fig. 12). He also contributed significantly to a years-long, community-wide project to develop a system for water catchment and distribution (Fig. 13). This project’s first goal was to provide running water to the village’s schools which serve the equivalent of elementary- and middle-school-age children. After that, the goal was to expand water distribution to every home in the community. I observed community

members installing some of the piping for this system, and, upon returning to the U.S., I heard that these projects had been completed. While providing running water to the whole community is a major accomplishment, it is my understanding that the plan is to expand the project to include water purification so the community can have easier access to potable water.

According to Maestro Orlando, many of the people who regularly come to the center for diets have taken it upon themselves to bring school supplies, toys, and clothes that they donate to the schools and families of the community when they come for diets. Maestro Orlando also recruits help from some families from the community to prepare food for dieters, clean the bedclothes that dieters use, and make any necessary repairs to the center's tambos and maloca, which are constantly being eaten away by termites and the tropical climate. All of these people are paid for their contributions. In this way, Maestro Orlando's collaborations with dieters allow him to be more actively involved in collaborative projects with the community. Though some dieters choose to be direct participants in these collaborations through donations to the schools, because of the way that Maestro Orlando uses the center's earnings, dieters might be unwitting contributors to community projects regardless of them giving donations. This is one of the important strategies that Maestro Orlando employs that fits within the academic discussion of indigenous tourism movements (Bunten and Graburn 2018). Along with the center's focus on dieta contributing to experiential cultural education (for example, learning about local cultural perspectives regarding non-humans by interacting with them directly), Mushuk Pakarina is owned, operated, and maintained through the collaborative efforts of

Figure 12. Outside (top) and inside (bottom) of community meeting hall at Llucanayacu. Photos taken by author March 28, 2022.

Figure 13. This water storage tank at Llucanayacu was built during the 2010s as the first phase of the water distribution system. In 2022 the community was working to connect it to a plumbing system to distribute water to the community's schools. Photos taken by author March 28, 2022.

Indigenous people. Dieters are also collaborators in this project, whether they know it or not. At the same time this approach allows dieters and curanderos (Maestro Orlando and his apprentice) to be co-participants in the creation of the tourist/pilgrim experience, often conferring a heightened sense of "authenticity" or in this case legitimacy to the experience. In this way Maestro Orlando's strategy for interfacing with pilgrims is also a type of cooperative tourism, in which visitors and hosts co-create the tourist experience (Carson and Pennings 2017).

Takiwasi similarly directs earnings from hosting diets to many projects beyond the center's main function treating substance use disorders. During the dieta orientation process, Takiwasi informs dieters about some of the research and community support projects that are funded by dieters. Among these projects that I was able to get information about are, first, the Nuwa project (discussed in chapter four), in which Takiwasi has been collaborating with a group of women from an Awajún community to develop a community-maintained garden, the products of which are used to prepare teas and herbal medicines that are sold in markets and grocery stores in the region. The proceeds from this project are fed back into its expansion. While the women contribute the knowledge of the recipes and cultivation of the plants, Takiwasi contributes by helping the Awajún community with knowledge about managing money, developing packaging for the products, and developing a method for consistency with scaled up production of the recipes. Second, though the project was only recently started while I was there, collaboration with a Quechua-Lamista group near Lamas on an initiative similar the Nuwa project was underway. Third, researchers from Takiwasi were involved

in a project to survey students in secondary schools in Tarapoto to look for early signs of substance addiction and then work with students, counselors, and parents to identify and support at-risk students.

Takiwasi is also undertaking efforts to cultivate medicinal plants that are becoming more scarce due to climate change, deforestation, and the demands of tourism. These plants are being grown in the botanical garden that encompasses the center's main property on the outskirts of Tarapoto and on a larger plot of land in the forest that belongs to the center. The plant that is most at risk is ayahuasca. As the person overseeing the project described to me, ayahuasca has become rare in the area around Tarapoto, and Takiwasi has become a type of sanctuary for the vine, so they are trying to begin to repopulate the area. Also high on the list of plants that they are trying to replenish is ajo sacha (wild garlic), which the curandero/as and those who help them gather plants have noted is becoming harder to find in the area. In a related sense, Horák (2013: 39) writes that Takiwasi, through maintaining its decades-long relationships with curandero/as from the surrounding area, has also become a repository of knowledge about traditional medicines. Some young curandero/as from the surrounding area, he reports, will come to the center to learn about medicine and techniques that are being lost in their home communities. These are among the ways that Mushuk Pakarina and Takiwasi collaboratively contribute to community projects and projects that contribute to cultural sustainability and Indigenous self-determination.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the complexities and potential difficulties and benefits involved in shamanic tourism. I described a parallel development within shamanic tourism as it is occurring in two medicine centers, Mushuk Pakarina and Centro Takiwasi, in the San Martín region of the Upper Peruvian Amazon. This development is characterized by close parallels with spiritual and religious pilgrimage practices including a reliance on liminality, distance from society, and a particular kind of communitas shared by humans and master plants. As such, I refer to it as shamanic pilgrimage. By insisting that ayahuasca use be overseen by experienced curandero/as in the context of a dieta or similar process of treatment with other medicinal plants, these centers are intentionally pushing back against touristic practices that encourage the decontextualization and commodification of ayahuasca and other markers of indigenous identity (Warden 2015). Rather, these centers, more effectively in some instances than in others, reinterpret payment from tourists through the ethos of yanapay or collaboration and reciprocity. While this is partly an effort to distance themselves from the negative connotations of exoticist, ayahuasca-focused tourism, it also involves the enactment of strategies based in collaboration that, through dieta and a rootedness in respectfully relating to the plants, encourage tourist-pilgrims to reconsider their worldviews and potentially adjust how they interact with Amazonian peoples and the non-human ecology of selves that make up the forest (Kohn 2013).

Chapter Two
La Dieta:
The Semiotics of Interspecies Relationality in Vegetalismo *and the* Ciencias Ancestrales

Introduction

In Amazonian curanderismo, as practiced by the curandero/as at Centro Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina, *la dieta*, "the diet," is the foundational technique by which they learn curanderismo. It is also used as a ritualized technique for healing. "Diet," in this sense, goes beyond restricting the intake of certain foods. It also involves sexual abstinence and social isolation as the dieter spends a minimum of one week to a maximum of three months alone in the forest while ingesting a concentrated, liquid preparation of a *planta maestra* (master/teacher plant). The dieter is visited once or twice per day by a curandero/a (or someone who is assisting the curandero/a) who, as quickly and in as few words as possible, checks on the dieter's wellbeing and delivers a small, bland meal along with the plant preparation. During the course of my research in Perú, I participated in two dietas. My first dieta, in 2019, was one week long. When I returned to Perú in 2022, I had plans to participate in two, possibly three more dietas, because, by that time, I had realized that the dieta, not ayahuasca, was the basis of curanderismo at both centers where I was conducting research. However, under the advice of curandero/as, I was limited to a single, three-week dieta in 2022.

Beginning in November of 2021, I began to seriously make plans to return to Perú to finish the field research I had begun before the Covid-19 pandemic. I had stayed in touch with Takiwasi, and they informed me that they would be happy to collaborate with me for another stint of research. I was keeping a close eye on news of the public health

situation, distribution of vaccines, and international travel guidelines to gauge the reality of a return trip. On top of this, I had been consistently in touch with Maestro Orlando and other friends in the Tarapoto area, and they kept me up to date on the public health situation in areas where the popular news sources seldom provided useful information. While regional health reports were readily available, Maestro Orlando was my only source of information about the situation in Chazuta and Llucanayacu.

During the rainy months of 2020 to 2021, a terrible illness swept through the Huallaga River Valley—and, indeed, most of Perú—affecting the city of Tarapoto as well as smaller population centers such as Chazuta and Llucanayacu. Maestro Orlando informed me that, "They say people are dying because they are getting dengue and covid at the same time."[32] In determining if, how, and when to return to Perú, I was carefully monitoring these factors so that I could make the most informed decision about conducting research in a safe and ethical manner. On one hand, I considered it important that the Covid-19 pandemic be controlled to the point that I would be unlikely to make myself a vector for spreading the virus or having my presence be an undue burden on my research collaborators during an already difficult time. On the other hand, I wanted to be sure that I could get access to medical care beyond what curandero/as had to offer if I were to contract a more serious illness, such as dengue compounded with Covid-19. Taken together, these things led me to consider that I would want the hospitals and clinics

[32] For more on the epidemiology and public health discussion of the co-occurrence of the 2021 dengue outbreak and the Covid-19 pandemic see Hasan et al. 2022. According to this study, over 14,000 cases of dengue were reported in Perú from January to August of 2021—a 34% increase over the previous year. The department of San Martín reported 3,712 of these, making it the third most affected department in the country.

in the area to not be overtaxed so that, if I were to need care, I would be much less likely to be taking up attention and space that a local person might also need but be unable to access because of my being there.

As the rainy season for 2021 to 2022 arrived in November of 2021, both dengue and Covid-19 seemed to have been brought more or less under control, or at least infection rates did not spike like they had the previous year. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, international travel was halted during 2020 and remained limited into 2021. By early 2022, both Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina were starting to see more visitors again. In talking with my friends and research contacts at the centers in Perú, I understood that the public health situation had relaxed and was well on its way to normalizing. The centers were welcoming visitors without incurring extra difficulties related to health concerns. Considering all of this, I determined that my concerns about health, safety, and the complications that my presence might add to the lives of those with whom I proposed to do research had been assuaged. After nearly two years, I could go back to Perú.

Because of time and funding lost to the downstream effects of the pandemic, I would only be able to stay in Perú for four months on this visit. Maestro Orlando told me of his own plans to travel in April 2022, so we determined that if I arrived at the beginning of March 2022, I could stay with him for a little over a month before he had to leave. I coordinated with Takiwasi that I would spend the remaining months researching with dieters and curandero/as there, and I would stay in touch with Maestro Orlando once he returned from his travels and spend time with him whenever possible.

In a conversation during this stage of planning my return trip, I asked Maestro Orlando, "I only have a few weeks to spend with you; I want to learn as much as I can about the plants, about the icaros, about curanderismo. What is your advice?" He responded that he could show me plants and tell me about them, he could introduce me to more of the people in Llucanayacu, but, if I really wanted to learn about curanderismo, I should consider doing a longer dieta.

This interaction is in some ways similar to a story that is told at Takiwasi about the center's founding. This story is often recounted during the "Taki-Tour," which is a short tour of the center's grounds and botanical gardens, hosted for first-time visitors. To summarize a portion of the story, in the 1980s, Dr. Jacques Mabit was working in the mountains of Southern Perú for Doctors without Borders when he first encountered traditional plant-medicine and heard about the curandero/as of the lowlands. A few years later, he traveled to San Martín to investigate the topic. After asking around, he was directed to an elder curandero who lived near the town of Chazuta. When Dr. Jacques found this curandero and asked about the plant-medicines, the curandero told him, "If you really want to know, you have to take the plants and diet." Through dieting and taking ayahuasca, Dr. Jacques learned curanderismo and was eventually told by the spirits that, in exchange for the lessons he had been taught by the plants, he needed to help people struggling with addiction. Thus, Takiwasi was born. As I found out through the course of my investigation, the old curandero who introduced Jacques Mabit to vegetalismo was none other than Maestro Aquilino Chujandama, grandfather and maestro to Maestro Orlando Chujandama.

I took Maestro Orlando's recommendation seriously, and we determined that I should do a three-week dieta at his center. After completing the dieta, I would spend a week at Llucanayacu so I could get to know the village better for my research. I was interested in taking more of a "deep hanging out" approach (Geertz 1998) to get to know the people of the community of Llucanayacu better. I was especially interested to hear their stories of what the past two years had been like and how the Covid-19 pandemic and related effects had affected their lives. I also wanted to investigate how they understood and interacted with curanderismo and plant-medicines, especially during the pandemic. Maestro Orlando strongly suggested that that could be a project for another time; if I really wanted to learn about icaros and vegetalismo what I needed to do was a deeper, longer dieta. As such, I was using the deep hanging out approach, but I would be spending time with non-human beings.

I was hesitant to take this approach, as I knew it would drastically affect the shape that my research project would take. However, I consider it to be an important part of being an ethnographer and a musician to never leave the student's mindset, and a student should take the advice of older, wiser, more experienced masters (maestros) seriously. So, I agreed to Maestro Orlando's suggestion. As I came to find out, the plan he suggested worked to my advantage. Having more personal experience in dieta, I was able to more fully understand how dieta helps one build a relationship with the non-humans of the forest, and this enabled me to ask better questions of the curandero/as and pilgrims whom I interviewed. Moreover, as I discussed in the introduction, curanderoa/s and others from San Martín with whom I spoke about the Covid-19 pandemic had little to say

about the virus or the illness. Most were of the opinion that the worst results of the pandemic came from uneven restrictions on their movement and ability to earn a living without sufficient compensatory measures from those who imposed these restrictions. Moreover, much of their trust in local and global health institutions had been eroded due to what they understood as inaccurate reporting of deaths, extreme inflation of the cost of healthcare, and governmental aid money getting "lost" on the way through Perú's bureaucratic systems. By 2022, with restrictions lifting, most people were happy to move on.

Contextualizing la Dieta

At both Centro Takiwasi and at Mushuk Pakarina, the *dieta* is considered to be the most powerful and fundamental technique used by curandero/as. For both centers, it is also the primary way that they interface with shamanic pilgrims. As Gearin and Labate (2018) describe, there are many food taboos across the globe, each related to specific religious and cultural practices. They cite Meyer-Rochow (2009) and Simoons (1994) as representing two divergent directions in scholarship on food taboos. On the one hand, there are those who argue that food taboos can be explained from a functionalist perspective: that there are environmental reasons for avoiding certain food items. These foods are either avoided entirely or during specific periods of time. Periodic food avoidance, it is hypothesized, is a practice that begins for physiological reasons but is later mythologized, ritualized, and instantiated into religious practice (Meyer-Rochow 2009). On the other hand, some food taboos have no apparent environmental explanation.

For example, Simoons argues that the hypothesis that, globally, pork taboos originate with trichinosis infection and or because of hygiene concerns does not stand up to scrutiny. While these explanations may fit in some cases, in others, such taboos are better understood through an analysis of the cultural and magico-religious significance of pigs (Simoons 1994: 15-18, and his chapter "Pork"). Gearin and Labate point out that, because of the complexities involved in how food taboos develop, it is remarkable "when a cultural group adopts the spiritual dietary restrictions of a different culture" (Gearin and Labate 2018: 177). Both dominant perspectives on food taboos highlight how through various socio-historical processes certain food items accrete significance and, in certain cases, this significance is inculcated into ritualized behavior. Thus, a semiotic analysis of dietary restrictions can potentially elucidate how a cultural group relates to its social, spiritual, and biological environment. In the case of shamanic tourism, analyzing ritualized diets demonstrates important complexities that have arisen regarding divergent strategies for engaging in cross-cultural contact engendered by the growing interest in ayahuasca and Amazonian shamanism.

In their essay on dieta, Gearin and Labate juxtapose the "ayahuasca diet" (really the pre-ayahuasca diet) with examples from ethnographic reports of shamanic diets undertaken by mestizo and Indigenous shamans as part of Amazonian practices, both contemporary and historical. They correctly point out that the (pre)ayahuasca diets observed in touristic and neo-shamanic practices are a departure from the dietas undertaken by Indigenous Amazonians (Gearin and Labate 2018: 178). In fact, the oldest written account of Indigenous Amazonians using ayahuasca also includes a description of

a dieta, albeit a discriminatory retelling at the hands of Jesuit missionaries. In this account from around the year 1675, the dieta is described as when Native "soothsayers" withdraw "in reclusion to certain huts that they have for this purpose in the jungle, where, apparently, they fast, invoke the devil and capture him with their conjurations and spells so that he comes to talk with them and reveal to them what they hope to find out" (Chantre y Herrera 2016: 142). The touristic, neo-shamanic diet is undertaken primarily for detoxification from a given person's standard diet in preparation for the ingestion of ayahuasca; it is said to ease the physical purgative effects of ayahuasca, thus, opening the possibility for deeper psycho-spiritual experiences. It is also considered to be a respectful way to approach the ritual of ayahuasca drinking. As such, motivations for this type of diet are both physiological and spiritual. In the ensuing discussion, we will see how, in curanderismo, there is no assumption of a separation between physical and spiritual spheres. Physical explanations are given for spiritual outcomes and vice versa. In the more specific semiotic terminology developed by Peirce that I am using, the ritualistic functions of pre-ayahuasca diets are active on the indexical level; the "ayahuasca dieta" displays a general posture of respect and care during preparation for participating in an ayahuasca ceremony. Specific details of the diet and reinterpretation as a preparation for drinking ayahuasca are done largely at the symbolic level, where overlapping, co-dependent meanings specify what the dieta is and what it does. This means, of course, that it is caught up in the complexities of the developing globalization of understandings of ayahuasca and how various people are to relate to it (Fotiou 2016). As other researchers have pointed out—and as indicated by the titles of many books on the

subject[33]—ayahuasca is in the foreground of this process of globalization. In much of the global discussion of Amazonian shamanism, ayahuasca has been at the center, and interest in Amazonian cultures and knowledge about the wider system(s) of plant-based shamanism lags behind.

The "ayahuasca diet" inverts the perspective that I encountered among curandero/as in San Martín. While these curandero/as do usually recommend some adjustments to a person's eating habits in the runup to undertaking a dieta, which typically starts with an ayahuasca ceremony, this is so there is less of a shock to the dieter's system when they abruptly halt the intake of sugar, fat, and salt at the onset of the ritual. Regardless, the focus of the dieta is the learning and healing engendered by the dieter building a relationship with the plants and the forest. It is the plants and the spirits of the forest that confer lessons and healing on dieters. Any preparatory behavioral changes and use of ayahuasca are supportive of the dieta, unless of course ayahuasca happens to be the plant being dieted. In contrast to pre-ayahuasca diets, the dietas observed as part of Indigenous Amazonian shamanism elucidate "how practices of

[33] To name just a few publications we could look at collections of essays edited by Labate: *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca* (2011), *Ayahuasca Shamanism in the Amazon and Beyond* (2014), *The World Ayahuasca Diaspora* (2016), *The Expanding World Ayahuasca Diaspora* (2018). I do not mean to pick on one researcher here, as contributors to these volumes include prominent researchers of Amazonian anthropology and ethnomusicology such as Françoise Barbira Freedman, Bernd Brabec de Mori, Clancy Cavnar, and Evgenia Fotiou. Certainly, this body of work was created to shed light on the developing global interest in ayahuasca. But it bears consideration that the increase in academic publications focusing specifically on ayahuasca is part of a feedback loop. Global interest in ayahuasca is on the rise, so academics publish more research on ayahuasca. This further raises public interest and so on the process goes. While I agree that it is important for research to be done on this phenomenon, part of what researchers should offer is context that, historically, ayahuasca had been used as one plant among many. This is one of the things I seek to do with this chapter and throughout this dissertation. For the curanderos that I research with, ayahuasca is an important plant, but it usually plays a supportive role as a catalyst for healing and learning through the use of other medicinal plants.

shamanic food taboos among indigenous Amazonians are intimately linked to the human-environment nexus and corresponding ontological configurations of personhood" (Gearin and Labate 2018: 178).

It is the latter type of dietas that are the focus of this chapter, as these are the types of dietas observed by curandero/as and visiting pilgrims at Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina. I argue that using this form of dieta as the foundation upon which cross-cultural interactions take place at these medicine centers, as opposed to focusing on ayahuasca, evinces a significant distinction between the practices of ayahuasca-focused shamanic tourism (Brabec de Mori 2014; Fotiou 2011, 2014, 2016) and shamanic pilgrimage.

Both Centro Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina are savvy regarding the meeting of Amazonian and non-Amazonian peoples because of interest in ayahuasca. I suggest that it is important to consider their use of dietas to reaffirm ayahuasca's role as a support to the use of other plants within curanderismo. In the face of the globalization of ayahuasca, the strategies employed by these medicine centers place them within what some researchers have referred to as Indigenous tourism movements (Bunten and Graburn 2018). These movements develop strategies for engaging with tourism in ways that take advantage of the global tourism economy while affording increased independence for Indigenous people (Bunten and Graburn 2018). I discuss the finer points of this in more detail in chapters one and four. To summarize, both centers invite travelers to pay to participate in dietas that these centers facilitate. The proceeds from these dietas go to supporting other endeavors in which the centers are involved. In the case of Takiwasi, these include the costs of running the center's substance addiction rehabilitation program

(including paying the salaries of curandero/as, therapists, and maintenance staff) and supporting the center's efforts in cultural and pharmacological research related to curanderismo and plant medicines (for example, see the discussion of the Nuwa project in chapter four). Regarding Mushuk Pakarina, Maestro Orlando is the center's owner. Money earned from facilitating dietas firstly goes to supporting his family, but the center has significantly contributed to the development of infrastructure for the community at Llucanayacu, such as the building of the community meeting hall and a system to collect, purify, and distribute water to the village. Dieters who have been to Llucanayacu several times often bring materials to donate in support of the community. These people are personally invested in the wellbeing of the people of Llucanayacu and the continuation of the cultural knowledge situated in the community. For example, Maestro Orlando told me of a group of pilgrims from North America, with whom he has a years-long relationship and whom he considers friends. This group regularly donates educational materials to the community's elementary and primary schools and donates clothes to the community.

In this chapter, I deploy Charles S. Peirce's approach to semiotics—as developed by Kohn (2013) who built on Viveiros de Castro's concept of perspectivism (1998; 2004)—to help elucidate how relating to the forest in a manner the significance of which is framed (Goffman 1974) within the practice of dieta and traditional Amazonian medicine motivates pilgrims to be personally invested in the wellbeing of Amazonian forests and cultures. The various ways of relating to the forest and the non-humans that inhabit it are what Maestro Orlando calls the *ciencias ancestrales*, "ancestral sciences." Science here refers both to a body of knowledge and to a method by which knowledge is

gained and applied. *Curanderismo/vegetalismo* falls under the umbrella of the ciencias ancestrales: they rely on its techniques to be able to heal and learn via inherited knowledge and the ciencias' particular methods for establishing relations with non-humans, who are often medicinal and psychoactive plants.

Behavioral and Dietary Restrictions during Dieta

During the isolation phase of a dieta, a dieter abstains from eating salt; meat of any kind, but especially pork; oils, fats, and any food cooked in oil; fruit and anything naturally sweet; and any condiments, but especially *ají*. Ají is the word used across Perú to refer to specific types of chili peppers and to spicy food in general, especially sauces and relishes that are ubiquitous on dining tables in homes and restaurants. Dieta also involves sexual abstinence including abstinence from masturbation. Dieters drink only water and eat only the bland food brought to them by curandero/as or others whose help a curandero/a has enlisted. In my experience, this bland diet consists of a steady rotation of boiled white rice, boiled potatoes, boiled green plantains, and boiled oatmeal. Depending on the specific diet, this meal may be brought to the dieter once or twice per day—either in the morning or at midday—and the dieter is not required to eat unless the attending curandero/a thinks they are getting too weak from fasting.

All of these behavioral restrictions are undertaken to amplify the effects of the plant(s) being dieted and open the dieter up—physically, spiritually, and energetically—to the plant or plants that they will be dieting. The two phrases that I heard curandero/as use most often to describe the state of being in dieta was either *está con plantas*, "he/she

is with plants," or *está dietando*, "he/she is dieting." These phrases would be used to communicate that "that person is dieting," in a general sense. The same phrases were also used to describe, specifically, what plants a person was taking for their dieta, *ella está con uña de gato/ella está dietando uña de gato*, "She is with cat's claw/She is dieting cat's claw" (*Uncaria tomentosa*).

The interchangeability of these two phrases demonstrates the motivation for dieting and provides information about the significance of behavioral restrictions and isolation in the forest. They can inform us about the frame (Goffman 1974) of dieta: how the context of this ritual provides information about the meaning of these behaviors. Dieters are trying to become close to the forest and the non-human selves that inhabit it. By opening themselves up to the plants and offering their body as the meeting grounds, dieters seek to enter into intense sustained interaction with the non-humans of the forest in just such a way that these beings will incorporate themselves into the dieter's being—being-with-the-plants through being like the plants.

What a Dieta *Involves*

Centro Takiwasi requires dieters to take part in an orientation process in the days prior to undertaking a dieta. The following is a general description of my experience of the orientation process. I was involved in the orientation several times as a participant-researcher. Taking part in the orientation was a good way for me to meet the dieters and to observe how Takiwasi shared information about traditional Amazonian medicine to prepare pilgrims for their diets. I worked it out with Takiwasi that I could use a few

minutes of time during the orientation to invite dieters to participate in my research. On some occasions, I was recruited to translate for dieters who needed help communicating across the English-Spanish language barrier. As one dieter, who himself is an experienced vegetalista, pointed out, the organization and care that Takiwasi puts into preparing and educating dieters about plant medicines and the importance of approaching plants in a way that is informed by local culture is one of the main things that sets Takiwasi apart from other Amazonian medicine centers.

Dieters arrived a minimum of two days prior to their diet for orientation and to participate in rituals that are part of the ritual cycle of dieta at Takiwasi that prepare pilgrims for the isolation phase. In the days prior to beginning the dieta, dieters had the option to participate in a plant bath ritual (for more on this, see chapter three) and a tour of the center's grounds and botanical garden, dubbed the "Taki-Tour." Dieters were required to participate in a purga (covered in more detail in chapter three), meet with their assigned therapist, and watch a video that explains the dieta ritual (including behavioral restrictions, safety precautions, and a day-by-day breakdown of the week's schedule). On the day before moving to the forest for the week-long isolation phase of the diet, dieters met at Takiwasi and were divided into groups based on the language(s) they speak so that they could view the appropriate version of the orientation video—Spanish or French, both with English subtitles. After the video, a therapist met with each group to reiterate important points from the video and answer any questions that the dieters had. Finally, a member from Takiwasi's research division gave a brief overview of some of the research that they were currently working on or had recently published and invited interested

dieters to participate in some of that research. This is the point at which the person facilitating the orientation introduced me as a researcher collaborating with the center, and I was able to invite dieters to do an interview with me upon completing their dieta.

At both Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina, dieters participated in an ayahuasca ceremony the night before beginning the isolation phase of the dieta. Early the next morning, a curandero/a accompanied the dieter(s) into the forest to a *tambo*, where the dieter was to stay in isolation for the duration of their dieta. A tambo is a small thatch-roofed structure that may or may not have walls. At Takiwasi, the tambos are enclosed by walls on all four sides except for an open entrance that has no door. At Mushuk Pakarina, the tambos do not have walls; the entirety of the tambo consists of a palm-thatch roof supported by four wooden posts. Inside each tambo there is an elevated wooden platform on top of which are a thin mattress and a mosquito net—this is the dieter's bed. There is also a hammock and, only at Takiwasi, a small table and chair.

While doing a dieta myself was ethnographically valuable in the sense that I gained a deeper, firsthand understanding of vegetalimso than I would not have been able to get otherwise, the restrictions of the dieta presented some difficulties for conducting research with travelers who, commonly, were in San Martín only to do a dieta. As such, they were often in the area for mere days or hours after completing their dieta. Being involved in the orientation at Takiwasi was, thus, valuable to me not only as a site for ethnography but for finding dieters who were generous enough to share some of their limited time in Perú to do an interview with me.

Due to the difference in the way that Mushuk Pakarina operates, I was only able to interview a single dieter from that center. While Takiwasi organizes groups of dieters to start and end their diets on a shared schedule, including orientation, Maestro Orlando might have several dieters at his center who are all on different schedules. For this reason, he prepares dieters in a less formal, one-on-one basis. The dieter from Mushuk Pakarina that I interviewed confirmed that the explanation and preparation he received was similar to my own.

My opportunities to interview dieters from Mushuk Pakarina were limited because of the restrictions I just described and because when I was at the center in 2019, Maestro Orlando had only recently agreed to participate in my research. In 2022, due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, there were fewer visitors. There were two other dieters whose stays at Mushuk Pakarina overlapped with my own, but I was unable to interact with them because they were in the middle of their own dietas. Through Maestro Orlando, I passed my contact information to them and invited them to participate, even if it was just through a remote interview, but I never heard from either of them. Maestro Orlando told me that they had both planned their trips on a tight schedule and went straight to the airport the day they finished their diets, so an in-person interview would not have been possible.

In my experience, preparation for the dieta at Mushuk Pakarina went as follows. In the weeks preceding the dieta, Maestro Orlando (and/or, during the time when he was still with Maestro Orlando, his apprentice) and I were in contact via Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and email. He provided general details about behavioral and

dietary restrictions and the schedule of the dieta. On the day that we arrived at Mushuk Pakarina, he provided more information about what we could expect during the ayahuasca ceremony that would happen that night, and he answered any questions and concerns that I had. The next morning, he accompanied me to my tambo, introduced me to the plant I would be taking during the dieta and explained what problems it helps with and what effects I would likely experience while taking it. He then reiterated information about the behavioral restrictions and safety guidelines we had discussed during the runup to the dieta, but being there, in the middle of the forest, made these guidelines more concrete. Though not as technologically involved or as extensively pre-planned as the Takiwasi orientation, I found these preparatory discussions to be equally as informative.

On the morning that I arrived at my tambo in 2019, for my first dieta, Maestro Orlando's apprentice was the one who provided instructions, in English, on dieta behavior and safety. Later that morning, Maestro Orlando also visited me at my tambo, and we had a shorter conversation in Spanish about the same guidelines. Sexual activity of any kind was prohibited. I was to eat only the food that they provided. I was only to drink the filtered water that they provided. This water was also not to be drunk hot or extremely cold. The reason for this is that many plants are associated, literally and metaphorically, with temperature, and they can affect a dieter's body temperature. For example, the plant that I was dieting in 2019 was *chiriq sanango* (*Brunfelsia grandiflora,* Fig. 14). In Quechua, *chiriq* means "cold," and the most notable physiological effects of ingesting this plant were, for me, feeling cold and numb, especially in my hands and feet. My hands, feet, arms, and tongue also tingled and sometimes went numb for several

minutes after I took this plant. The plant is also supposed to help dieters work through emotional coldness (i.e. being emotionally withdrawn). Drinking hot water might halt some of these effects, which would be disrespectful and unwelcoming to the plant. Drinking cold water could increase these effects which could be uncomfortable or, in extreme cases, potentially require the intervention of a curandero/a to reestablish the regulation of body temperature. There are also "hot plants," whose effects on body temperature work in the opposite direction. A clear example of a hot plant is *uchu sanango* (*Tabernaemontana sananho*, Fig. 15); uchu means "hot/spicy" in Quechua.

Figure 14. Chiriq sanango in front of a house in Tarapoto. Photo taken by author April 5, 2022.

Figure 15. Uchu sanango at Centro Takiwasi Botanical Garden. Photo taken by author June 20, 2022.

I was instructed to stay at my tambo or in the small clearing in which the tambo was located. All life activities were to be done there. Mushuk Pakarina has seventeen tambos spread throughout the forested property. During my dietas, there were other dieters occupying some of these tambos. I was only to go near their tambos if I needed to walk back to the main house, and, on such an occasion, I was to move quickly and quietly past them. I was not to speak to anyone except Maestro Orlando and his apprentice. If I were to pass someone on the path, I could acknowledge them with a nod of my head, but that was all of the interaction allowed.

Acceptable reasons to leave one's tambo, I was told, were to use the toilets and showers at the main house, to refill my water bottle from the tank at the house, to visit the river, or to ask one of the curanderos for help. Any of these trips were to be kept short, and I was to return promptly to my tambo. The exception to this rule was a visit to the river. Mushuk Pakarina is bordered on three sides by a stream that is a tributary to the much larger Huallaga River on whose banks the village of Llucanayacu is located. Maestro Orlando refers to this body of water simply as *la quebrada* or *la quebradita*, "the stream." On Google Maps, this stream is called the Llucanayacu stream. In Quechua, this means "water that climbs." This is an apt name as it is one of many streams in the area that filter down through the surrounding hills. It passes through the village to join with the Huallaga, which is one of the many large rivers that eventually combine to form the Amazon. The Huallaga flows into the Marañón near the town of Pucacuru in the region of Loreto, and the Marañón joins the Ucayali becoming the Río Amazonas in the 100-kilometer stretch between the cities of Nauta and Iquitos. I retrace the paths of these flowing bodies of water as part of explaining why going for a swim in the quebradita is one of the few acceptable activities for passing an appreciable amount of time during a dieta. As I describe in more detail in chapter three—analyzing icaros on the subject of water—the movement of water through the forest is connected to the compounding of vital, spiritual power. This power is collected and compounded as drops of rain fall in the forests and hills, agglomerating into streams, brooks, and rivers. A curandero/a may seek to access this power and pass it to their patient through an icaro, or a dieter may put themselves in the middle of the stream carrying the energy in order wash themselves—

physically and spiritually—and absorb some of the energy of the forest concentrated in the water.

This is only acceptable for those who are dieting certain plants. During my first dieta, while dieting chiriq sanango and ayahuasca, I was allowed to visit the river and swim at my leisure. During my second dieta, in 2022, I dieted a mix of *renacos* (different species of stranglers and ficuses) that, as Maestro Orlando described to me, are plants that grow in the shade and are sensitive to ambient temperature. During this dieta, I was not allowed to bathe, visit the river, or spend time out in the sun. I was also told to be careful about being in the rain or getting too cold at night, as drastic changes in my body temperature could cause problems for my dieta.

This brings up two points. First, combinations of plants may be dieted, especially plants that are understood by curandero/as to play supportive roles. Among supporting plants are ayahuasca and certain trees and woody stranglers. At Takiwasi, other than ayahuasca, these combinatory supportive plants are referred to as *palos*, "sticks/poles." As with many of the plants used in vegetalismo, this name refers to the character of these plants, which reveals themselves literally and metaphorically. Poles are pieces of wood that can be used as structural supports. Palos are woody plants that, through dieta, can confer their supportive strength to dieters. Second, plants and plant-spirits can be fickle, and each plant or combination of plants that are dieted bring with them individualized effects and behavioral requirements on the part of dieters.

This is one of the points at which a semiotic analysis can help us to consider that the framing (Goffman 1974) of a dieta, in this case through an orientation process, is key

to understanding its internal logic. In the orientation at both centers, the reasoning for behavioral restrictions is explained, in general terms, as the way to approach the plants respectfully. This already signals a frame for understanding plants as non-human selves who have personalities. It is also explained that each plant, depending on how it is used, can help to treat certain ailments. For an individual plant these can range from physical symptoms like easing joint pain to helping clarify a confused mental state; this is a description that I heard given for the uses of *ajo sacha*, "wild garlic" (*Mansoa alliacea*). Sometimes curandero/as will only take the explanations this far; these are sorts of "just so" explanations that dieters have to take at face value until they have their own personal encounters with the plants. More often than not, however, a deeper explanation is provided that invites the dieter into understanding plants from an animist perspective and to begin to build a relationship with them from this adjusted frame. In the case of ajo sacha, just mentioned, the curandero continued explaining to the dieter that the curandero/as have learned that this plant is a solar plant—connected to the energy of the sun in a way that most plants are not. It typically grows where it gets direct sunlight during the brightest, hottest part of the day, and it is most effective as a medicine when it is harvested after having gotten several days in a row of good sunlight. As a "hot," solar plant, it is used in a salve to treat joint pain. In a dieta, the plant shines a light on difficult circumstances in one's life, especially regarding complex and confusing situations, and it helps dieters clarify their perspectives as they make choices and move forward in their lives.

In semiotic terms, ajo sacha is iconic of the sun in that, by consequence of the plant's nature and its observed effects as a medicine, it acts as a stand-in for the Sun's fundamental aspects: heat and light. In a way, the light is metaphorical. In this instance, the concept of light exists within a symbolic order in which literal light comes to index clear thought or a more complete understanding of something that was, metaphorically, "in the dark."

Centro Takiwasi tends to take a more formulaic approach than does Mushuk Pakarina in preparing visitors for their dietas. While Maestro Orlando will host dieters at Mushuk Pakarina for weeks to months, dietas at Takiwasi are normally one week long. I have heard of long-time acquaintances of the center being hosted for multi-week dietas, but this is outside the norm. Dieters typically arrive at Takiwasi two to five days prior to the commencement of their dieta. During this time, dieters acclimate to the tropical climate and prepare for the dieta by participating in plant baths, at least one purga, and an ayahuasca ceremony the night before entering the forest for their dieta. Typically, the schedule is some approximation of: purga on Thursday, ayahuasca ceremony on Friday, travel to the forest for isolation in a tambo on Saturday morning, return from the forest the following Sunday morning, stay in Tarapoto for a few days (during which time dieters meet with a member of Takiwasi's team of therapists), travel home.

At Mushuk Pakarina, dieters participate in an ayahuasca ceremony at the beginning and the end of the dieta. Takiwasi used to hold ayahuasca ceremonies at the end of dietas too, but Dr. Jaime told me that, over the years, the curandero/as and

therapists came to agree that the complications of a second ayahuasca ceremony outweighed its benefits.

First thing in the morning, following the final day of isolation in the forest, the central phase of the dieta is ritually closed in what curandero/as refer to as “cutting the diet.” The diet is cut when a dieter eats a salad of diced onion, lime juice, and salt. It is the eating of salt that actually cuts the diet. Abstaining from salt is the key difference between a dieta and the process that Takiwasi calls *tomando plantas de contención,* “taking plants of containment.” As Maestro Orlando explained to me, eating salt is a human thing to do, and salt maintains a person’s protective, energetic barrier. By abstaining from salt, a dieter opens themselves up to the energies and spirits of the forest. This is how plant spirits are able to enter into and join with the being of a dieter.

Once a dieter eats salt, they enter into the phase of the dieta ritual called “post-dieta.” This includes continued dietary and behavioral restrictions during a period of time that is typically twice as long as the isolation phase; isolation in the forest for one week incurs a post-dieta of two weeks. During this period, the main dietary restriction is continued abstinence from sugar and naturally sweet foods. When the two-week mark arrives, the dieter cuts the post-dieta by eating a piece of fruit. Maestro Orlando advised me that, after cutting the post-dieta, a dieter is completely closed; the energetic barrier has been reestablished; the plants have finished their work of integrating into the dieter’s body; and the dieter is ready to re-enter society and live their normal life. Takiwasi, being extremely cautious, recommends that dieters observe an additional two weeks of sexual abstinence after cutting their sugar fast.

Abstinence in Dieta

> She showed the Wildman what women can do / and his lust wrapped him around her body. / For six days and seven nights Enkidu was around and made love to Shamhat. / When he had had his fill of her delights, / he turned back to the herd. / But the gazelles saw him and ran, / the herd of the wild fled from him.
> (*Gilgamesh,* Helle 2021: 10, lines 191-96)

Underlying the conceptualization of dieta is an understanding of a porous, mutable boundary between the human and the non-human spheres of existence. Certain individuals, the *yachaq runa-kuna*, “people of knowledge” (healer-shamans) are adept at crossing between these spheres. Every human can contact and cross into the non-human sphere if they properly apply certain techniques, but curandero/as have an aptitude for maintaining a situation of keeping one foot in each sphere, as it were. With relative ease, they can also cross more-or-less fully into each sphere but carry with them an element of the human into the non-human sphere and an element of the non-human into the human sphere. Viveros de Castro’s work (1998) describing what he calls *perspectivism* is helpful in explaining Amazonian understandings of the relation of the human and non-human spheres. Kohn (2013) uses perspectivism as one of the pillars in his semiotic exploration of these same concepts. A limitation of perspectivism is that the model is based in an understanding of human and non-human relations focusing on human-animal interaction as taking place within a predator-prey hierarchy. Viveros de Castro conceptualizes perspectivism as *multinaturalism*, as opposed to *multiculturalism*. Simplified, this means that, rather than conceptualizing the world as consisting of a single, objective reality that is interpreted subjectively through many cultural lenses (multiculturalism), Viveiros de Castro asks us to consider an Amazonian worldview consisting of many realities, each of

which belongs to a respective species. Each species perceives themselves to be human, and they exist in a predator-prey relationship to the animals above and below them on the food chain. "Each species is a mere envelope (a 'clothing') which conceals an internal human form, usually only visible to the eyes of the particular species or to certain trans-specific beings such as shamans" (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 470-71).

While Amazonian curanderismo has its particularities, the excerpt from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* with which I began this section illustrates that there are similar archetypal, mythical understandings of these same concepts in the traditions of the "Old World" too. The details of what separates the human from the non-human are also similar. In the story of Enkidu, sexual intercourse not only separates him from the non-human sphere, but it weakens him physically (Helle 2021: 10) as if sexual activity results in the expenditure of strength and energy that he had accumulated during his life in the non-human sphere.

In a dieta, and in the less-strenuous versions of dieta that accompany other plant-medicine rituals in curanderismo, the most important things to be avoided are sexual activity, eating pork, and eating salt. Other anthropological studies involving curanderismo have cited the relation of human bodily odors associated with sex as being repulsive to plant-spirits (Peluso 2014: 235). This held true to my experience dieting in the Amazon. During my longer dieta, in 2022, Maestro Orlando instructed me not to bathe, neither was I to swim in the river nor stay out in the rain. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a similar importance is placed on the odor of Enkidu's body before he leaves the non-human sphere and joins the human sphere, which involves him bathing, "He smeared himself with oil and turned into a man" (Helle 2021: 16). Luna describes a key moment

in a dieta being when a dieter, isolated in the forest, acquires *el olor a monte*, “the smell of the forest.” Once a dieter has left their human smell behind and begun to take on the smell and essence of the forest, plant spirits will approach them (Luna 1986: 49-50).

Because I was not allowed to spend time in water and had only brought a few changes of clothes with me for the dieta, I decided to wear each set of clothes for as long as seemed healthy and hygienic. I was also unable to wash any of my clothes since I was to limit my contact with water. Since I was alone in the forest, my appearance and odor were the least of my worries. To my surprise, after the first few days, my body odor faded and was replaced by a sweet, floral scent. That scent remained with me for the entirety of the dieta, and it took several cycles of cleaning for the smell to be washed out of my clothes.

At Mushuk Pakarina, during dietas in which bathing is allowed, Maestro Orlando instructs dieters to only wash with water, no soap, because the smell of harsh chemicals or perfumes repels the plant-spirits. At Takiwasi, dieters are supplied with a bar of unscented soap to wash with, but they are advised to keep bathing to a minimum. Takiwasi makes this soap themselves expressly to be used by people who are “with plants.”

This is key to my understanding of cross-species communication through the ritual framing of dieta. Changing behavior patterns and accumulating plant-like characteristics amounts to iconic and indexical communication. The dieter is signaling to the plants that they recognize, respect, and seek to learn from or be healed by those plants. This simultaneously enacts an engagement with plants that recognizes them as

non-human selves. This is a close parallel to what Taussig (1993) calls "the mimetic faculty," or the human propensity to learn and communicate through mimicry, especially when a shared system for symbolic communication (e.g., a language) is not available. Taussig proposes that this faculty is deeply ingrained in how humans interact with the world, as any perception of the world involves information first being represented and interpreted through the body's sensory apparatus. I argue that this not only parallels Peirce's formulation of pre-symbolic semiosis but that the two are one and the same.

Maestro Orlando taught me another lesson about the accumulation of energy as one of the reasons for sexual abstinence during dieta. During my first dieta at Mushuk Pakarina, which was a short, one-week dieta, I was given ayahuasca to drink while I was isolated in my tambo. However, during the longer dieta, I only drank ayahuasca during the ceremony at the start of the dieta and the ceremony at the close of the dieta. Early on in my isolation, I asked Maestro Orlando about this, "Why am I not drinking ayahuasca during this diet?" He gave me an answer that I have heard from him often, *porque es otra experiencía*, "because it is a different experience."[34] By which, he does not mean that he is merely facilitating a search for esoteric experiences. Rather, as I explain throughout this dissertation, the culturally appropriate way to learn about plant medicine is through first-hand experience supported by conceptual clarification with an experienced maestro. As such, "*es otra experiencía*" means, "there is something valuable for you to learn from personally approaching these plants in this way."

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[34] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Field notes. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. March 15, 2022.

Maestro Orlando provided the theoretical explanation for the "other experience" during the ayahuasca ceremony at the close of the dieta. I had just vomited, and he said to me—in the middle of the ayahuasca ceremony, to illustrate the importance of the point—*Ya ves, hermano, porque no tomas ayahuasca en la dieta más profunda; dietar es acumular energía de las plantas, y vomitar es botar,* "now you see, brother, why you don't drink ayahuasca during deeper [longer] dietas; to diet is to gather energy from the plants, and to vomit is to expel/waste [the energy]."[35]

In a different way, Maestro Orlando's apprentice had explained the need for sexual abstinence during my preparations for my first dieta in 2019. He explained that, during a dieta and continuing into the post-dieta, one is continually incorporating lessons learned from the plant-spirits. This involves maintaining a state of mind achieved during the dieta. This state of mind gradually tapers off as the dieter re-enters the human sphere during post-dieta. He told me to imagine how drastically a person's physical and mental state change before and after having an orgasm. That drastic change can be enough of a shock to halt or reverse everything that was accomplished by dieting, and the energetic release can also expel the energy accumulated during the dieta, just as Maestro Orlando explained in relation to excessive vomiting.

One of Takiwasi's therapists clarified this point further while preparing a group of dieters for their week in the forest. She explained, in no uncertain terms, that energy accumulated from ingesting plants during a dieta would be expelled along with the sexual

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[35] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Audio recording of ayahuasca ceremony. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. March 27, 2022.

energy that is released during orgasm. This is partially to due with energetic release and partially because of plants' aversion to human sexuality.

Pork

During dieta and post-dieta, one abstains from eating pork. As Simoons (1994) describes in his study of taboos against eating pork flesh, there are a variety of reasons that such taboos come to exist. He evenhandedly arrives at the conclusion that the long history of contact between different cultural groups provides ample information for the formation of hypotheses pertaining to the independent development and diffusion of taboos against pork. He cautions against searching for bio-medical reasons to explain the origins of religiously situated taboos, citing the not-so-well-supported hypothesis that the Jewish and Muslim prohibition of pork comes from an avoidance of animals infected with trichinosis and later being inscribed into religious law. Simoon argues that such explanations tend to be overwrought when a spiritually situated explanation will do.

In a way, however, this simply begs the question of the possibility of a bio-physical reason underpinning the spiritual explanation. Simoons recognized that seeking an ultimate origin for pork prohibition is more than likely to result in a vacillation between hypotheses of physical and spiritual origins that can be traced back to prehistory without resolution—though he proposes a social conflict hypothesis as a possible origin for old-world pork prohibition. I agree with Simoon that it is more useful to try to understand contemporary food prohibitions via contemporary explanations. Undoubtedly, these are historically situated in inherited systems of knowledge and practice, but they are

enacted, updated, and reinterpreted in contemporary daily life. While some insight may be gained by interrogating different historical perspectives on pork taboos, it is these more recent and current understandings that are most relevant to my research of the contemporary practice of vegetalismo. Furthermore, these competing perspectives of "natural" and "supernatural" explanations for food taboos belie a Cartesian separation that vegetalismo challenges.

Thus, in contrast to many of Simoons's examples, I found the logic of pork prohibition within the frame of vegetalismo and dieta to be satisfactory. As I found throughout my research with curandero/as, there are "physical" and "spiritual" explanations for how and why things are done, but the physical and spiritual are never separate. Rather, they are different perspectives on the same facts. To return to Kohn's (2013) bio-semiotic model, these dimensions only seem separate because, as a result of evolutionary development, most humans do not need to regularly access some of the more subtle elements of the world they inhabit. In other words, it is not part of the Westernized person's daily life to relate to plants, for example, as having their own selfhood and, in a very non-human way, their own type of awareness—and perhaps even consciousness. Curandero/as, on the other hand, are constantly shifting their perspectives to be able to interact with the more subtle and spiritual dimensions of the world.

The dieters I interacted with, irrespective of their cultural background, were able to shift their perspectives by using the techniques of vegetalismo and access the non-human sphere. For a variety of reasons, such interactions with non-humans have historically been translated very badly leading to the concretization of poor cross-cultural

understanding and the proliferation of attempts at translation that are not helpful at closing epistemological and ontological gaps (e.g., the physical-spiritual gap, the human-non-human gap). Though I am under no illusions that I will be able to solve all of these problems with a single dissertation, I would be remiss for not attempting to make a modicum of headway.

If we can accept, even hypothetically or as a metaphor for evolutionary selection through reaction to environmental stimuli, that plants have likes and dislikes, we can begin to understand where the prohibitions of the dieta come from. In dieta, a person is ultimately trying to build a relationship with the plant they are "with." By building this relationship, they might be healed of an illness or granted knowledge. This is done in a direct, embodied way. By becoming less human and more plantlike while ingesting a concentrated preparation of the plant, they make their normally human body a hospitable place for the plant to inhabit. By sustaining this situation, the essence of the plant is collected and instilled in the person's body. The prohibitions of dieta are carried out with the goal of maintaining this meeting of the human and the plant in such a way that the plant may more completely permeate the human's being. If the prohibitions are not followed, the accumulated essence of the plant will leave, either because it is repulsed (for example, by the presence of an astringent odor or animal flesh) or because it is expelled (as in the example of excessive vomiting above).

The explanations that I received from curandero/as for pork prohibition during dieta follow this logic. I asked Maestro Orlando why we do not eat pork, "*chancho*,"

during a dieta. He answered "*Porque come de todo*" (Because [a pig] will eat anything).[36] Though all animal flesh is prohibited during dieta, pork is especially dangerous because, not only is the dieter breaking the dieta by engaging in the non-plant behavior of eating meat, but a pig may have recently eaten other things that are also repulsive to plants that a cow or a deer, for example, would be less likely to eat. In a sense, eating pork while in dieta is potentially breaking the plant's confidence in multiple ways at once.

As Maestro Orlando and the curandero/as at Takiwasi explained to me, breaking a diet can make a person's situation even worse than it was before the diet. If a person enters into the ritual of dieta, they are inviting a plant to enter their being—it is the initiation of an incredibly intimate relationship. If they betray the plant's confidence, intentionally or not, the plant may leave, taking any healing or lessons taught with it. This is actually a best-case scenario. It is also possible that, if dieta restrictions are broken, a plant may injure the dieter in retaliation. Maestro Orlando's apprentice told me he heard stories of old maestros who died because someone snuck pork into their food. The shock of the retaliation from all the plants they had dieted over the years killed them. While this is certainly an extreme case, according to the curandero/as I met and the guidelines provided by Takiwasi and Maestro Orlando, once the post-dieta is finished, a person may return to eating pork without cause for concern.

Another spiritual factor potentially related to pork prohibition in curanderismo has a parallel that Simoons pointed out in his research. That is that certain exorcism rites of

[36] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Field notes. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. March 21, 2022.

ancient Mediterranean, Mesopotamian, and more recent Jewish and early Christian traditions involved removing evil spirits from possessed humans and trapping them in pigs (1994: 21-22). He specifically mentions passages from the New Testament of the Bible (Matthew 8:28-34 and Luke 8: 26-37) that recount an episode in which Jesus expelled demons from a man or two men, depending on the version of the story. The demons, realizing they are to be cast out, ask to be allowed to enter a nearby herd of pigs. Jesus consents, and, upon being entered by the demons, the pigs rush into the sea and drown. Other accounts include Assyrian healing and exorcism rites that involved tricking or enticing a demon to leave the body of a human to be contained within the body of a sacrificed pig whose remains were destroyed and not eaten (1994: 25).

Maestro Orlando mentioned that some curandero/as—whom he characterized as "more dark than light"—might send negative energy into pigs once they remove it from a patient. This, he explained, is another reason to avoid eating pork during and after a dieta. Horák mentions encountering similar explanations during his investigation at Takiwasi (2013: 132). The particulars of pork prohibition in dieta never came up in my interaction with curandero/as at Takiwasi beyond the generalities of defining proper dieta behavior. Abstaining from pork was one of the ways to safely and respectfully approach *las plantas maestras*¸ "the master/teacher plants."

Maestro Orlando cautioned that the two most dangerous yet difficult things to avoid during post-dieta are sex and pork. At that moment, he was making a point about cravings for food and physical contact often being more extreme during post-dieta than during isolation in the forest. This is because, once one has returned to the human sphere,

these things are more easily accessible, and it is up to the dieter's personal discipline to avoid them. A fair part of the protein in the local diet, both in the lowland cities and rural areas of San Martín, comes from smoked and cured pork. The ubiquity of these dishes makes them an easily accessible temptation for a person who has just spent weeks or months surviving on oatmeal and boiled potatoes. Some of these foods are prominently tied to the *san martinense* identity. If one visits a restaurant, either with some of the fineries tailored to tourists or the common establishments that appear in the front rooms of people's houses during the day, one is likely to find dishes on the menu bearing titles that include *regional* (roughly, a Spanish equivalent to the English word of the same spelling). This means that the dish contains some form of pork, usually smoked sausage or *cecina*, which is a cured and smoked preparation of pork common to the Peruvian lowlands. For example, *chaufa regional* is a fried rice dish, the base of which comes from the influence of the sizable Chinese and Japanese immigrant populations in Perú. In this case, the main protein in the dish is cecina or, sometimes, pork sausage.

A number of regional dishes are often prepared using pork fat, making them a dangerous choice during post-dieta. For example, *juane*, which I most commonly encountered as *juane de gallina*. This dish is prepared by boiling rice, chicken, eggs, and herbs wrapped in a banana leaf, or, more commonly, a *bijao* leaf (*Calathea lutea*). The main ingredients can all be eaten during post-dieta, but some people use pork lard to fry the chicken and aromatic vegetables or add pork fat to flavor the rice. This is not the only dish that presents a risk of unintentionally consuming prohibited food items. For this

reason, I often heard curandero/as recommending that dieters either cook for themselves during post-dieta or only eat at certain trusted establishments.

From what I observed, it is common, even for people in difficult economic situations, to eat at least one meal per day outside the home. This makes sense when eating out hardly costs more than preparing a meal for oneself. In Tarapoto, it is easy to find lunch, including soup or a salad and a beverage for between five and ten *soles* (approximately $1.40-$2.80). Such options are even more tempting for travelers who are less likely to have access to a kitchen. Care is required when deciding on where and what to eat during post-dieta.

Salt

Equally important as avoiding pork and sexual contact is abstaining from eating salt. There are two main reasons for salt avoidance. Once again, the reasoning behind abstinence from salt foregrounds curandero/as' understanding that there is no separation between the "natural" and "supernatural" worlds. If anything, there is a separation between the human and non-human spheres, but this separation is a human construction. If humans do not regularly enact certain behaviors, the non-human sphere will overtake them, just as the forest reclaims trails that are not maintained. Eating salt on a regular basis is one such behavior. Within the ritual frame of dieta, it is the withholding of salt and its reintroduction that mark, or index, the start and end of the dieta. Salt, as I heard explained by curandero/as—and by therapists during dieta orientation at Takiwasi—helps to maintain humans' protective, spiritual-energetic barrier. Certain events can cause

momentary ruptures in this barrier. *Susto*, “shock,” is an example of a condition that primarily affects children. Among Quechua speakers, it is sometimes called *manchari* (from *manchay*, “to be afraid”). Symptoms of susto include vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, weight loss, insomnia, and fatigue (Beyer 2009: 327). Susto is explained as resulting from a child being startled or injured. The resulting shock creates an opening in the child’s spiritual-energetic barrier—which is not as developed as that of an adult—through which negative energy can enter. Drinking ayahuasca also dissolves one’s spiritual-energetic barrier; this is partially what Dr. Jaime meant when, just before an ayahuasca ceremony, he explained to a group of first-timers that “once we drink, we will be like open Wi-Fi.”[37] This is one of the reasons that the preparation of the ritual space for an ayahuasca ceremony at Takiwasi involves encircling the group of ayahuasca drinkers with blessed salt.

Salt also plays an important role in mythico-historical narratives involved in Quechua ethnogenesis. In Kohn’s analysis of an origin story involving a flood, which he encountered in Ávila (Kohn 2013: 199-200), a Quechua community in the Ecuadorian Amazon, he recounts that being seen as salt-eaters is one of the elements that separates a *runa*, “person,” from an *auca*, “outsider/adversary/savage” (Kohn 2013: 199; Doherty Vonah et al. 2007: 42). In this story, a group of runa are separated from their community by an enormous flood. Carried into the forest, they find themselves isolated from society; they lose their way and stop doing many of the things that runa do, including eating salt. After a time, they were no longer runa; they became auca. Partially, this story serves to

[37] Torres, Dr. Jaime. Interview with author. Field notes. Tarapoto, Perú. September 26, 2019.

explain conflict between Quechua groups and other Native communities. In the case of Kohn's research, this story illustrated how a colonial hierarchy had been partially adopted by the Quechua community in Ávila. In this narrative, White people and Quechua people were "civilized," but other Native groups were more "savage" or "less human." In the Ávila Runa story, the default position of runa was as civilized, salt-eating, people, and the auca were fallen runa who ceased to maintain their full connection to the human sphere.

Maestro Orlando told me a story about the origins of the community of Llucanayacu in which diet played an important part in mediating humans' connection to the non-human sphere. However, in this story, the trajectory and value placed on distance from "civilization" functioned in the opposite direction. This was a story that Maestro Orlando's grandparents had told him and his siblings about where their ancestors came from and how they ended up in Llucanayacu. According to this story, the Llucanyacu Runa are descendants of a group of Chanka (also spelled Chanca) people from the Andes, near Ayacucho, who fled persecution by the Inka. This group was led by a yachaq who was very powerful and could transform into various animals. As a condor, he guided the people along the Andean Cordillera, and as a jaguar, he defended them and hunted wild game so they could eat. This yachaq led the people north to what is now the city of Chachapoyas and then east, into the Amazon Basin. The group travelled to Moyobamba and then Lamas, where they stayed for a time, but when the Spanish arrived, they followed the Huallaga down the valley until they eventually stopped along its banks and founded the settlement that would become Llucanayacu.

Maestro Orlando explained that his family were descended from a line that included powerful yachaq runa, including the one who led the Chanka into the forest. But Maestro Orlando lamented that curandero/as are not as powerful now, and people do not live as long. He explained that individuals used to live much longer lives, sometimes hundreds of years—especially the curandero/as. He explained that the shortened life span is largely because the Native peoples adopted the diet of the Spanish. "Imagine the knowledge, the power that they had, living hundreds of years," he said. The historical change in diet, he explained, is why curandero/as can no longer transform into jaguars—at least outside of visions and dreams.[38]

These two narratives have many parallels to a central theme in Taussig's study of Amazonian shamanism (Taussig 1987): that the more powerful shamans are always to be found elsewhere—either in the past, in the forest, or downriver—always away from "civilization" and the bounds of the human sphere. As the two stories illustrate, diet, especially the inclusion of salt mediates between the human and non-human. Abstinence from salt, then, serves a dual purpose: it signals the entrance to and exit from the dieta, and its absence from the diet functions to break down the dieter's spiritual-energetic barrier so they may better absorb the energy of the plant they are dieting. It is a central part of becoming less human and more like the forest.

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[38] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. March 22, 2022.

Experiences Reported by Dieters

In this section, I explore how dieters and curandero/as interact with what Kohn calls "non-human selves" (Kohn 2013: 75). That is to say that the forest is made up of plants and animals who, in Peirce's terms, are the "somebodies" for whom signs stand for "something." These are the forest-spirits and plant-spirits to whom the curandero/as I research with refer. Kohn argues that because plants and animals are subject to the evolutionary process, in order to survive they are constantly making representations of each other and changing (evolving) as they adapt to these representations. In adapting, these selves are, in a sense, Nature representing something about the world to itself by interacting with itself through individual beings who inherit, carry, and pass on genetic information.

> As the giant anteater illustrates [if we consider the adapted shape of its head and its long, dexterous tongue], this 'somebody'—or self, as I prefer to call it—is not necessarily human, and it need not involve symbolic reference, subjectivity, the sense of interiority, consciousness, or the awareness we often associate with representation for it to count as such . . . . Self is both the origin and the product of an interpretive process; it is a waypoint in semiosis. A self does not stand outside the semiotic dynamic as "Nature," evolution, watchmaker, homuncular vital spirit, or (human) observer. Rather, selfhood emerges from within this semiotic dynamic as the outcome of a process that produces a new sign that interprets a prior one. It is for this reason that it is appropriate to consider nonhuman organisms as selves and biotic life as a sign process, albeit one that is often highly embodied and nonsymbolic. (Kohn 2013: 75)

Kohn takes this line of thought a step further, asking us to consider that this type of re-presentation and adaptation via semiotic processes is a type of thought, albeit a very non-human type of thought (Kohn 2013: 78). Citing the influential work of Haraway (2003) Kohn recalls the concept of "significant otherness," but he challenges it, stating that it is not "incommensurable" or "incognizable" as Haraway argued. Kohn proposes that,

despite the ontological gap that significant otherness presents, when we encounter it “we can nonetheless find ways to enter intimate (significant) relations with these others who are radically not us. Many of these selves who are not ourselves are also not human. That is, they are not symbolic creatures. . . . As such, they force us to find new ways to listen” (Kohn 2013: 134). I argue that Amazonian vegetalismo is one such way to interact with and listen to selves who are “radically not us” (that is, not human).

What surprised me about my experiences dieting and otherwise being-with-plants was, to be direct, that it worked despite me not being enculturated into an animist epistemology. It did not just work for me, it worked for every person that I interviewed. There was, of course, a high likelihood of biased reporting, as the people I interviewed were seeking to be healed or to learn something by being-with-plants—this was, by no means, a randomly selected, representative sample of the global population. These people do represent, however, a sample of the population who self-selected to travel to the Peruvian Amazon to engage with Amazonian plant-medicine through dietas as opposed to interfacing with it only through ayahuasca. As such, my analysis of this group provides valuable insight into the current state and potential future of the practice of the ciencias ancestrales and vegetalismo as the people involved in it continue to interface with the processes of globalization. I discuss these themes in more depth in chapters one and four.

Here, I explore experiences from their dietas that pilgrims reported to me. This analysis is presented to further elucidate how dieta, as a ritualized frame for cross-cultural and cross-species interaction, differentiates shamanic pilgrimage from “re-traditionalized” (decontextualized, reinterpreted) ayahuasca tourism (Labate 2014).

While Kohn's conceptualization of non-human selves does not require those selves to be involved in symbolic semiosis or to have individualized subjectivities, my interlocutors regularly reported experiences that, to them, seemed like intersubjective interactions with plants that involved symbolic reference as well as pre-symbolic communication (that is, communication on the iconic and indexical levels).

Stephanie was a dieter who came to Takiwasi to get help with life-long trauma that had developed into debilitating PTSD. Her experiences were particularly dramatic and illustrate the process of healing and learning through the methods of vegetalismo and how a semiotic analysis of this process can help get to a deeper understanding of it. For this reason, I discuss her overarching dieta process at Takiwasi—including some of her reasons for participating in a dieta and her experiences in the purga, ayahuasca ceremony, and isolation dieta that are interrelated parts of a single ritual cycle.

Originally from South America, Stephanie moved to New Zealand to escape an abusive situation. She had been on medication and working with psychotherapists for years. "I felt I was moving in circles. And, actually, on a cognitive level, I knew everything that was going on, but somehow it wasn't enough for me to heal,"[39] she told me. For her, there were two aspects of the dieta—including the purga and ayahuasca ceremony—that were important to her healing process: 1) the intense physicality of her experiences helped concretized her healing process at the pre-symbolic levels, allowing her to re-interpret her trauma symbolically; and 2) she was able to trust that the process was working because, in her experience, the medicine was interacting with her directly—

[39] Stephanie (pseud.). Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. December 3, 2019.

the plants, as non-human selves, “spoke” with her and, in concert with the curandero/as, guided her dieta. “And I think that is what is very evident, what really works in the medicine, in the whole experience: I felt like I was being held by this very alive intelligence.”

It is important that I clarify one point before moving on. In an effort to clearly give each ritual (baths, purgas, ayahuasca ceremonies, dietas, plantas de contención) its due attention, I present them in chapter three in a way that could easily be interpreted as if they are isolated events that each happen unconnected to each other. However, I include examples from each of them here in relation to Stephanie’s dieta to illustrate how they are interwoven into a larger ritual form. Considering each ritual both individually and in relation to each other—as pieces of a larger arch of ritual space-time that spans the whole process from the moment that the dieter decides to participate in a dieta until the end of the post-dieta—fits with my interlocutors’ accounts and my own experience. Discussing Stephanie’s experience will elucidate this point.

Once she decided to travel to Takiwasi for a dieta, while she was still in her home country, Stephanie began to have dreams in which a woman (or a spirit in the form of a woman) visited her. It was not relevant to her to define if this entity was a spirit, but it was a feminine entity who was interested in communicating with her. Who this entity was wasn’t clearly defined until Stephanie drank ayahuasca, but she assumed, correctly in her view, that this visitor was ayahuasca and that she needed to “build a relationship” with this plant-person.

Shortly after the dreams started, Stephanie's daughter, who was involved in helping her plan the trip to Takiwasi, sent Stephanie a recording of an icaro, "*sirenita, bobinsanita,*" ("Little Mermaid, Bobinsana") which, for reasons unknown to her at the time, felt like a meaningful connection to the process she was undertaking. When she recounted this story to me, Stephanie had a physical, emotional reaction—goosebumps and a sense that she was involved in something "really special."[40] This was because the master plant that the curandero/as and therapists at Takiwasi assigned her to diet was *bobinsana* (*Calliandra angustifolia*). From conversations with curandero/as, I learned that, as an herbal medicine, this plant is used to treat arthritis, infertility, and complications related to women's menstrual cycles. On the energetic/spiritual side, the plant is connected to the element of water, to femininity, and to psycho-emotional strength and flexibility. In dietas, plants confer elements of their essence to the dieter. Bobinsana is a large shrub that grows on riverbanks, is especially sturdy yet flexible, and grows extremely dense and deep root systems so that it can survive the powerful floods that it will inevitably endure due to its preferred growing location. As it turns out, the central theme of Stephanie's dieta was to heal her relationship with the women in her life and to reconnect to her own femininity. As she explained, this involved developing a more flexible perspective toward herself and her personality as she began to heal and move beyond the limitations that she had suffered due to her trauma. This expansion or rediscovery of her own personality also involved flexibility in her relationship with masculinity, including what she termed her own "masculine side." Since she had been

[40] Ibid.

traumatized by masculine figures in her life, she had unconsciously limited aspects of herself that she perceived as masculine and potentially dangerous.

Stephanie's experience was supported throughout by icaros. This began with the coincidental connection to the bobinsana icaro that her daughter shared with her and continued through the purga, ayahuasca ceremony, and dieta. As with most of the dieters I spoke too, Stephanie's experience of icaros was predominantly of general impressions of what the icaros were doing: how the singing was affecting her psycho-emotional state or modulating various aspects of her experiential field. Generally, she was not able to recall the melodies or lyrics of specific icaros, but remembered what their effects were. This report parallels Turino's interpretation of the typical semiotic functioning of music. "Music involves signs *of* feeling and experience rather than the types of mediational signs that are *about* something else" (Turino 1999: 224). In Peirce's particular use of the concept of "meaning" within semiotics, we can understand that the meaning of a piece of music, as with any sign, is in the effect that is has on or in the experience of the perceiver (Peirce 1955: 30-36). This is what curandero/as mean when they say that a patient's understanding of the words of an icaro are usually irrelevant to the icaro's function as a technique for healing. The patient is only one of the perceivers involved, the primary perceiver or perceivers for whom the icaro has symbolic meaning are the plants. The plants, ingested so as to be embodied within the patient, interface with the curandero/a to elicit or re-present the necessary experience in the patient to result in healing or learning. The plant is able to do this because either it is actively embodied in the experience of the patient who has ingested it, or its essence is invoked by the icaro, which is then able to

enter the patient's body through the curandero/a's breath empowered by song. The curandero/a and plants are involved in symbolic communication via icaros, and it is these songs along with other shamanic techniques that allow the plants to communicate with ritual participants in the iconic, indexical, felt way that Turino discussed.

Stephanie was anxious about the purga but experienced the icaros as building up "a kind of energetic field that allows you to really trust . . . and feel safe. Safety, for me, is a big thing."[41] During the purga, she felt that the "sweetness" of the curandero/as' icaros allowed her to trust that this was a positive experience even as she went through the physical discomfort of the ritual. She began to have visions, or unusually clear memories of traumatic moments in her life. As she vomited, the memory she was experiencing would be "cleaned" (removed from her experience), and a new one would materialize. At a certain point, she experienced a blockage. A memory had materialized, and with it came a physical pain in her stomach that persisted because she was unable to vomit. The curandero helped her get past this blockage by blowing tobacco smoke onto her stomach and into a pitcher of water, which he then directed her to drink. This quickly elicited a bout of vomiting, "And then everything came out, and I had a big relief."[42] She summarized her experience of the purga, saying, "I really felt—and I had an amazing vision—that, I don't know if all, but a great amount of the trauma memory was taken out of my body."[43]

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

In the ayahuasca ceremony the next night, Stephanie had a series of visions each accompanied by a physical experience that amounted to a stepwise progression toward understanding her trauma, concretizing it in some manner, and then expelling the condensation of her trauma from her being. "And everything happened with the icaros."[44]

She had an experience of her awareness being divided in two. In different ways throughout the ceremony, she experienced being embodied as herself while also viewing events from outside of her own body. Once the ayahuasca began to take effect, she could not tell if she had partially transformed into a serpent or had been swallowed by a serpent. She felt what she described as either the motion of her body transformed into a snake or the snake's body around hers. Then, the snake got stuck in her throat (or she got stuck in the snake's throat). She began to feel nauseous and see visions of traumatic moments from her childhood. After some time in this uncomfortable state, she transformed into a large parrot and was flying over the forest. But the nausea and feeling of having the snake stuck in her throat returned and forced her to stop flying.

There were over twenty people participating in this ayahuasca ceremony, and it was supervised by a lead curandero with four assistant curandero/as: two men, and two women. At the point when Stephanie's nausea returned, she noticed that the men had been the only ones singing. However, at that moment, the women took over, and her experience split so that she was watching from outside of her body while feeling that the women's icaros were helping her body stay relaxed. She observed that the lead curandero had come to help her. From outside of herself, she saw a dark shape stuck on her neck.

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[44] Ibid.

The curandero performed a *chupada*, (from the Spanish *chupar*, “to suck”) which involves the curandero/a sucking negative energy out of their patient’s body with their mouth. In my experience this usually does not involve physical contact. The curandero/a often fills their mouth with tobacco smoke, agua de florida, or—at Takiwasi—holy water to protect themselves from the negative energy and neutralize it. They then move their mouth near the affected spot on the patient’s body to suck out the malignant energy, usually making quite a lot of noise in the process.

Once the curandero had performed the chupada, Stephanie felt some relief. Her visual awareness returned to her body, and, with the blockage in her throat removed, she experienced the snake come up out of her head. Again, not being able to tell precisely if she was the snake or had been swallowed by the snake, she somehow ended up in a situation in which her head was engulfed in the snake’s mouth and she was “wearing it like a hoodie.”[45] At this point she began to experience visions of traumatic memories again, in this case relate to women in her life who had placed expectations on her that she felt she was unable to live up to. She fell into a confused state in which she could not differentiate between the expectations set out for her by others and her conception of herself and the person she wanted to be. Her mental state was dominated by conflict as she thought she had failed to live up to either ideal and did not know how to find a compromise between the two.

She noted that, even in this confusion, she found some comfort in the icaros. Her impression was that the songs sung by the male and female curandero/as represented a

[45] Ibid.

balance between "masculine and feminine sweetness."[46] This contrasted directly with the next difficulty she faced. The lead curandero began to sing a fast-paced energetic song that Stephanie felt was invasive and "penetrating."[47] In reaction to this, she felt a strong, negative energy rise within herself and materialize into a "demon" who was angry at the curandero because, as the demon told her, "He wants to take me out of here [Stephanie's body]."[48] The lead curandero then visited each of the participants to ask them how they were doing. When he arrived at Stephanie's side, she told him she was mad at him because, "You want to take me out of my body." The curandero replied, "No, I don't. You stay with your body." And, immediately, the demon was gone. "And at that moment, I thought, 'Oh, shit, this is trauma coming up.' I mean, I was protecting myself from the trauma because [the lead curandero] represented to me the pure male. And the penetrating icaros were a threat to me."[49] That is when she asked ayahuasca to show her the truth, and she was "shown" and "told" that the lead curandero's icaros were not a threat. Rather, they were an effort to break down her defenses so that the sweetness of the other icaros could work in her more deeply.

As the ceremony went on, she said that she got increasingly confused about what the significance of all of the things she had experienced was. As her confusion was coming to a peak, the lead curandero and one of the curanderas sang an icaro together that induced Stephanie to vomit so powerfully that the only thing she could relate it to

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

was the sensation of having contractions while giving birth, and she vomited out the snake that had been with her (or been her) for the duration of the ceremony.

After that, Stephanie had an intense conversation with what (or who) she understood to be ayahuasca. Ayahuasca told her that the confusion she was feeling had to do with her “damaged feminine lineage.”[50] Ayahuasca said, “in order to heal yourself and heal your daughter and prevent the same [trauma] from happening to your granddaughters—if you happen to have them—you need to repair your feminine lineage.”[51] Stephanie asked how she could do that, and ayahuasca replied, “when the time comes, you will know how.”[52]

With this information, she was eager to move to the isolation phase of the dieta and continue building a relationship with bobinsana. Dieting bobinsana, Stephanie began to have dreams and visions in which bobinsana came to her and guided her through the process of healing her feminine lineage. She described it this way, “She [bobinsana] told me to turn to every feminine ancestor of my lineage—my mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and everybody. I got back until my seventh generation—past ladies that I never knew, I never met. She [bobinsana] said that I have to make a golden thread to put all our hearts together, and going one by one, I did it. And it was amazing; it was very healing.”[53]

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

After that, Stephanie had a vision in which her "masculine side" started to talk to her and reminded her of a time when she, impulsively, shaved half of her head without knowing why she did it. Bobinsana explained to her that it was an externalization of "a scar that I have on my being that had to be seen."[54] As a young girl, Stephanie had been traumatized by a male figure in her life, and afterword she "felt threatened by everything that means masculine,"[55] even the masculine aspects of herself, she explained.

The last night of the dieta, Stephanie had severe stomach pain. The next morning, which was the last day of the dieta, the attending curandero determined that rather than giving her the final dose of bobinsana, she needed a different kind of attention. He performed a tobacco soplada on her. He sang an icaro, and then performed a chupada over the troubled area of her stomach with tobacco smoke in his mouth. During this process, Stephanie "had all these memories come up—like very, very real. . . . And I feel like he took off my body a great part of the trauma memory. And that was the last day."[56]

In summarizing her experience of the combined ritual process, Stephanie said:

> I realized that my feelings—it's that I was identified with this trauma all my life. This was almost part of my body, my physiology, my everything. And now that I have more space for myself, I have to fill it up with the real me. I have the feeling that it's going to be a slowly unfolding process. . . . So, this is going to be what I'm going to fill this space with: with the real me!"[57]

It bears restating as I move on to analyzing the dieta through semiotics, that Peirce held that *meaning* is the effect that a sign has when it is interpreted (Peirce 1955:

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

30, 35-36). As Stephanie emphasized, her dieta was more meaningful and efficacious for her than talk therapy alone had been because the experiences were not relegated to the symbolic level—i.e., abstract, linguistic analysis. Her trauma was re-presented to her in a way that spanned the iconic, indexical, and symbolic levels of semiosis. Throughout the larger ritual (purga, ayahuasca, isolation) a pattern repeated for Stephanie, she would experience a memory, a dream, or a vision related to a traumatic moment from her past—an iconic representation of the event. These dreams and visions were accompanied by physical discomfort, and relief from both the traumatic memory and physical discomfort when she either vomited or a curandero/a "removed something" from her body. This is the indexical dimension of semiosis in action—signification through co-occurrence. In Peircian terms, the meaning of these experiences was the consolidation of trauma via the reliving of it at a safe distance (via dreams and visions) while concretizing it as physical pain and discomfort. Only once the concrescence of the trauma on the iconic and indexical level had been achieved could it be removed either through a physical purge or an intervention by a curandero/a, such as a chupada. At each stage when a series of traumas had been thus consolidated and removed, Stephanie felt physically and emotionally "lighter" and as if a space in her body, previously occupied by the trauma, was now open to be filled with better things: with her "real self" interpreted through a more flexible perspective, liberated of limitations that had been placed on her by others.

In curanderismo, this process of consolidating disease, metabolizing it, and removing it seems to usually be experienced in the way that Stephanie described. In Peircian terms, these experiences have meaning as *iconic sinsigns*—signs whose meaning

comes from their likeness to a thing and that are experienced as actually existing, as opposed to existing in potential (Peirce 1955: 101). Peirce contrasts sinsigns with *rhemes*, whose meaning is derived from their quality of possibility or potentiality (Peirce 1955: 103).

As many dieters, including Stephanie reported, these experiences of iconic sinsigns are nested within an indexical layer of meaning, as with memories which are replicas of events that occur in a person's experience because they were, at some point in the past, co-occurrent with the event. For several dieters, symbolic—that is linguistic—interaction with what they understood to be the plants was also meaningful. These types of interactions always involved dieta plants or ayahuasca; nobody reported conversing with a purga plant.

Another dieter, Rachel, experienced a high amount of fear while adjusting to the first few days in isolation. In the middle of the week, she was offered a concentrated drink of tobacco juice—as most dieters at Takiwasi are—and had a dream in which tobacco spoke to her with a deep but creaky voice, like a "stern father." Tobacco told her *yo te protejo*, "I am protecting you."[58] She vomited after drinking the tobacco and did not feel afraid after that. This is another instance of a physical purge indexing a kind of healing resulting in a dieter experiencing the easing of a difficulty or symptom. Dealing with deeply rooted fear was a theme in Rachel's process that arose during the ayahuasca ceremony. Ayahuasca spoke to her, too, but with a distinct "voice"[59] from that of

[58] Rachel (pseud.). Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. December 1, 2019.

[59] Rachel described to me that the plants did not speak to her with "voices." To paraphrase her, she said when they "spoke" to her, it was more like a "vibration" that was an internal experience—not heard in the

tobacco. Ayahuasca repeatedly told her to "let it go." She eventually realized that the "it" she had to let go of was fear, especially fear of dying.

Rachel dieted *ushpawasha sanango* (*Tabernaemontana undulata*) and had "vivid memories of my childhood, things I had forgotten about."[60] This is one of the ways that the character or essence plants is expressed iconically to facilitate healing. Ushpawasha sanango is commonly referred to as *memoria del corazón*, "memory of the heart," because dieting it often results in the reemergence of emotionally charged memories that, although forgotten, had been important moments that affected the course of the dieter's life.

Rachel experienced mental confusion about the meaning of her reemergent memories. This confusion, or an inability to symbolically interpret the iconic and indexical meaning of her past experiences, was alleviated after purging, and she was then guided in a conversational manner by what she experienced as "the plants." The plants—ushpawasha sanango, ayahuasca, and tobacco—manifested as entities external to herself. They answered questions and provided clarification about ritual actions she needed to take to act out her cure. She chose not to share the details of these actions as they were personal and private beyond what she was comfortable describing to me. However, she was adamant that they were specific, stepwise instructions that she had already begun to implement, and she was seeing positive results.

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external world. The vibration of each plant had a personality and conveyed meaning that was encapsulated in words. She ultimately returned to describing this as speaking because that was the closest common experience she could relate it to, and because she was able to hold conversations with these non-human beings, referring to these interactions as "speaking with plants" made sense.

[60] Ibid.

This closely parallels Stephanie's experience in which the physical experience of purging consolidated negativity or having it removed by a curandero/a led to relief followed by detailed guidance of how to continue the process of healing.

Purging Iconicity to Index Healing

Through the process of dieta, a significant portion of the experience will usually be the opposite of the desired outcome. Curandero/as explained to me that this is because the plants metabolize and bring to the surface aspects of a dieter's being or negative energies that they have accumulated that are in conflict with the essence of the plant(s) being dieted. Once brought to bear in this way, these negative influences can be removed by a curandero/a or will be sloughed off during the energetic openness that dieta induces. For this reason, any and all dieta plants used by curandero/as can be referred to and categorized as purgas, even if they do not cause physical purging like those used in purga rituals. What I found in speaking with dieters and curandero/as was that this is a normal pattern for dieting. As with Stephanie and Rachel's accounts, once they were in the ritual process and taking plants, they had visions and dreams about specific moments in their lives related to the issue or issues they were trying to heal or learn about. These experiences were accompanied by localized, physical discomfort that, upon being removed or purged, gave way to a sense of ease and levity. At that point, the visions or dreams ceased, or their focus shifted. As the negative aspects are purged, the plant replaces them with aspects of its own nature or provides guidance about how the dieter can take action to heal the wounds left over.

In semiotic terms, this is a dicent index of healing. “A *Dicent Sign* is a Sign, which, for its Interpretant, is a Sign of actual existence. It cannot, therefore, be an Icon, which affords no ground for an interpretation of it as referring to actual existence” (Peirce 1955: 103). This is similar to the iconic sinsign in that its meaning is as an actual instance. However, iconic sinsigns (such as Rachel’s vivid memories) are signs of actual existence through similarity with the objects they represent. Dicent indices are interpreted as real through their effect. That is, a dicent has an element of a rheme (potentiality) nested within it, and this potentiality is brought to fruition as the sign acts on its interpretant (Peirce 1955: 103).

A dieta plant acts indexically, revealing the truth of its essence by metabolizing and purging its opposite. The dieter experiences this process first iconically through dreams and visions and second as a dicent index of healing. The dreams and visions are co-occurrent with physical or emotional pain or discomfort. Then the dreams and visions (icons) change or are removed along with the cessation of pain and discomfort through a physical purge or the intervention of a curandero/a (indices).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the practice of dieta and how it acts in relation to other rituals to comprise a ritual cycle at two Amazonian medicine centers: Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina. I presented several ethnographic examples to demonstrate how we might interpret dietas to facilitate healing and learning as the ritual frame provides a key for interpreting how humans and non-humans relate to each other. I propose that it is the

process of building these cross-species relationships within the ritual frame of dieta that enacts healing. While these two medicine centers provide symbolic (linguistic) interpretations of curanderismo from an Amazonian perspective to prepare dieters for what they are likely to experience, it is the intensity of dieters actually experiencing plants as non-human selves that gives weight to these interpretations. This is why, as I experienced with Maestro Orlando, when a curandero/a is asked how one can learn about plant medicines, they often recommend that the best way is to take them—to diet and meet them yourself.

To summarize: by entering into the ritual frame of dieta, a dieter communicates to the plant that they recognize and respect its selfhood. After a time, if the plant is convinced of the veracity of the dieter's proposition—if they act out (index) their plant-ness (icon) well enough—the plant will approach the dieter in a mutual recognition of selves. At this point the plant begins to communicate with the dieter, often through meaningful visions and dreams. Sometimes the plant will interact with the dieter symbolically, giving specific directions or teaching lessons via language-like communication. Healing is enacted when disease or negative energy is represented iconically and indexically at the same time—as when a vision and nausea are experientially linked—and purged, resulting in a meaningful reinterpretation of the dieter's sense of self as having undergone a positive shift.

In the next chapter, I discuss how, for curandero/as, this same process can result in a different type of recognition of the human as having embodied the perspective of a plant-being. This occurs when the plant begins to share a symbolic system with the dieter

that is unique to those two individuals. This system is manifested in the icaros. Icaros are always active on the indexical level as the existence of icaros represents that a relationship between the two has been established. It may contain additional, symbolic signs, such as lyrics, that can also have meanings specific to the plant and the individual curandero/a. What is significant to note is that the meanings of the songs exist in a cross-species relational frame. Viewed from the curandero/a's more experienced perspective, this is the same relational frame active during dietas.

Chapter Three
Escucha los Cantos*:*
The Semiotic Efficacy of Icaros

You only have to avail yourselves of these shamanic tools to rediscover a Nature which is not mute—as Sartre said in a kind of culmination of the modern viewpoint. Nature is not mute; it is Man who is def.

- Terence McKenna, "Opening the Doors of Creativity"

Introduction

The first time I heard an icaro in person, it was sung for my benefit during a ritual plant bath at Centro Takiwasi on the outskirts of Tarapoto, Perú in July of 2019. The curandero presiding over the bath was don José Vela, a *Maestro Perfumero* (master healer who specializes in the use of fragrant plants and perfumes). Over the course of the approximately 30-minute duration of the plant bath, don José sang several icaros, pausing from time to time to blow tobacco smoke or the sweet-smelling perfume agua de florida over my head, chest, back, hands, and arms. As he sang, he walked around me in a circle, creating a wash of gently percussive, regularly rhythmic sound by shaking his shakapa—a rattle made from a bundle of dry leaves. As I sat on the white, painted stool in the middle of don José's maloca, my senses were filled with the strong fragrances, the sounds of his songs, his shakapa, the rushing waters of the nearby Río Shilcayo, and the breeze through the trees and myriad plants that make up the botanical gardens that cover the grounds of Centro Takiwasi. I felt as if, in some way very unfamiliar to me at that point, I was at the center of something. I literally was sitting in the center of the maloca, but I was suddenly aware of, and overcome by a sense that, the forest—the plants, the river—was "aware" of me and that don José was somehow gathering and focusing that attention on me with his songs. The sensory onslaught of the combination of nature sounds, singing,

the shakapa, smoke, plant-infused bath, and agua de florida drying on my skin and in my hair was extremely relaxing—almost euphoric. At times, my attention was pulled above the surface of this multi-sensory bath by recognizable words in the icaros: local names of plants; names of rivers; fragments of Quechua and Spanish phrases such as *shamuy*, “come,” *cura cuerpecito*, “cure/heal this dear body.” My thoughts circled around the questions: is the other awareness “real”? Is it a trick of my psychology made up of the combination of my own research into Amazonian shamanism, my anticipation of this moment through the months spent preparing for field research, and don José’s icaros invoking the aid of forest spirits to come and help me? In the next moment, my preoccupation with these issues would dissolve as I relaxed back into the wash of sounds, smells, and the pleasant cooling sensation of the breeze in the tropical afternoon.

At the conclusion of the plant bath, don José repeatedly blew tobacco smoke over the crown of my head, pausing to turn his face away and belch loudly before turning back to continue blowing smoke. When I spoke with him the next day, he explained to me that the ritual of the bath had metabolized negative energy and stress that I had been carrying in my body, and that the final act of blowing smoke (a *soplada*) allowed him to remove the energy from me through the column of smoke, neutralize it, belch it out safely into the air, and then place a protective barrier over me to protect against future incursions of negative energy.

This was my first personal experience with Amazonian curanderismo. I would have many more over the course of the ten months I spent in the high Amazon of San Martín in 2019 and 2022. Being a person whose life experience has taught me to

approach every situation with open-minded skepticism, I was, and am, confused, intrigued, astounded, terrified, and grateful for the many encounters with Amazonian curanderismo and the non-human selves of the forest I have been privileged to have. I am equally grateful that the *curaciones,* "cures," work. That is to say, the rituals facilitated by curandero/as for my benefit and the benefit of the people who are the focus of this ethnography were, more often than not, effective. The people who participated in the rituals discussed in this dissertation found their physical and psychological health improved—sometimes drastically and in short order. Sometimes, they found that though these rituals did result in improved health, they were only the beginning to a long process of expanding their perspectives about the world and their relationship with it through work with curanderos and plant medicines. They found deep personal meaning in having started this process with the hope of increasingly improved physical and psychological health through its continuation.

What is more, I and most of my interlocutors had several experiences that were highly improbable, if not impossible. At least, that is, according to materialistic epistemologies that posit that such cures are the work of superstitious charlatans, that plants are not "conscious," and that spirits are not "real." I make this point because, recently, even in the realm of materialist science, evidence has mounted to the point where the relevance of these kinds of experiences and the role that music plays in shaping them are inescapably important when it comes to conceptualizing health and medicine (Graham, Saucedo, and Politi 2022; Kaelen et al. 2018).

To call on a classic of ethnomusicology, icaros are also valuable to help us rethink the perennial question of music's role in how humans make sense of themselves and their relationship to the world around them: "How musical is Man" (Blacking 1973)? I raise this question here to place it alongside the work of a cohort of ethnomusicologists who challenged researchers to seriously consider the relationality of music, humans, and non-humans (Brabec de Mori and Seeger 2013). For this reason, I draw on the work of that cohort of researchers and the work of Charles S. Peirce and Eduardo Kohn (2013) to explore how the concept of *person* is understood in the context of Amazonian curanderismo. This informs my analysis in which I seek to provide insight into how people are musical, and, along with that, *why* people are musical. Phrased another way, I seek to answer the questions, *how and why is music—icaros—so fundamental to Amazonian curanderismo, and why would it be a good idea for researchers and clinicians within and beyond the disciplines of ethnomusicology and anthropology to seriously consider these questions?*

To state the situation that I had in mind for conducting my research, clinical studies into the development and use of what has been termed *psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy* have recently—in the last five years—begun to seriously consider the role that music has played in affecting therapeutic outcomes. Notably, research teams at Imperial College London and Johns Hopkins University demonstrated a significant causal link between the experiences had under the effects of psilocybin/psilocin (which are among the principal active components of "magic" mushrooms) and the overall results of therapy. For example, this team measured significant improvement of treatment-resistant

depression and anxiety and the complete or partial cessation of smoking (Carhart-Harris et al. 2016; Garcia-Romeu, Griffiths, and Johnson 2014). In other words, the mechanism of action of these therapeutic models cannot be reduced simply to introducing certain chemicals into a participant's biological system. More specifically, it was the participants who scored high on the Mystical Experience Index who had the most marked improvement (Griffiths et al 2006). As a follow-up to those studies, Kaelen et al. (2018) correctly called attention to the fact that music was a fundamental piece of how these studies were conducted. Therapists overseeing participants' psilocybin sessions had to develop a keen sense of how to curate the music playlist for each participant; they had to figure out which songs to play at what moment, as this would often be the deciding factor in increasing or decreasing the possibility of a participant having a mystical experience. This results in a low-resolution model that looks something like this:

> Talk therapy + psychedelic + carefully curated music = mystical experience ➡ drastic increase in positive therapeutic outcomes.

The types of therapeutic outcomes that these studies measured were unprecedented in the psychological literature at the time. Better said, they were unprecedented in the literature since research involving psychedelics was outlawed in 1970; prior to that, research had shown that therapies involving lysergic acid diethylamide-25 (LSD) helped alleviate alcohol addiction, though a more recent meta-study suggests that improvements from single-dose LSD therapy wore off after about one year (Krebs and Johansen 2012). Similarly, the more recent research showed, for example, participants who had at least one mystical experience as part of a psychedelic-assisted therapy session had as high as an 80% chance of successfully quitting smoking, permanently (Noorani et al. 2018).

The importance of direct experience that the clinical studies found closely fits with ethnographic reports about ayahuasca ceremonies and perspectives that curandero/as shared with me. Curandero/as sing icaros to call on the aid of plant spirits with whom they have built a relationship through the practice of ritualized diets (see chapter two). These songs are sung in every healing ritual that I observed during my research in Perú, most of which did not involve plants that induce psychedelic experiences. However, icaros have a particular synergistic effect when sung during ayahuasca ceremonies. Curandero/as sing to carefully modulate the experiences of their patients under the effects of ayahuasca, especially to shape the patients' visions (Taussig 1993: 65-65; Dobikn de Rios 2006; Dobkin de Rios and Katz 1975). Dr. Jaime, who is now one of the lead curanderos at Takiwasi, shared with me that his first experience listening to icaros in an ayahuasca ceremony was "like ten years of therapy in one night."

While ayahuasca is present in much of the discussion in this dissertation—after all, it is a fundamental part of the work of the curandero/as I have researched with—it is important to underline that icaros are used in other contexts that do not always involve ayahuasca; the plant bath I described at the beginning of the chapter is just one such example. It is my contention that icaros function, as most music does, on the iconic and indexical levels, to use the terminology of Peircian semiotics (Turino 1999, 2008, 2012). While I argue that, even outside of ayahuasca ceremonies, icaros function mostly on pre-symbolic levels, I agree with Demange (2008: 20) and Shanon (2002: 189) that in ayahuasca ceremonies, the interplay of icaros and the synesthesia that ayahuasca often induces is fundamental to how curandero/as do their work. As such, much of this chapter

is dedicated to a semiotic analysis of icaros in rituals that both do and do not involve ayahuasca.

Contextualizing Various Meanings and Uses of Icaros

According to every curandero/a that I met in San Martín, in the simplest terms an icaro is any melody—usually, though not necessarily, associated with words—the source of which is a plant spirit (or, less often, another forest spirit, such as an animal or mermaid) and the purpose of which is to support the work of a curandero/a. Though this is what is meant by "icaro" in the geographic area where I conducted fieldwork and in most conversations about vegetalismo outside of the Amazon, this definition is contextual. As I explore below, in other contexts, the word "icaro" has more narrow definitions that are important to take into consideration.

Brabec de Mori has proposed that the songs referred to as icaros in the Western Amazon share musical characteristics (2002: 145; 2011: 37-42). In a future project, I plan to analyze this question in more depth in relation to the icaros that I recorded. As a general pattern, I noted similarities between icaros that were received by Quechua-Lamista, those received by mestizo healers from Amazonian areas, and the "ikaro style" that Brabec de Mori describes (2011). However, curandero/as with different cultural backgrounds, notably Rosa Giove and Jacques Mabit, received songs that were notably different in style. This makes sense following the conceptualization of icaros as resulting from a combination of the personalities of the healers who receive them and the spirits

who give them. The style of icaros that I encountered that most closely matches Brabec de Mori's description, as a generalization, has the following characteristics[61]:

1. Icaros are fundamentally built around melodies that are sung or whistled by an individual healer or, more rarely, by multiple healers singing in unison or octaves. Melodies in duple or triple meter are both common. The rhythms in which the melodies are sung are generally repetitive. Stark syncopations are rare. In cases where "dotted rhythms" occur, they are a regularly repeating motif.

2. Icaros are strophic or quasi-strophic, being based around a few (most commonly two to four) melodic phrases or extended motifs whose words change on each repetition. The number of repetitions and, less commonly, the order of the melodic phrases may be adjusted depending on what a curandero/a determines is fitting in the moment.

3. The lyrics commonly feature vocables (in my experience "na-nay" and "ri-ri," with several repetitions according to the melody and rhythm of the song were most common), and certain words are quasi-improvisatorial. In my experience, this is especially the case with the names of plants and animals, which may be changed to fit the needs of the moment.

[61] In these descriptions, I use terminology taken from Western music theory under the assumption this will be the most useful way for readership comprised of music scholars to get a general sense of the songs. These terms and limitations are not used by my curandero/a interlocutors.

4. The melodic contour of the first phrase often rises from the starting pitch. The contour of the second phrase often falls from the starting pitch. If there are subsequent phrases, they are often transformations and transpositions of either of the first two phrases. Each phrase occurs at a different pitch level. This requires frequent and marked shifts of vocal register (e.g., chest voice to head voice) between phrases. Starting in head voice with a slightly nasal timbre is most common in my experience.

5. Other than the voice, the only instrumentation is comprised of percussion instruments played by the curandero/a as an accompaniment to singing. The only two instruments I encountered were the shakapa (a rattle made from a fan-shaped bundle of dried leaves) and the maraca (typically a small, gourd shaker). These instruments seem to be used in icaros that amplify the energy or effects of the plants being called on and in icaros focused on cleansing. As described elsewhere in this chapter, the air moved by the shakapa is used to blow away negative energies. The sound of the maraca represents water, as its sound is similar to falling rain and flowing streams. Thus, it is used to wash away negative energies. I have heard healers sing the same songs with and without percussion instruments. As such, shakapa and maraca were used for almost every icaro sung during plant baths, perfume rituals, and purges (discussed later in this chapter).

6. Though there are exceptions, icaros tend to be medium-tempo songs, comprised of mostly eighth notes, if a quarter note is equal to between 80 and 110 beats per minute. Tempos generally stay consistent within individual instances of an icaro being sung.

In contrast, some of Dra. Rosa's icaros can be characterized as:

1. Lyrically complex in comparison to Quechua-Lamista and Amazonian mestizo icaros, yet metaphorically simpler. They feature a mix of Spanish and Quechua, though they employ fewer Quechua words than Quechua-Lamista and Amazonian mestizo icaros.

2. They often follow a verse-chorus form. Some are through-composed, featuring no repetition.

3. Their melodies are often irregular, feature large leaps, chromaticism, melismatic figures, and melodic contours distinct from the general patterns of "ikaro-style" as proposed by Brabec de Mori.

4. Rhythmically, Dra. Rosa's icaros are irregular and tend to follow speech patterns and vary widely in tempo, even changing tempo within individual songs.

5. Though she sometimes used a shakapa when singing icaros learned from other healers, I did not observe her using one while singing her own songs.

Dr. Jacques has received icaros in Spanish, featuring some Quechua words, and in French. As Bustos (2006) has discussed, Dr. Jacques' singing tends to be fast paced and rhythmically driven. To quote Dr. Jacques, "Whenever I listen to myself in recordings, I wonder why I sing so rapidly. However, I cannot sing more slowly, even if I want to. . . . It's like asking a person with a fast walking pace to walk slowly. He gets tired; it's the opposite of what one would expect" (Bustos 2006: 38). I have heard older recordings of Dr. Jacques singing some of Maestro Aquilino's icaros more slowly than he did during my time at Takiwasi. This suggests that even icaros taught to a healer by their maestro/a, over time, take on the characteristics imparted by the healer who receives them.

The contrast in style between icaros received by curandero/as from different demographics reflects the cultural hybridity of the globalization of vegetalismo. While some of the icaros sung by healers at Takiwasi may be stylistically different from the icaros described by Brabec de Mori, they are learned following the norms of vegetalismo: from the spirits or a master healer. They are also texturally similar: driven by a single melody and, sometimes, a shakapa or maraca. This distinguishes the processes of cultural mixing regarding icaros described by Labate (2014), which involves the learning of icaros from recordings and transcriptions, the incorporation of melodic and harmonic instruments such as guitars, and the translation of existing icaros into alternate languages. These days, all of these things and more have fallen under the umbrella of the term "icaro."

Thus, icaros represent and have represented different things in different times and places. In certain contexts—for example, my first hearing of icaros during the ritual plant bath I described at the start of this chapter—what an icaro is and what it signifies can seem, for a moment, like a fixed thing. However, what icaros are thought to be and how people relate to them varies significantly based on the context of relation. This sort of context-dependent coherence is what Goffman (1974) called "framing." This refers to the ways in which the "keys" to interpreting the implied meanings of communicative interactions are held in the context of communication. Geertz's classic exploration of the possible meanings of a wink demonstrates how enculturation and personal experience with culturally located spaces of communication imply differing interpretations of actions that, on the surface, might seem identical (1973: 6-7). In different terms, this is framing in action.

To more fully understand icaros as an object of study, I employ Peircian semiotics to explore some of the most relevant frames in which my interlocutors relate to these songs. The word itself, icaro, is part of a symbolic network in which, for me, don José, and the plants, as beings involved in shared semiosis, is related to and contrasted with other signs. Framed within a ritual, what could otherwise be heard as a song like any other (perhaps sung for entertainment), indexes a process of healing. This general process is specified by the icaro's words: *Chiriq sanangitaykuna, shamaykuna kallariy / Ayahuasca curandera, shamaykuna kallariy* ([Our dear] chiriq sanango [the plant *Brunfelsia grandiflora*], come to us, begin / Ayahuasca, healer, come to us, begin). While these words have uses, active within the overlapping sign networks of Quechua, English,

and Spanish, what I came to understand is that they also have symbolic meanings that are active in networks only accessible to a given curandero/a and the spirit who conferred the song to them. In this way, the singing of an icaro in a healing ritual indexes the curandero/a's ability to heal by facilitating a meeting between their patient and the plants. This is because the existence of the icaro implies that the curandero/a has the requisite experience and relationship with those plants such that they will come to the healer's aid when called.

The globalization of Amazonian shamanism and requisite cross-cultural contact has also resulted in changes to instrumentation, language use, and musical style, especially as related to songs sung during ayahuasca ceremonies. Many of these adaptations have been included under the expanding umbrella of the term icaro (Labate 2014). An issue that arises from this analysis, however, is that many Indigenous Amazonian groups have songs that function in similar ways but are distinct from icaros in name and in musical form (for some examples see Brabec de Mori 2011; Caruso 2005: 259-61; Townsley 1993). To complicate the situation further, some of the various groups include icaros in their repertoire of healing/shamanic songs, and, in some of these cases, the songs referred to as icaros share significant elements of their musical structure, include Quechua vocabulary to a degree that other songs do not, and are specifically tied to the use of psychedelic ayahuasca (Brabec de Mori 2011).

All of this makes it quite difficult to parse apart or piece together a definition for icaro that fits well within a given context without being either reductionist or so general as to be nearly useless. The exercise of trying to understand icaros in their various

contexts exemplifies how meaning emerges from semiotic processes in which all living beings are involved (Kohn 2013). At some levels, semiosis is subjective—highly contextual, involving a recursive, self-referential system of symbols. At other levels it is generalizable to the point that contacting objective reality almost seems possible. Icaros, as sign objects, exist across space, time, and various semiotic levels simultaneously—in how they are learned, used, and defined by humans and non-humans. As such, a discussion of the history and historiography of icaro as a musical form caught up in the sometimes beautiful, often violent interactions of the cultural contact of colonization and globalization is necessary.

Songs sharing many linguistic and musical characteristics with icaros are sung throughout the Western Amazon and are referred to by the same (or a very similar) name (Brabec de Mori 2002, 2011, 2015; Bustos 2006, 2008; Luna 1986). In her research, Rosa Giove found it difficult to track the etymology of the word beyond Amazonian Quechua and the verb *ikaray* “to sing an icaro,” or “to blow smoke in order to heal” (Giove Nakazawa 2017).

To confuse matters more, in 2016, the Peruvian Government recognized “the Íkaros of the Shipibo-Conibo-Xetebo as cultural patrimony of the nation” (Resolución Viceministerial No. 068-2016-VMPCIC-MC, my translation). In this legal document, it is explained (citing the anthropologist Giuspe [Giuseppe] Caruso [sic]) that the Shipibo-Conibo recognize five types of íkaros: *mashá, behuá, shiro behuá, nahuarin,* and *icara* (note the name of the final type). Giuseppe Caruso, however, does not use the term íkaro to describe Shipibo-Conibo shamanic songs. According to him, the *onaya* (one of the

terms for a Shipibo-Conibo healer) differentiate between two general categories of songs: those with power and those without power. Of the former, there are two sub-categories, "those that cure, which are sung to sick people, and those that procure success in love: the latter are called *huarmi* (*warmi* means woman in Quichua)" (2005: 259, my translation). Caruso is consistent with his use of the terms *los cantos (del chamán/terapéuticos)*, "the therapeutic/shaman's songs," but calls icara the "shamanic song *par excellence*" and links this category to the songs of "urban mestizo curanderos" for whom "the word *icaro* is an umbrella term for all the songs that an ayahuasquero uses during a treatment session" (2005: 260, my translation). How are we to make sense of the similar terminology (icaro/icara) and usage which, in one case, refer to a specific sub-type of shamanic song; in another case, to all shamanic songs; and, in the case of the Peruvian government, to the conflation of the two previous cases?

As far as I have found, Brabec de Mori has done the strongest historiographic work on icaros. He pieced together an etymology of the word icaro and its related social history that provide helpful context for understanding the development of Amazonian shamanism(s) and the communicative frames in which the terminology of icaros arises. He argues that icaro originated with the Kukama people. In Kukama, the noun-verb pair *ikara* and *ikarustu* means "song" and "to sing," referencing general, everyday songs. These words also refer to songs used for healing and shamanism along with the word *mariri*, which is reserved for shamanic songs (Brabec de Mori 2011: 34). Brabec de Mori (2015: 657) goes on to describe that the processes of *mestizaje* and cultural hybridization played a fundamental role in the adoption of the Kukama word ikara into the shamanic

practices of the Northern Peruvian Amazon. Specifically, he references a period of cultural mixing that started in the middle of the 1600s when Indigenous people were forced by Catholic missionaries and colonists into *reducciones* (labor camps). Because missionaries imposed Quechua as the *lingua franca* of the reducciones (Ardito Vega 1993: 69), these same processes led to the standardization of shamanic terminology in the Amazonian dialect of the Quechua language which due to the intense cultural mixing that occurred in the reducciones, absorbed vocabulary from other Amazonian languages. Giove Nakazawa also speculated about this being at the root of the word icaro, but she had not found a clear example to point to as a source language (2017: 12:50-14:52). The continuation of missionization and colonization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries followed by the Rubber Boom from approximately 1865-1920 led to further intercultural dissemination. This resulted in the Amazonian Quechua terminology being adopted and used as part of the shamanic vocabulary of Indigenous and mestizo people farther south and throughout the Western Amazon (Brabec de Mori 2015: 657-64).

Similarly, the form of ayahuasca containing DMT-admixture plants likely originated in the Northern Amazon with the Kukama or their progenitors. The technique of icaros, the related shamanic terminology, and DMT-containing ayahuasca were carried south by Indigenous and mestizo people over the period of approximately the last 400 years (Brabec de Mori 2011). While the Kukama word ikara refers to songs generally, including ayahuasca songs, as hybridized curanderismo was disseminated throughout the Western Amazon, the word icaro came to refer specifically to songs related to healing and other shamanic practices, especially the use of ayahuasca (Brabec de Mori 2011).

Suárez-Álvarez (2023) has presented a counter case to Brabec de Mori's hypothesis that psychedelic ayahuasca was not used by the Shipibo-Conibo until after the arrival of the Spanish in South America. Suárez-Álvarez's evidence consists of reports from early missionaries of Indigenous shamanic activities that bear a resemblance to psychedelic ayahuasca use. He also points out that the Shipibo-Conibo word *oni* (ayahuasca brew) is likely related to the Protopanoan word for "human" as evidenced by the word *joni*, "man/person" in Kashinawá (another Panoan language). He proposes that, for some Panoan group such as the Shipibo-Conibo, ayahuasca is potentially foundational not only to their traditional medicine system but to their sense of group identity and wellbeing in relation to the world. "Imagine this association: ayahuasca, people, knowledge, health" (Suárez-Álvarez 2023: 348).

While Suárez-Álvarez raises some issues that point to a more complex history of the use of ayahuasca in the Western Amazon, the evidence he presented does not entirely upend the interpretation proposed by Brabec de Mori. The evidence that he presents suggests that the hypothesis, proposed by Brabec de Mori (2011), Gow (1994), and Shepard (2014), that psychedelic ayahuasca was not used in the Ucayali valley until the Rubber Boom is tenuous. What his case fails to counter, however, is the evidence that a shamanic complex involving ayahuasca and icaros as used in communal healing ceremonies was created in and disseminated through unintended consequences of missionary, colonization, and industrial projects. This is evidenced by his admitted, and unfortunately continued, misunderstanding of the case that Brabec de Mori made regarding the dissemination of the term icaro attached to the use of psychedelic

ayahuasca and a number of other Kukama and Quechua words. Suárez-Álvarez argues that Brabec de Mori failed to make the case that icaros, as sung by curandero/as in Northern Perú, are similar enough to the icaro style of Shipibo-Conibo healers while being different enough from their other songs to be considered a distinct form. Brabec de Mori himself pointed out that some songs that Shipibo-Conibo healers referred to as icara were similar to mestizo icaros but showed some differences in melodic and formal structure when compared to their northern counterparts (Brabec de Mori 2011: 41). An important consideration that Suárez-Álvarez seems to have overlooked, however, is that as far as Brabec de Mori observed in working with Shipibo-Conibo healers, icaros were the only shamanic songs that are sung exclusively during ayahuasca ceremonies and are the only songs that use Quechua lyrics (Babrec de Mori 2011: 36).

Considering the evidence presented by these researchers, it seems to me that the emergent picture is of wide-spread shamanic use of ayahuasca (likely containing psychedelic admixture plants) throughout the Amazon basin in pre-Columbian history as proposed by Suárez-Álvarez (2023). However, multiple phases of forced movement and cultural contact between diverse groups of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples beginning with Spanish colonization and Catholic missionization and continuing through the Rubber Boom, shaped and disseminated the shamanic complex that tied Kukama and Quechua words with the shamanic use of psychedelic ayahuasca to most of the Western Amazon. This process seems to have happened in a north-to-south direction over the last 400 years. “Many ayahuasca-related terms that are known in the Peruvian south are

rooted in the north and none used in the north come from the south" (Brabec de Mori 2011: 35).

The Quechua-Lamista ethnic group, who make up the largest population of Indigenous people in the region around Tarapoto and Chazuta, developed from the many Indigenous peoples who were forced into the reducción in Lamas beginning in the 1650s (Scazzocchio 1979: 16, 34). Undoubtedly, this history has influenced the shamanic and traditional healing practices in the area and is why the shamanic terminology used in the region, including by curandero/as at Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina, matches the Quechua terminology described above. As such, my research is only a microcosm in the story of Amazonian shamanism. Though the style of singing is being affected by globalization, the majority of what I encountered in San Martín reflects Brabec de Mori's historiographic analysis.

Semantic Framing: Is It Icaro, Ikaro, Ícaro, or Íkaro*?*

As Taussig (1987) and Brabec de Mori (2011, 2015) demonstrated, Amazonian shamanism—often involving ayahuasca—has been caught up in the processes of globalization and proto-globalization at least since Europeans first made contact with Amazonian peoples. In different contexts of cultural contact and mixing the word icaro has carried different shades of meaning, as exemplified by Brabec de Mori's historiography (2011) and the confusion and equivocation of terms in Suárez-Álvarez (2023) and the Peruvian Ministry of Culture's resolution recognizing Shipibo íkaros as national cultural patrimony (Resolución Viceministerial No. 068-2016-VMPCIC-MC). In

the following section, I attempt to provide clarification about what the term(s) icaro/ikaro/ícaro/íkaro might mean through a semiotic analysis of the term's use in different contexts that I have encountered while researching the topic over the past ten years. Something as subtle as the way that the word is spelled or which syllable is stressed in pronunciation can communicate important information about differing value structures and assumptions being made in discussions about Amazonian shamanism in which the concept of the icaro is active.

For example, I have encountered a common misconception in both face-to-face and in online interactions (in internet forums related to ayahuasca and Amazonian shamanism) that icaro refers exclusively to Shipibo ayahuasca songs or that icaros originated with the Shipibo people and have been adopted into other traditions in recent years. I have found that this idea circulates along with the related ideas (Brabec de Mori would argue these are also misconceptions) that the Shipibo ethnic group are the heirs of the oldest, most authentic, version of Indigenous ayahuasca use. This idea is often accompanied by a misapprehension that Quechua is synonymous with non-Indigenous—signifying mestizo people from the Peruvian highlands who have relatively recently begun working with ayahuasca, mostly to earn money from tourists. These seem to be fairly pernicious ideas that I think of, collectively, as the "Shipibo-ayahuasca-origin meme." This meme exists primarily in discussions in online forums (e.g., the Ayahuasca Facebook page and the Reddit page r/ayahuasca—resources that many use as a first step to gathering information when new to the topic of ayahuasca shamanism, discussed in chapter four). This conceptualization posits three "schools" of ayahuasca shamanism: the

Indigenous school, whose ur-example is the Shipibo (Labate 2014); the neo-shamanic/gringo-shaman school, meaning cosmopolitan people—usually from the Global North—who have become curandero/as or ayahuasquero/as, sometimes through an apprenticeship with Indigenous or mestizo/a curandero/as (Brabec de Mori 2014); and the Quechua/mestizo school. The Quechua/mestizo school usually falls in the middle of a hierarchy of perceived authenticity and proximity to shamanic power with Shipibo and other Indigenous shamans at the top and "gringo" shamans at the bottom. This reductionist conceptualization is based on the idea, among other misinformation, that Quechua, as an ethnonym, is synonymous with mestizo and/or refers to Indigenous people who, relatively recently, migrated from the Peruvian highlands to the lowland forests to join in the ayahuasca tourism economy. However, I have personally had run-ins with this meme in spaces where one might assume that people would be relatively well informed about the topic of Indigenous Amazonian cultures and shamanism—namely at meetings with a U.S. branch of the Santo Daime Church and with a reviewer for an academic anthropology journal that regularly publishes articles on closely related subjects. In both cases, these people tied the origin of icaros and ayahuasca shamanism to pre-colonial, ancient Shipibo culture.

The document from the Peruvian Ministry of Culture seems to paradoxically reflect conflicting aspects of multiple narratives about Amazonian Indigenous peoples and icaros simultaneously without acknowledging—or perhaps without being aware of—their incongruity. Further, this document exemplifies some more subtle indications of

how these narratives are functioning, namely, in the varied spellings of the word icaro, which, I argue, each imply different interpretive frames.

Kohn (2013) and (Turino 1999) each made a similar point via Peircian semiotics that is fundamental to my understanding of icaros, not only in how they function to heal, but in how they are understood as a phenomenon caught up in a web of historical and cultural contexts. That point is that, as semiosis takes place across its three principal levels, each level depends on or is nested within the previous level. That is, symbols depend on indices which depend on icons. As part of this functioning, symbols nearly always accrue some of their meaning through the context of their occurrence in the perception of the person interpreting them. The indexical level of signification is fundamentally contextual and is, thus, the stage in the meaning-making process from which semantic framing springs.

In writing (symbolic semiosis) in a Peruvian context (indexical semiosis), it is often the case that the letters C and K will be used interchangeably to signify that a given word is being communicated in Spanish or an Indigenous language, respectively. The letter Q is similarly involved in this type of code switching; K does not exist in normal Spanish orthography, so the hard C sound is typically achieved with QU when followed by I or E, which would change the C to its soft sound—like S. Thus, in Spanish, Quechua is spelled with QU while in Quechua orthography it is spelled *Kechwa*. The change in orthography amounts to communication of the same word with the same, or very similar, pronunciation but with subtle changes in what is likely to be intended and interpreted. The difference is something that accrues through changes in context-dependent semantic

framing. Context *is* the functioning of indexicality: meaning derived from the co-occurrence of the sign and its object in a specific place and time (Peirce 1955: 102; Turino 1999: 227). In general terms, the letters C/QU index a mestizo/Spanish communicative context, and the letter K indexes an Indigenous one. While in many spaces, it is impossible to parse apart Indigenous-ness and mestizo-ness (Cadena 2000), I propose that C or K point to (index) or imply a frame of mestizo-ness or Indigenous-ness that leans more heavily in one direction or the other.

Bernd Brabec de Mori, whose research on Amazonian shamanism and the music of the Western Amazon I have already cited extensively, most often spells the word *ikaro*, as in the title of his master's thesis (2002). This signals the songs' Indigenous origins. In his master's thesis, he also spells ayahuasca with the "Indigenous" orthography: ayawaska. However, in publications of the last fifteen years or more, he has followed the Spanish orthography: ayahuasca. On the other hand, the late Rosa Giove Nakazawa, co-founder of Centro Takiwasi and important researcher and practitioner of curanderismo, switches between spelling the word with a K or a C without explanation in her writing (1993). Giove was emphatic, however, that the word be pronounced with the emphasis on the penultimate syllable due to its cultural importance for Amazonian Quechua-speaking peoples. The Quechua-Lamista are the most numerous Indigenous people in the department of San Martín, where Takiwasi is located. It follows, then, that Giove heard the word pronounced by Indigenous people who speak Quechua—in which emphasis is normally placed on the penultimate syllable—and by mestizo curandero/as who would also have encountered the Quechua pronunciation. Giove's vacillation

between spelling the word with K and C likely reflects her motivation to respect the Indigenous origins of the word even while she worked and researched in the intensely cross-cultural environment surrounding Takiwasi.

The logic of the case that I am making about the relative “Indigenous-ness” signaled by spelling and pronunciation is not perfect, but that is part of the point that I am trying to make. While more study would be necessary to confirm this, I hypothesize that these choices of spelling and pronunciation can be linked—correlatively if not causatively—with motivations to situate icaros within competing historiographies of Amazonian shamanism. While Giove made it clear that she prefers the pronunciation that ties icaros to Amazonian Quechua-speaking groups, her spelling reflects both that cultural connection and the cross-cultural nature of Takiwasi’s relationship with Indigenous, mestizo, and global engagements with curanderismo. Brabec de Mori, who has forwarded the hypothesis of “ikaros” being disseminated as part of the culturally syncretic shamanic complex whose terminology suggests mixing of Kukama and Quechua during the missionization period. His spelling reflects a connection with Indigeneity through the use of K rather than C, and it reflects the Kukama and Quechua pronunciation, as both languages typically place phonetic stress on the penultimate syllable.

In contrast, in contexts in which the songs are assumed to originate with the Shipibo-Conibo people, the word is often spelled with a K (to index Indigeneity) and with the stress on the first syllable, following the phonetic patterns of the Shipibo-Conibo language. This is how the word is spelled in the title of the Peruvian Ministry of Culture’s

document recognizing, to quote the document again, “the Íkaros of the Shipibo-Conibo-Xetebo as cultural patrimony of the nation” (Resolución Viceministerial No. 068-2016-VMPCIC-MC). The spelling and pronunciation distinction between Brabec de Mori’s use and that in the Ministry of Culture’s document is especially notable since Brabec de Mori is most well-known for his work with Shipibo-Conibo communities (Brabec de Mori 2014, 2015). Another notable example of a context in which the word is used as “íkaro” is in online discussions such as podcasts and the ayahuasca Facebook group (discussed in chapter four). In these spaces, it seems to me that most of this is a reflexive reproduction of what discussants see in advertisements for ayahuasca retreats, which are often highlighting a connection to authenticity by working with Shipibo healers. This is likely a reflection of how wide-spread the Shipibo-authenticity meme is. The Peruvian Ministry of Culture’s recognition of Shipibo íkaros as cultural patrimony shows how narratives produced in the networks of tourism and globalization (the Shipibo-authenticity meme) can flow back into and shape more localized discussions. In academic discussions, the history of icaros and ayahuasca shamanism is still being debated (Suárez-Álvarez 2023). In contrast, the assumption of ancient Shipibo origins seem to be rooted in the popular, global discussion outside of Amazonian contexts deeply enough that it has circled back around and begun to shape official, Peruvian state narratives.

For my part, I use the spelling “icaro” which reflects the Quechua pronunciation that I encountered in my field sites in San Martín. I spell the word with a C to reflect the complicated history of cultural mixing that I have striven to provide an overview of here. In the future, I may decide to change the way I spell the word. But, given the unsettled

and complex circumstances of curanderismo and icaros, I am ambivalent about how the word should be spelled.

A Semiotic Interpretation of Icaros

As I describe in chapter two, the various aspects of the dieta work together for the dieter—curandero/a or otherwise—to establish and cultivate a relationship with the forest and with the specific plants being dieted. In vegetalismo, plants and the spirits of the forest are the source of shamanic power, and they grant their aid to those who have successfully welcomed the plant into their bodies through proper dieting. Being given the gift of an icaro not only grants the curandero/a power to heal but is an index of their having successfully built a relationship with an aspect of the forest. When the curandero/a sings an icaro during a healing ceremony, they are not only wielding a tool of their craft, they are signaling and (re)enacting the authority, knowledge (yachay), and power they have been given by the spirits of the forest. As Townsley (1993) describes, the songs invoke and—through their musical, metaphorical content—reconstitute the essence of the plant to whom the song is related. The way this is done, interestingly, follows the reverse of the normal semiotic process by which meaning is communicated and understood (icons depend on the reality of existent objects, indices depend on icons, symbols depend on indices). This is because the curandero/a is not communicating with their patient; they are communicating with their spirit-helpers and using their breath to introduce the spirit's power into the body of the patient.

The inverted semiotic process is followed to retrace the steps that the curandero/a went through to learn their songs and medicine. The basic structure of the process is thus: The icaros amount to a symbolic form of communication—a network of signs, the knowledge of whose meaning is accessible only to the curandero/a and the plant-spirit who taught them the song. This is why it does not matter if the patient understands the meaning of the songs—the symbolic meaning is only known to the curandero/a and the spirits. This is not to say that the effect that the music itself has on the patient is not relevant. Rather, for curandero/as, the affective result of the songs has little to no relation with the songs' ability to heal. By using the symbolic communication of the song, the curandero/a indexes their relationship to the plant and, thus, sonically brings it into the ritual space as a re-presentation (icon) of the plant that is then introduced into the patient's body via the curandero/a's breath. In so doing, the curandero/a facilitates a meeting between the patient and the plant (the actually existent sign object). This parallels the point at which the curandero/a learned the icaro by meeting the plant itself incorporating it into their own being in a dieta. By performing their relationship to the plants through the singing of icaros, the curandero/a ritualistically, musically, and semiotically "reverse engineers" the essences of many different plants and other forest spirits to aid in the healing process. To my understanding, this is how icaros function.

Levi-Strauss, in his essay "The Effectiveness of Symbols" (1963) described a similar process that he observed during a Cuna shamanic healing ceremony that was conducted for a woman experiencing a difficult and dangerous childbirth. His hypothesis, however, necessitates (and assumes) the functioning of a "cultural text" that is

consciously and subconsciously enacted, embodied, believed and—to a degree—understood by people within the Cuna cultural group. In Levi-Strauss's case, he proposed that shamanism was acting on a psychological level, tapping into what we might now call the placebo effect in order to heal. The Cuna shaman's song, he argued "constitutes a purely psychological treatment, for the shaman does not touch the body of the sick woman and administers no remedy. . . . the song constitutes a *psychological manipulation* of the sick organ, and it is precisely from this manipulation that a cure is expected" (Levi-Strauss 1963: 191). He goes on to describe how the words of the shaman's chant metaphorically refer to fertility spirits, the woman's pain, various parts of her anatomy, and the difficult situation she is in. Then, still working through lyrical metaphor, the shaman reinterprets the situation as positive and culturally normal. The cure, Levi-Strauss argues, was administered through a psychological reorientation via the symbolic structure shared by the woman and the shaman. "The cure would consist, therefore, in making explicit a situation originally existing on the emotional level and in rendering acceptable to the mind pains which the body refuses to tolerate. That the mythology of the shaman does not correspond to an objective reality does not matter. The sick woman believes in the myth and belongs to a society which believes in it" (Levi-Strauss 1963: 197).

Working from a structuralist perspective, Levi-Strauss's argument is, fundamentally, that language shapes reality—or at least that language shapes psychology and psychology shapes reality. Therefore, shamanic cures are real, in a sense, but they depend on particular processes of enculturation that lead certain people to believe in their efficacy. This makes sense, since Levi-Strauss's structuralism was based in Saussurian

thinking including that language as “the most complex and universal of all systems of expression [is] the master-pattern for all branches of semiology” (Saussure [1916] 2011: 68). From this perspective, language supersedes all other sign carriers. This is why the shaman is able to use words—structured by ritual and song and laden with mythical significance—to affect his patient’s psychology and physiology to enact a cure. The binarism inherent in Saussure’s structuralism comes through as an important part of Levi-Strauss’s hypothesizing on the mechanisms of shamanic healing; the shaman-patient dyad is parallel to myth and the metaphorical reenactment of myth, the symbol and the symbolized, sickness and health. The point being that the power to act exists on one side of each of these dyads—each contains a passive pole, subject to falling into chaos, which can then be re-ordered by the related active pole. While this conceptualization may fit well for Levi-Strauss’s analysis of Cuna shamanism, it does not fit in the case of Peruvian vegetalismo. As I described above, it is not necessary that a curandero/a’s patient understands, let alone believes, in the efficacy of a cure. Curandero/as are more pragmatic. The potential for their techniques and plants to result in a cure has little to no relation with the patient’s beliefs (at least not faith-based beliefs). This is partly to do with the fact that, contrasting with Levi-Strauss’s example, vegetalismo involves the ingestion of plants that have medicinal, bio-chemical properties. Curandero/as also operate with the knowledge, based on personal experience, that the plants are active, conscious agents in the healing process. This is why, as I described in chapter two, when I asked Maestro Orlando what the best way to learn about curanderismo was, he recommended first-hand experience through a dieta. This is why I have found it valuable

to analyze some aspects of curanderismo through Peircian semiotics. Saussurian semiotics posits an inescapable rupture between the world and human attempts to make meaningful sense of the world. Saussure posited that human processes of sense making were necessarily linguistic processes, thus they were culturally limited and fundamentally arbitrary (Saussure [1916] 2011: 69). Peircian semiotics, based in philosophy rather than linguistics, posits that though language is powerful and useful for abstraction, it is not necessary for meaning making.

> Contrasting with general postmodernist views, in Peircian theory signs are neither unmoored from the objects they signify, nor are signs necessarily only linked to other signs. Both these ideas, derived from Saussure's problematic binary conception of linguistic signs, collapse the basic triadic character of semiosis and the different moments of semiotic chaining—that is, how sign-object relations at one stage create a distinct effect (interpretant) which becomes the sign at the next stage in the chain (Peirce 1991: 239). Peirce emphasized that a sign is not a self-evident idea or entity but is the catalyst for an effect. (Turino 1999: 223)

Further, non-linguistic meaning making implies that the process begins with contact between actual objects in the world and what Peirce called "scientific intelligences," which are any beings "capable of learning by experience" (Peirce 1955: 98). While Peirce was concerned mainly with humans, Kohn (2013) argued that any living being involved in the process of evolution is actively making meaningful representations of the world by interacting with it and being shaped by it. Thus, every evolving being is included under the umbrella of "scientific intelligence" and are what Kohn prefers to call "selves" (2013: 34).

One day I asked Maestro Orlando about how curandero/as use icaros to heal their patients. Phrased in different ways, I have asked similar questions probably close to a

dozen times over the few years that I have known him. On this day, he patiently responded, "Look, there are three essential parts for doing good work: the plant, the patient, and the curandero. My job is to help the plant and the patient meet. There is a chance that the two will clash, '*es posible que se choquen*,' and the patient will not get better. I bring everyone together—the plant, the patient, and me—and, if everyone is willing to meet, the patient can heal. But it is the plant that heals. I just arrange the meeting."[62] Curanderismo does not require faith-based belief because, in this system, healing is enacted through direct contact between human and non-human selves. If there is a psychological component to healing achieved through curanderismo, it does not seem to be bounded by culture. This is because, as the accounts from my interlocutors included in this dissertation show, the techniques of curanderismo elicit convincing, meaningful contact between human and non-human selves.

If we take a step back to view the place that icaros hold within the semiotic meeting of plants, patients, and curandero/as, we will see that the songs are at the center, both metaphorically and technically. The songs, as Turino pointed out regarding the effectiveness of most music, convey a significant portion of their meaning on the indexical level (Turino 1999). What a given piece of music indexes, Turino argues, is mostly dependent on the life experience of those hearing the music. It is a virtual certainty, then, that an icaro would be interpreted differently by a cosmopolitan patient from Europe, or a South American metropolis such as Lima, than it would be by a

[62] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. March 28, 2022.

member of an Amazonian Native community—let alone the interpretation of a curandero/a.

If we were to apply Levi-Strauss's model of symbolic efficacy to the case of vegetalismo, the effectiveness of a cure would depend on the culturally defined, if subconscious, understanding of the metaphorical content of icaros. Further this understanding would need to be, at least in some part, shared by the curandero/a and their patient. Yet, in the culturally diverse contexts of Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina, the chances of there being a shared understanding of the significance of the many icaros that curandero/as sing is highly unlikely and often explicitly ruled out by a lack of shared language. Yet vegetalismo rituals are effective in these spaces.

The clearest case of this that I encountered involved a pilgrim, Amir, who was originally from the Middle East but had immigrated to Australia. He spoke English as a second language, virtually no Spanish, and absolutely no Quechua. Amir shared with me that he had previous experience with psychedelics, both in ceremonial and recreational contexts, but knew very little about ayahuasca or vegetalismo other than what he had learned from friends, podcasts, and some surface-level internet research. Yet Amir reported having a strong connection with two icaros—both during the diet-opening ayahuasca ceremony and during his week of isolation in dieta. When he heard one of the icaros, it elicited visions of serpents. He also explained that his main take-away from the dieta, which he associated with the other icaro, was that he had been over-intellectualizing every decision was making in his life. So, he needed to make a change, to connect with his emotions, intuition, faith, and spirituality. Up until the dieta, he

considered himself to be an atheist, but, afterword, felt he had been missing a spiritual dimension to his life and determined to find a spiritual practice that could incorporate his experiences with plant medicines.

The two icaros both belonged to Rosa Giove, who sang them during the ayahuasca ceremony in question. The first was *El icaro de la S,* "The Icaro of the Letter S"—a song in Spanish and Quechua which includes lines such as *Sinchi, sinchi amaru / Tu voz en el viento* "Powerful boa/anaconda / Your voice on the wind." The songs goes on to describe the serpent's power to teach and heal those who will listen to its voice, "*sss*," carried (iconically) on the wind and through the breath of the curandero/a. The second was *El icaro de la A*, "The Icaro of the Letter A" also called "*Ábrete Corazón*," "Open yourself, heart" (also discussed in chapter four). This song speaks directly to the lesson the dieter learned, *Ábrete corazón, ábrete sentimiento / Ábrete entendimiento, deja a un lado la razon / Y deja brillar el sol, escondido en tu interior*, "Open [yourself], heart, open [yourself], feeling / Open [yourself], understanding, leave reason to one side / And let the sun hidden inside you shine."

How is it that these meanings are communicated, seemingly across linguistic and cultural boundaries?

It stretches the limits of what would be allowable in a materialist paradigm, but, perhaps, if we are able to bracket materialism and take a phenomenological, semiotic approach, we can seriously consider what various Amazonian curandero/a's have said—to me and as communicated through past ethnographies—the plants and spirits heal and communicate with people who will but take the proper approach in asking for help.

Whether the experiences of communicating with plants and spirits are, “literally real” in a materialistic sense, or only “metaphorically” or “symbolically real,” in the sense described by Levi-Strauss, they are, at the very least, phenomenologically real. Considering the results shown in clinical research on psychedelics (especially Kaelen et al. 2018), in certain cases, the phenomenologically real has effects that are undeniable, even to the staunchest materialist.

So, I return to the indexical functioning of icaros and Peircian semiotics to further clarify what icaros are and how they function. Beyond being songs, icaros are signs that index the curandero/a’s active relationship to the Forest (broadly defined as the non-human elements and entities that inhabit the Amazonian world, including the land, water, and sky). It is the maintenance of this relationship, largely through dieta, that the curandero/a is able to call on the aid of the various denizens of the forest. Maestro Orlando illustrated this point to me with a story:

> When I did my dietas, I came in contact with a *sirena* (mermaid/siren). Back then, I was afraid of the sirena because my wife had just had our second child. He was two years old. That’s why I didn’t want to be with the sirena—she wanted me to be her husband. This is like the experience that my maestro, my grandfather, my father Aquilino told me about. He had his wife (aside from his human wife), a woman of the water; her name was Julia. Why is this important? The sirena taught me to sing icaros. . . . But when I didn’t agree to be with her, the icaros disappeared. The sirena showed me huge cities—enormous, full of lights. She put me on top of a mountain and showed me, “Look at it shine like gold.” It was there shining, and the sirena told me, “If you come and live with me, all of this is yours.” And I told her, “No, I can’t live here with you because I have a son.” And the sirena pursued me in my dreams—through the waters, through lakes and rivers like this one (he gestured to the stream that runs through Mushuk Pakarina). I remember one time, the sirena grabbed my feet; she wanted to pull me under, and I didn’t want it. I was kicking my feet, crossing a lake, and the plant that you’re taking (I was in the middle of a dieta when we had this conversation), el cocha renaco, it’s a strangler fig. If you put it next to a tree, this plant will grow and kill the tree so it can take its place (this aside was to illustrate that this plant

> grants physical and mental strength). With the help of that plant, I went on in the water, and the sirena was right behind me. And I was carrying my son on my back. And I swam and swam and swam. And I told the sirena, "I will never be yours." And she said to me "Yes, one day, you will look for me," she said—and this was in a dream, I was wet with my son on my back—and she said, "One day, you will look for me, and it will be too late." When my son was no longer a youth, I started to look for the sirena, but I could not find her. Through searching and searching, I found her. She told me, "No, you lost the opportunity of a lifetime: the knowledge. . . ." And that was the end, she left. And that's how it was. Until today, I am still searching. I don't know if I will find her again. And she took the icaros. I used to know how to sing those beautiful icaros. But afterward—it's like if you write with a pencil and you start to erase: *ssht*, they disappear. There's nothing left, not even a trace, (*no deja ni huella)*. That's how she left me. This is how the stories are. Sometimes, one can't understand—the people from outside that you will tell about your experiences in the Amazon. In Amazonian curanderismo with the medicinal plants, sometimes, it's a little bit inexplicable, not understandable. They will say, "but how can that be?" When you do the work that you're doing now (dieting), the experience that you're living—before you came for a week, now you are here for a month. And yes, like that, every so often, with more time, the experience becomes stronger, deeper. The contact opens up all of the energy and sensitivity. And that's what happens with the plants.[63]

This story illustrates a number of important points. 1) Through dietas, the curandero/a builds relationships with plant-spirits and master spirits—*maestro* meaning both "teacher" and "one who has authority." 2) To garner the help of these spirits, the relationships must be actively maintained. 3) If the curandero/a does what is needed to maintain the relationship, they will be given the gift of icaros, the knowledge of how to use them, and the knowledge of how to heal. 4) If the curandero/a does not or cannot do what is needed to maintain the relationship, a spirit may sever it, taking the abilities and knowledge they had bestowed on the curandero/a with them. 5) Since icaros are the means by which a curandero/a calls on the spirits, the rescinding of icaros amounts to the

[63] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. March 17, 2022.

ending of a relationship. This shows that being given an icaro is the quintessential *sign* (an index) that a curandero/a is in relationship with a spirit, and that that spirit will come to the curandero/a's aid when called by the icaro. What is more, the spirit does not just come to the call of the song, but the icaro is a manifestation of the spirit-as-song. As curandero/as sing, they join spirits' essences with the bodies of their patients. And finally, 6) an icaro is an index whose existence signals that the curandero/a has received knowledge about how to heal. The indexing of the relationship implies an accompanying gift of knowledge (e.g., recipes for preparing medicines, proper ways of conducting rituals, etc.). This is why being a curandero/a is "synonymous with mastering an often large number of icaros" (Luna 1986: 99).

The relational-indexical nature of icaros is evident in the fact that the icaro itself is a process of symbolic semiosis: a network of signs shared by the curandero/a and the spirit who taught it. Of course, to function symbolically, each icaro is dependent on the curandero/a and spirit having a shared knowledge of a set of indices—a knowledge gained through experience "being together" during dietas. The shared system of symbols between the spirits and the curandero/a consists of recoded, preexisting signs, incorporating a new meaning into the semiotic chain. This is how the metaphorical language of icaros is created and enacted. The metaphorical opacity of icaros can differ greatly depending on a number of factors, especially the functioning of the song.

In chapter four, I discuss the dissemination of Rosa Giove's icaro "Ábrete Corazón" online. Several cover versions of the song have been performed and recorded by various artists. To name a few, just on the popular streaming services YouTube and

Spotify, there are versions by Alonzo del Río, The White Arrow, Laboratorium Pieśni, and Diego Palma (of the Sacred Valley Tribe, a sort of "New Age," neo-shamanic community in Pisaq, Perú). Most of these are performed in an eclectic, New-Age, or folk-revival style. I suggest that the more direct, less metaphorical nature of "Ábrete Corazón's" lyrics are partially what makes it more widely attractive and accessible. Additionally, it is in Spanish, making it more accessible (if less "exotic") than a song in an Indigenous language might be for a global audience.

One of this song's most interesting characteristics that sets it apart from other icaros that I encountered is that it seems to be sung directly to the patient, as opposed to most icaros which are sung to spirits for the benefit of the patient. More specifically, it is sung to the part of the patient that is engaged in pre-symbolic semiosis. The icaro uses explicit language to implore the patient to engage with the deep knowledge—*memoria antigua*, "ancient memory"—available through a connection with their feelings and intuitions. In order to access this knowledge, symbolic, analytical reasoning needs to be "left to one side" to "let the sun hidden inside you shine."

This icaro was received by Rosa Giove to help treat patients struggling with substance use disorders at Centro Takiwasi. I have personally heard Giove and other curandero/as and therapists at Takiwasi describe that many of the people who come to them for help with substance use issues struggle with being "stuck in their head," unable to stop the rationalizations for self-destructive behavior patterns involved in addiction. One curandero at Takiwasi explained to me that many foreigners and people from Perú's urban centers who come to Takiwasi, especially those with higher levels of formal

education, also struggle with being over-analytical and disconnected from their physical bodies. “Ábrete Corazón” is an icaro deployed to help with exactly these issues. This was the case for the pilgrim who I mentioned above. For them, “Ábrete Corazón” was one of the two icaros that was most impactful. The more direct language of the icaro functions to stop symbolic reasoning processes by stating the song’s purpose clearly. The purpose is to bypass those same symbolic processes by imploring the patient to, instead, focus on knowledge gained through direct, embodied interaction with the world (indexical and iconic semiosis). The song still functions like other icaros in that it indexes Giove’s relationship with plants. The knowledge and healing power gained through her experiences is ostensibly still passed into the patient’s being even though the icaro does not explicitly invoke any particular plants. This would explain how the pilgrim who spoke no Spanish was able to understand and benefit from the message of the song, even though they were not able to analyze it symbolically. That is, in fact, exactly the effect the icaro is supposed to elicit.

In chapter four, I explore the hypothesis that the metaphors of the song are of a kind that makes them amenable to interpretation within the frame of “New Age” spirituality, which emphasizes the spiritual development of each individual, motivated toward connection with the “higher self,” the divine essence (Heelas 1996: 21-23). I propose that all of this goes together to explain how an icaro that was received to help substance addicts move past intellectual rationalizations for their addiction behavior was taken up by the networks of the globalization of Amazonian shamanism.

The case of “Ábrete Corazón” illustrates a semiotic point about icaros: the context dependent nature of action on the indexical level leaves room for interpretation and misinterpretation in cases when the icaro moves beyond first-hand, plant-human relations and into the multifarious contexts of globalization. The context of Takiwasi provides a semantic frame that makes the symbolic interpretation of the icaro explicit. When divorced from this context, the particular metaphorical language of “Ábrete Corazón” predisposes the song for appropriation and reinterpretation.

On the other hand, the less accessible metaphors of most other icaros make them more difficult to interpret. This is because the symbolic language used in icaros is a mix of culturally specific indices and symbolic systems that are exclusive to curandero/as and the spirits to whom they sing (Brabec de Mori 2009; Townsley 1993). This does not render these icaros impervious to transplantation or incorporation into other contexts of usage, but, according to the curandero/as I spoke with, there are implications attached to singing an icaro that was received by someone else. As don José described to me, singing icaros learned from one’s maestro is more common early on in one’s practice. Every curandero/a I met still sings some of their maestro’s songs. However, a curandero/a is at their most powerful when they sing their own songs that they learned directly from plants.[64]

[64] Vela. don José. Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. August 13, 2019.

Icaros in the Context of Four Rituals: Plant Baths, Perfume Rituals, Purges, and Containment Plants

In this section, I discuss only four out of the many rituals practiced in vegetalismo because these four are among those most relevant to my interlocutors. I also seek to call attention to the role of icaros in rituals that do not involve ayahuasca. That being said, ayahuasca is an important component of vegetalismo. Because ayahuasca often induces synesthesia, icaros function differently in ayahuasca ceremonies than they do in other cases. For this reason, I dedicate the section after this to a more detailed discussion of icaros and ayahuasca.

Of the rituals I discuss in this section, Maestro Orlando only regularly oversees isolation diets and ayahuasca ceremonies that are part of the ritual of dieta. Plant baths (*baños de plantas*), perfume rituals (*rituales de perfume*), purges (*purgas*), and containment plants (*plantas de contención*) are ritual forms that I encountered specifically at Takiwasi. Plant baths and purgas are commonly overseen by curandero/as throughout the Western Amazon, and Maestro Orlando practices these techniques. However, he does not consider them to be necessary components to facilitating dietas. While I have not encountered the term *planta de contención* anywhere except at Takiwasi and in literature related to the center, the process is not dissimilar from what curandero/as recommend to patients whose needs are not necessarily serious enough to warrant prescribing an isolation diet but who, nonetheless, would benefit from taking a master plant.

Each of the ritual practices discussed in this section involve various levels of enacting liminality. Liminality is achieved when an individual or group exits the routines

of daily life, entering a temporary, often ritually structured state of being. This concept was explored in the classic works of Turner (1966) and Van Gennep ([1908] 1960). Depending on the treatment prescribed by a curandero/a, a ritual participant may be involved in multiple processes that parallel Van Gennep's tripartite model of ritual structure. The first of these stages is achieved by separation from quotidian patterns. Separation is achieved by leaving behind normal lifeways and entering into *dieta*. All rituals of curanderismo that I encountered involve some type of behavioral restrictions that curandero/as referred to as "dieta." In all cases, these restrictions follow the same logic as the *dieta en aislamiento* (diet in isolation, discussed in chapter two). However, the restrictions prescribed in these dietas are much more lenient that those of isolation diets. It is one of my principal arguments that dieta is the fundamental technique of vegetalismo. This is different from yet related to the common assertion of curandero/as that the deepest work that a person can do for healing and learning in vegetalismo is the dieta en aislamiento. I posit that vegetalismo is encompassed at all levels by the practice of dieta. It is the entry point into involvement in vegetalismo's rituals and, when the intensity of dieta is raised to its highest level of behavioral restriction, it reveals vegetalismo's internal logic and value system.

In every case, dieta involves, at a minimum, sexual abstinence and avoidance of certain foods—most often abstaining from eating pork, oily or fried foods, and heavily seasoned or spicy foods. These are the fundamental steps for ritual separation—distancing oneself from the world of humans and approaching the forest. In this way, a participant enters the second stage of Van Gennep's model of ritual: liminality. This

involves submitting to the authority of ritual specialists (Turner 1966: 96), in this case curandero/as, and entering the ritual state between pre- and post-ritual, everyday life. In this liminal state, a participant's identity becomes malleable; they are able to approach and ingest plants in a context in which the plants' essences will be integrated into the participant's being. If done correctly, this process engenders a situation in which the plants heal and teach.

The third phase of Van Gennep's model, reintegration, involves continuing the dieta—often with adjusted criteria—for a specified time after one of the more focused rituals of vegetalismo. Every curandero/a that I asked about this phase of the process of a cure gave me some version of the answer, "The plants are still working in you, so you need to give them time to finish what they are doing." Ending the dieta too soon would be to make the welcoming space that one has cultivated in their body through dieta and other rituals into a hostile environment for the plant before it has finished its work and integrated itself into the participant's being. This can either cut the plant's work short, or in some cases, reverse the effects of the ritual.

Plant Baths

The plant bath at Takiwasi takes a number of forms, varying depending on the objectives of the ritual. As don José Vela described to me: "There are various baths depending on the reason for doing the bath. There are relaxing, calming baths. There are baths, for example, to prepare for work. There are energetic baths—baths to clean

negative energy from the body."[65] Each of these baths has a different name depending on the reason for which it is given or depending on a central ingredient. For example, don José described to me that the *patikina*[66] bath is particularly potent and is sometimes given to protect curandero/as about to direct an ayahuasca ceremony. The inclusion of this ingredient requires that the bath be carefully cooked to remove patikina's toxins.

In each case, baths entail covering the participant's body in water in which several plants—often more than a dozen—have been steeped or cooked. Typically, the more fragrant parts of plants are use. For example, the leaves and flowers of the ayahuasca plant are used in baths rather than the pulped wood and bark, which are used in preparations that are to be drunk. Smaller doses of plants are used that, in higher doses, would induce starkly altered states of consciousness even when absorbed through the skin. For example, plant baths typically use small amounts of *toé* leaves (*Brugmansia suaveolens*). Plant baths are undertaken for physical, spiritual and energetic purification, often as part of preparations for undertaking other ritual activities or as a respite from them. Behavioral restrictions observed in relation to plant baths include sexual abstinence the day of the ritual and the day after. It also includes avoidance of pork, though I was not instructed to avoid pork before every plant bath in which I participated. This is possibly because the curandero/as assumed that I knew about that restriction or because not every

[65] Ibid.

[66] Patikina is not a plant that any curandero/a besides don José mentioned. As far as I have been able to find, patikina is a common term in the Western Amazon for the plant that botanical science has named *Dieffencachia seguine* (Vael 2014: 64). In English, the plant's common name is "Dumb Cane" because, it is reported, if ingested, the plant's toxins produce a painful and itchy sensation in the mouth and throat and also render the unhappy person unable to speak (http://www.worldfloraonline.org/taxon/wfo-0000943374).

curandero/a thinks that it is necessary for plant baths. The perfume ritual, discussed below, involves the same restrictions.

At Takiwasi, plant baths are normally held in an open-air maloca—a thatch-roofed structure with a tiled floor and no walls—that is positioned some twenty feet up the bank from the Río Shilcayo, the body of water that runs along one side of the center. Based on my personal experience and observations, the plant bath generally goes as follows. Upon the participant's arrival, the curandero/a would invite them to take a seat on a chair in the center of the maloca. The curandero/a would begin by blowing agua de florida over the participants whole body and singing an icaro. During the handful of plant baths performed by don José for which I was present, the first icaro typically involved calling spirits of plants and/or maestro/a curandero/as from whom he learned. Don José also always used his shakapa (leaf rattle) during the first icaro. Upon finishing this icaro, don José walked around the participant using broad strokes of the shakapa to fan them. Then he would light a mapacho and perform a soplada.

Next, the curandero/a would invite the participant to enter a private shower and change into a bathing suit. While they are still in the shower, the curandero/a would direct the participant to douse themselves from head to foot with the fragrant liquid of the bath, which is provided in a bucket with a small pitcher to be used for ablution. The curandero/a would then direct the participant to exit the shower, without drying themselves off, and return to their seat in the center of the maloca. The curandero/a would then douse his hands with agua de florida and massage the participant's head, neck, and shoulders. Then the curandero/a returned to singing. When don José was

facilitating the bath, at that point, he would often replace his shakapa with a maraca, and his icaros would usually turn to themes of water and *limpieza*, “cleaning.” The shakapa and maraca represent the cleansing elements of air and water, respectively—as don José explained. The shakapa is a fan/rattle made of dried leaves. Shaking it reproduces the sound of wind rustling the leaves of forest plants, iconically representing the wind through sound even as it actually moves air over the patient. The maraca, when played softly, recreates the sound of falling rain. When played more aggressively, it recreates the sound of a rushing river.

At any time during the bath, it was not uncommon for the curandero/a to halt their singing and belch, releasing negative energy or *cargas*, “burdens,” that they had been collecting from the participant as the bath ritual cleanses them. This is an instance of the common theme of sickness and negative energy being distilled into *mal aire* or *aire maligno*, “bad or evil air” that is removed from the patient and replaced with “good air.” This process is enacted by the charging of the curandero/a’s breath by smoke, perfume, and song. To end the bath, the curandero/a would perform a final soplada with mapacho smoke to *cerrar el/la paciente*, “close the patient,” sealing in the positive energy instilled by the plant bath and protecting them from outside negative influence.

Between my research trip in 2019 and my trip in 2022 don José Vela, Takiwasi’s long-time Master Perfumero, retired. The curandero/as who have overseen the plant baths since his retirement do not specialize in that area. Rather, they are vegetalistas who, nevertheless, have a knowledge of plant medicine that is both deep and wide enough to enable them to oversee these important ceremonies. However, the icaros that they sang

were different in their form and content from those sung by don José. This is to be expected, since these curandero/as are not don José and have not had the decades of experience as perfumeros that he had. In 2022, plant baths were primarily being overseen by a curandero who apprenticed with a Shipibo family in the Ucayali region. Despite having been a practicing curandero for more than ten years, during the first half of my stay in 2022, he was still in an initiatory role as far as Takiwasi was concerned. This meant he was only allowed to sing icaros from Takiwasi's standard repertoire of songs, handed down by the maestros of the center's lineage, such as Maestro Aquilino Chujandama, don Solón Tello, Dr. Jacques Mabit, Dra. Rosa Giove, Maestro Juan Flores, etc. This obviously limited his ability to sing songs that might have otherwise been more well suited to the role of perfumero, which is not to say that don José did not mix in some of the same songs from time to time. Don José did, however, mostly sing his own songs during plant baths. As I explained above, he told me that curandero/as do their best work when they sing songs that they personally received.

According to don José, the main difference between specialized perfumero icaros and any other icaros is that, in the perfumero icaros, "The maestro sings to the water, to all the waters, [asking] that they help and clean [the patient]." He gestured to river, just feet away, "This is the Río Shilcayo, which connects with the Río Cumbaza, then the Río Mayo, Río Marañon, Río Ucayali, and the Río Amazonas. This is what [the perfumero] sings. He doesn't sing to the plants, but to the waters."[67] This is exemplified in the following excerpt from one of don Josés icaros.

[67] Ibid.

"El Icaro de las Lluvias," (The Icaro of the Rain)[68]

Lluviecita de los cielos,	Dear rain from the heavens,
Vas cayendo tus agüitas (repeat)	You make your waters fall (repeat)
Encima de nuestra selva,	Over our forest,
Encima de nuestros cerros. (repeat)	Over our hills. (repeat)
Ah, nah, nah, nah, ri, nah, nah, nay	Ah, nah, nah, nah, ri, nah, nah, nay
Ah, nah, nah, nah, ri, nah, nah nay	Ah, nah, nah, nah, ri, nah, nah nay
Aumentando riachuelos,	Growing brooks,
Aumentando quebraditas, (repeat)	Growing our streams, (repeat)
Aumentando nuestros ríos,	Growing our rivers,
Con tus aguas cristalinas. (repeat)	With your crystalline waters. (repeat)
Ah, nah, nah, nah, ri, nah, nah, nay	Ah, nah, nah, nah, ri, nah, nah, nay
Ah, nah, nah, nah, ri, nah, nah nay	Ah, nah, nah, nah, ri, nah, nah nay

As don José described, this icaro, like his other icaros that are specific to his work as a perfumero, tend to be sung directly to the forces of water. As is the case with the icaro discussed next, these songs often focus on water's shifting nature: how it is pure and purifies, how its power grows as it accumulates from small drops of rain into brooks, then streams, then rivers. The song also subtly emphasizes how the purifying and life-giving power of water is a gift; the water falls over *our* forest and hills, it grows *our* streams and rivers. Thus, as with icaros sung to plants and animal spirits, these icaros attribute a type of volition to the waters. They are a type of self that can be asked for aid and who are characterized ambivalently. They are calming as gentle rain (*lluviecita*) and powerfully cleansing and life-giving as flowing rivers.

[68] This is my name for this icaro, which I based on its subject matter—following common practice for naming icaros. Don José never directly named this song in conversation with me.

The Perfume Ritual

The perfume that don José used for the perfume ritual was of his own recipe. The ritual is performed to enact a more powerful cleansing than can be achieved by most plant baths. The recipe consists of a mixture of tobacco taken mapacho cigars, water, thimolina (a medicinal liquid sold at pharmacies, used to make compresses to treat headache and fever), camphor, agua de florida, and tobacco cologne. Agua de florida and the tobacco cologne are perfumes made by Lanman and Kemp Barclay, a company based in New York and Lima. On that I observed don José performing the perfume ritual, he mixed the ingredients in a large plastic bowl and then turned to me as said. "*Hay que icarar para darle mas fuerza a los insumos y al ritual*" (It is necessary to perform an and icarada to give more strength to the ingredients and the ritual).[69] He then lit a mapacho and blew three long, slow puffs of smoke into the mixture. Next, he traced the sign of the cross in the air over the bowl three times. He blew air into the bowl and then three more short, sharp puffs of smoke. The icarada involved charging the mixture with smoke, his breath, and spiritual intention through the sign of the cross (don José is Catholic). Interestingly, it did not involve singing, though he sang over the participant once he had applied the mixture to their body.

After preparing the mixture, don José directed the person for whom he was performing the ritual, who, as per previous instructions, arrived in a bathing suit, to sit on a chair outside the maloca. He had them hold the bowl containing the perfume mixture while he performed a mapacho-smoke soplada on them. Using perfume-soaked tobacco

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[69] Vela, don José. Interview with author. Audio recording. Tarapoto, Perú. December 7, 2019.

from the bowl, he drew the sign of the cross on the crown of the participant's head, on the center of their chest, and in the center of their back. These are energetic nodes in the body that, curandero/as say, can become blocked and cause illness. They are also the most effective areas through which to remove negative energy and introduce positive energy. After drawing the sign of the cross on the participant, don José grabbed another handful of tobacco from the bowl and used it to apply more of the mixture to the participant's hair and spread the fragrant liquid over every inch of their exposed skin, starting with their face and neck and working his way to their arms, chest, back, legs, and feet. When performing the ritual for women, don José steps away for a moment after instructing them to spread the mixture over their own abdomen, inside their blouse or bathing suit top, and over their upper thighs.

Next, don José retrieved his maraca and a bottle of camphor perfume from the maloca. He removed the chair and walked around the now-standing participant, blowing the camphor perfume onto the maraca and onto the participant's back, sides, and front–one spray from each of the four cardinal directions. Curandero/as explained to me that blowing smoke or perfume in the cardinal directions is a way of making an offering and asking permission from the spirits of the forest to allow and support a ritual. Next, don José instructed the participant to jog in place for a few minutes to work up a sweat and open their pores, which helps their skin absorb the perfume mixture. While they jogged, don José walked around them in a circle shaking his maraca and singing an icaro. In the cases that I documented, these icaros always followed the subject matter he described related to perfumero icaros: they were sung to the waters and used metaphors referencing

motion and cleansing. For example, *Linda quebradita, cómo corren tus aguas / Del arbusto, de los cerros, vas corriendo tus aguitas / Tus aguitas cristalinas, ah na nay, na ri na nay nay* (Dear beautiful stream, how your waters run / From the bush, from the hills, you make your waters run / Your crystalline waters, ah na nay, na ri na nay nay).

Upon finishing the icaro, don José instructed the participant, who by then was winded from their jog, to breathe deeply—in through their nose and out through their mouth. This helped calm their breathing after the jog and allowed them to inhale the scent of the perfume mixture, bringing the medicine into their body. He instructed the participant return to the chair and, closing his eyes, he placed his hand on their head, then their chest, and then their back. It seemed to me that this was done to sense how they were responding to the ritual up to that point. Don José then lit a mapacho for another soplada. In this instance he put the lit end of the mapacho into his mouth and blew through it to project smoke over the participant. This was followed by another spraying of camphor water over the participant from each of the four cardinal directions.

Next, don José walked with the participant down to the river and instructed them to wade out to the middle and submerge themself. He advised them to face upriver, grab a rock for stability and sink themself up to their shoulders, allowing their feet to float out behind them. This way, he explained, the river flowed over them from their head down to their feet, washing away the negative energy that had been metabolized by the ritual. He instructed them that, from that position, they should dunk their head under the water from time to time so that they would be completely submerged. As the participant followed his instructions, don José leaned against a large rock at the river's edge and, shaking his

maraca, began to sing again *Perfumero, curandero shamuykuna shamuyri / Legitimay medicina, legítimo curandero nay nay / Rio, rio Shilcayo shamuykuna shamuyri / Legitimay medicina, limpia, limpia cuerpecito nay nay / Limpia, limpia warmycita nay nay; limpia, limpia nay nay / Limpia, limpia los temores nay nay* (Perfumero, healer, come to us, come / True/legitimate medicine, true curandero nay nay / Rio Shilcayo, come to us, come / True medicine, clean, clean the dear body nay nay / Clean, clean the dear woman nay nay; clean, clean nay nay / Clean, clean the fears nay nay).

Upon finishing the icaro, which lasted about five minutes, don José instructed the participant to carefully climb out of the river and go to the private shower at the maloca to rinse off any remaining bits of tobacco and perfume mixture, dry themself with a towel, and put on fresh clothes. After that, he instructed them to take a seat on the chair, which had been moved to the center of the floor inside the maloca, to close the ritual. Don José then blew camphor water from the four cardinal directions, this time holding his shakapa between his mouth and the participant with each spray of the perfumed liquid. He then sang an icaro that began by invoking the aid of his maestro, Ignacio Pérez, who was the perfumero at Takiwasi before his death in 2009, when don José took on that role. The icaro first recognizes Maestro Ignacio as a *legítimo curandero*, "legitimate/true curandero" and *legítimo perfumero*. It continues by imploring the spirit of Maestro Ignacio to "guide the rituals with your beautiful icaros and perfumes, casting out evil spirits." The icaro continues similarly, recognizing the potency of various perfumes, tobacco, and the *sirena* (mermaid) who is a spirit of the water. The song asks for their help to cast out evil spirits and sadness, replacing them with joy and "healing the

wounds of life." The structure of this icaro follows this pattern: it names a perfume, plant, or spirit; it acknowledges it as a person and legitimate medicine or healer; then, it asks for help in healing or teaching of certain lessons.

After finishing his icaro, don José performed another four-directional spray of agua de florida and camphor water over the patient. He paused in the middle of this to step out from under the roof of the maloca to belch and forcefully exhale to expel negative energy he had removed from the participant. Then, he used an empty agua de florida bottle as a whistle and blew a note followed by a spray of camphor water over the participant's head from the front, back, and sides. Finally, he sprayed camphor water over the crown of the participant's head and passed his hands in a sweeping gesture over their head and down to their shoulders, declaring the ritual successfully finished, "*¡listo!*" (ready/finished!)

Purges

True to its name, the *purga* (purge) is a ritual that involves ingesting plants and large quantities of water to induce vomiting, sometimes also having the consequence of triggering diarrhea. Takiwasi's team of therapists and curandero/as, assess each individual participant to choose the appropriate plant or plants for them to take. Horák (2013: 52) provides an overview of the purga along with a list of the different plants that may be taken. In O'Shaughnessy's study of Takiwasi's therapeutic model (2017), he places the purga plants in a "hierarchy of difficulty" with *azucena* (*Lilium haponicum*), *rosa sisa* (*Tagetes erecta*), and *saúco* (*Sambucus peruviana*) among the less difficult

purgas with tobacco and *yawar panga* (*Aristolochia didyma*, Fig. 16) at the more difficult end (O'Shaughnessy 2017: 98). I generally agree with this assessment, but, from my own experience and from conversations with several dozen people who have collectively participated in several hundred purga ceremonies (including curandero/as, therapists, rehabilitation patients, and pilgrims) the relative difficulty seems to be extremely idiosyncratic. For example, some people place azucena, which is at the bottom of O'Shaughnessy's list, among the more difficult purgas. I should also add that there are some plants that were included in the purgas I was present for that are not in either Horák or O'Shaughnessy's discussions of the topic–namely *paico* (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*) and *verbena* (*Verbena spp.*). If I were to place these two plants in the "hierarchy of difficulty," I suggest they belong in the middle, with paico falling on the easier side and verbena on the more difficult side, but still less difficult than tobacco and yawar panga.

For me and for many with whom I interacted, one of the more difficult aspects of the purgas is the requirement to drink large amounts of water to help the plants do their work of inducing vomiting. Depending on the plant, it is sometimes required that this water be as warm as possible while still allowing for it to be drunk quickly. While this can make the process of vomiting easier, being nauseous and having to force oneself to drink a large amount of steaming water in the heat of a tropical afternoon can be extremely uncomfortable. The plant rosa sisa is normally mixed with a concentrated liquid preparation of tobacco. Again, this can more effectively induce purging, but the ensuing nicotine rush can also be quite unpleasant. On the other hand, participants almost universally reported to feel energized and to have an improved mood the following day

and sometimes for several days. One discrepancy I found is that O'Shaughnessy reported that one is not required to drink water when taking azucena; this was part of his reasoning for placing it at the bottom of the difficulty hierarchy. At least as far as I found in 2019 and 2022, it was required to drink about one liter of warm water with azucena. This is only a small discrepancy, and this is still the smallest amount of water drunk with any of the purgas.

Figure 16. Yawar panga at Mushuk Pakarina. Photo taken by author March 5, 2022.

O'Shaughnessy also includes *purgahuasca*, a preparation of ayahuasca that does not include a DMT admixture plant, among the purgas. I argue that, though physical purging is a central aspect of that ritual, it is not performed as part of the purga ceremony with the rest of the others, and should, for that among other reasons, be considered in its own category. On an ethnopharmacological level, purgahuasca is technically one of many ayahuasca brews.

The most difficult and potentially dangerous purga given at Takiwasi is *yawar panga*, "blood leaf" in Quechua. The name of this plant is appropriate for several reasons:

the liquid that the plant exudes when crushed is a deep red color; the leaves of the plant are shaped like Valentine hearts; on a bio-physical level, the plant is a blood purifier; on a spiritual and psychological level, this plant helps people to process generational trauma (issues related to their bloodline).

While the effects of all of the other purgas are mostly worn off by the time the two- to three-hour ritual is finished–and certainly within the next few hours–the emetic effects of yawar panga regularly last six hours or more. These effects can last longer, and it was not uncommon for those with whom I spoke to report residual stomach cramps for a day or two after taking yawar panga.

Dietary restrictions for the purga are more stringent than those for plant baths and perfume rituals. This is partially for ritual reasons and partially for pragmatic reasons. Eating too close to the beginning of a purga can make the process more difficult. It is recommended to avoid highly seasoned foods on the day of a purga. Avoidance of pork, oily foods, and spicy foods (*ají*) is required. The ritual generally begins at 3:00 or 3:30 pm and lasts until approximately 5:00. Takiwasi's guidance is to eat an early lunch, preferably a soup or something light. After a purga, one is not supposed to eat until the next morning. It is suggested to abstain from drinking any liquids for the same amount of time, unless completely necessary. This is because drinking liquid can reactivate the emetic effects of the plants. Ritually, one is considered to be in the process, with the plants still doing their healing work through the night. Regardless, it is contraindicated to eat heavily seasoned food, pork, or spicy food the day after a purga.

Upon completion of a purga, participants are directed by the curandero/a to return immediately to their sleeping quarters, take a shower in cold water without soap, put on fresh clothes, and lay down to rest for the next two to four hours, and sleep if possible. It is also recommended to pay close attention to one's dreams, perhaps keeping a dream journal, on nights following a purga. This is because plants may teach lessons through dreams during this time. If one is participating in a purga at the start of a dieta or the beginning of taking *plantas de contención*, heightened dietary restrictions are considered to be in effect immediately following the purga. Sexual activity is prohibited for two days before and after a purga.

Purgas are typically held on a weekly basis in Takiwasi's small maloca and are directed by a curandero/a, usually with the support of an assistant. The assistant will usually be either a more junior curandero/a or one of the center's therapists. In 2022, when the center was somewhat short staffed, I attended a small number of purgas with three or fewer participants that were directed by a lone curandero/a. In my experience, these weekly purgas are usually attended by four to seven rehabilitation patients, and it is not uncommon for two or three visiting researchers or members of Takiwasi's staff to participate. When a purga is being facilitated for a large group of visiting dieters, the ritual may take place in the large maloca. When larger groups are involved, purgas may be overseen by as many as three curandero/as with two to three assistants.

To illustrate an example of a purga, I will briefly recount my experience as a participant-observer during what, to me, was a more-or-less typical iteration of the ritual. At 3:00 pm, I walked across the grounds at Takiwasi to get to the small maloca, and,

entering it, I found the familiar sight of eight small, wooden benches–each accompanied by the customary bucket, plastic pitcher, and a bunched-up roll of tissue paper. The benches were arranged in a half circle against the wall on one side of the room. The *chicos* (rehabilitation patients) filtered in shortly after I arrived. We chatted for a few minutes before the question arose, "which plant are you taking today?" We then shuffled around so that those taking the same plants were grouped together; the curandero/as preferred us sit this way for purgas. This helps keep the ritual organized: those taking the same plants need the same temperature and amount of water; the groups can be served their plants at the same time; and it helps the curandero/as keep track of which plants we had all taken, in case one of us is having a difficult time or needs help (the curandero/a will be able to more quickly make a decision about what intervention to make).

Around 3:20 Dr. Jaime arrived with one of the younger curandero/as. Each of them was carrying their bag of ritual implements (shakapas, mapachos, bottles of agua de florida, etc.) and the various small pitchers and plastic cups containing the plant preparations we were about to drink. The younger curandero helped one of the rehabilitation patients carry a large plastic bucket filled with cold water into the maloca. Then, the same patient left to fetch a large pot of freshly boiled water that would be mixed with the cold water for those whose plant needed to be accompanied by warm water.

He then took his seat with the rest of the patients, and Dr. Jaime prepared the maloca for the ritual. He did this by blowing a large mouthful of camphor water in each of the cardinal directions, then down and up (representing the spiritual realms of the

world below and the world above). Then he took a bottle of holy water and sprinkled it around the edge of the room in a circle. After that, he sat down in his chair at the table in the center of the room that held the plant preparations, and he began smoking a mapacho. After about a minute, he invited each of us to the table, one at a time, to drink our plants. He charged each cup with energy by blowing a puff of mapacho smoke into it before serving it. After each participant drank their plants, they filled their pitchers with water and returned to their seats. We waited in silence for about five minutes. Then, Dr. Jaime said, "*Muy bien, empecemos* (Very well, let's begin)," and he gestured with his hands to signal that we should start drinking from our pitchers.

This is when he started to sing, sometimes accompanied by his shakapa, sometimes his maraca, sometimes a capella. I will leave out the details of most of what ensued, but, suffice it to say, the purga plants did what they were supposed to. At intervals, either Dr. Jaime or the other curandero would visit each of us in turn to ask how we were doing and to perform sopladas with smoke or agua de florida. About an hour and thirty minutes after the ritual had started, we had all emptied and rinsed our buckets, and Dr. Jaime was satisfied that everyone had made it through the purging, he performed a final mapacho soplada to protect each participant from negative energy. He sang the final icaro, ending it with an extended, sharp exhalation. Finally, he declared the purga over, jokingly saying, "*¡Servidos!*" (You have all been served). One by one, we filtered out to return to our quarters to rest.

At Takiwasi, many of the icaros sung during a purga are also sung during ayahuasca ceremonies, plant baths, and perfume rituals. They invoke the help of some of

the same plants and spirits that help in the other rituals. However, most of the icaros sung during purgas call to specific spirits–most often those of the emetic plants being ingested. The curandero/as explained to me that, in a purga, icaros are used to modulate the effects that the plants are having on the participants. It was common in interviews with pilgrims for them to express to me that they were not as aware of the icaros in purgas as they were in other rituals. Often, they did not feel that the songs made much of a difference to their experience. Some expressed that the songs were something of an annoyance during the uncomfortable time spent in these rituals. Dr. Jaime explained that that is one of the effects that icaros can have during a purga. They might be perceived as annoying because they are heightening the nausea to help participants purge.

One visitor to Takiwasi noted that "the intensity of the icaros builds, like, in waves. They get more and more intense and the pitch goes up, and a bunch of people will all vomit at the same time. And then the intensity will fall and start to build again, and when it hits another peak, everyone vomits."[70]

The icaros *"Paparuy*," and "*Vuela, Vulea, Suy, Suy*," (both discussed in the next section) were sung at the beginning of every purga. One icaro was sung multiple times during purgas. I only heard referred to as "The Icaro of the Plants." This icaro has a simple, repetitive structure and is possibly the only icaro that I encountered that hardly relies on metaphor, if at all. The words of the icaro follow this pattern, "[Name of plant] *curandera/o, shamuykuna, kallary* / *Cura, cura cuerpecito* / *Cura, cura almacita*" (Healer plant, come to us, begin / Heal this dear body / Heal this dear soul). This icaro

[70] Charles (pseud.). Interview with author. Audio recording. May 1, 2022.

might be sung at any time during a purga but was almost always sung near the end of the ritual. When sung at the end of a purga, the curandero/a would sing while fanning their shakapa directly onto the head of each participant, singing through the structure one to three times before moving on to the next participant. The plant(s) named in this icaro, when sung during a purga, are most often either the plant that the participant is currently taking for the purga or a plant that the participant will be taking for a dieta or as a *planta de contención* in the coming days. In a mixture of Spanish and Quechua, this icaro is a straightforward invoking of plant-spirits and a request for their aid in healing. As in other cases, the shakapa is being used as an implement for cleansing, helping to remove negative energies that have not already been cleared out by purging.

Containment Plants

Taking a *planta de contención* is, for all intents and purposes, like an isolation diet (covered in depth in chapter two) that has been adjusted so that the participant may continue most of their normal daily activities. The name of the ritual refers to the process of building up and containing the energy of the plants being ingested, similar to the process of isolation diets. Plants taken during this process are typically the same plants that would be taken for an isolation diet. The process involves some notable differences from isolation diets, however. Behavioral restrictions are the same as those of isolation diets except that salt is still eaten so that the energetic barrier is maintained. Doses of plant preparations are smaller and, after instruction from a curandero/a, the participant typically administers the plant to themselves. The ritual process begins with a purga. The

morning after the purga, the participant meets with a curandero/a who performs an icarada over the patient and the plant preparation they will be taking. The curandero/a then serves the participant the first dose of their plant. Depending on the plant being taken, the participant will take one or two doses per day on a weekly cycle. Once the treatment is finished, the patient will return to the curandero/a who performs a mapacho soplada to close the ritual. In lieu of a post dieta, the participant continues the prescribed behavioral restrictions for three days after they finish taking the plant.

The analyses of these rituals provide examples of the different types of icaros I encountered during my research. There are icaros that provide protection, icaros that activate the energies of the plants, icaros that calm the energies of the plants, and icaros that remove negative energies. In each case, the musical and lyrical content of the icaros is composed of symbolic signs. The meaning behind the metaphorical content of the songs is emergent from a symbolic network shared only by the curandero/a and the plants. The existence of the icaro, as a sign vehicle active in the semi-isolated, human-plant symbol network, indexes the curandero/a's ability to heal by calling on plants with whom they have a relationship. When a curandero/a invokes a plant and uses their breath, charged by icaros, to place the plant's energy into the patient, the icaro is active as a metaphorical icon, which "represents a parallelism" between a sign and its object (Peirce 1998: 274). This is a particular kind of parallelism in which the icaro is a sonic stand-in for a plant that might not be physically present. From another perspective, the curandero/as' perspective, the icaro is not a stand-in at all. It is active as a pure icon in the same way that ingesting a plant carries iconic and then indexical meaning as the plant

itself comes into contact with the person ingesting it. The curandero/a has brought the spirit and energy of the plant into the ritual space, concentrated it into their breath, and put it into the patient's body. The plant itself is made present as the icaro. In the rituals discussed in this chapter thus far, this contact with plants through icaros is often so subtle that a patient would not be aware of it. Especially for a patient who was not enculturated in an environment in which curanderismo was active, it is likely that they would interpret such contact with a plant a psychological anomaly or as the biochemical effects of plant medicines they have ingested. According to the curandero/as, all of these interpretations are legitimate but partial. And a completely correct interpretation is not necessary for healing to be achieved. For example, purga plants do induce vomiting through biochemical mechanisms, but icaros can introduce other plants into the ritual or modulate the effects of the plants that participants took. Most of the pilgrims whom I interviewed did not perceive the icaros to be doing very much during purgas, because their effects are not as noticeable as during ayahuasca ceremonies.

In the next section, I explore icaros as they function during ayahuasca ceremonies. In order to facilitate this discussion, I draw on a body of clinical and neuroscientific research, placing it in conversation with my ethnographic research, including data gathered in interviews and as a participant-observer in ayahuasca ceremonies. I analyze reports of synesthetic experiences of listening to icaros during ayahuasca ceremonies using Peircian semiotics to elucidate how icaros function in ayahuasca ceremonies as compared to the rituals discussed thus far.

Icaros and Ayahuasca: The Synesthetic Interaction between Psychedelics and Music

I open this section with a few excerpts from Aldous Huxley's famous recounting of his experience taking mescaline (the principal active compound in psychedelic cacti such as peyote and *wachuma*/San Pedro). I begin here to forward a hypothesis about psychedelic experiences: I propose that they are, fundamentally, experiences of synesthesia. That is that they, as Carhart-Harris and Friston show (2019), reduce activity in certain brain areas while increasing activity in others; these modulations of brain activity reliably produce synesthesia. A large portion of the human neuro-physical sensory apparatus functions to subconsciously interpret and filter out evolutionarily less-useful information. It seems that this is done so that most of the information that is made available for conscious analysis will be useful for survival and for continuing one's genetic lineage into the future. The world is so complex that it seems that evolutionary processes developed a system through which humans could pragmatically engage with the world. This hypothesis is supported by research on developmental and neonatal synesthesia (Maurer et al. 1993; Rogowska 2011; Rouw et al. 2011; Wagner and Dobkins 2011). As some of the sensory filtration mechanisms are modulated by psychedelics, it is often reported that, at lower doses, certain aspects of perception intensify. Colors become more vibrant, smells and flavors are intensified. As dose levels increase people often report an increased sense of significance, as if what they are experiencing is "more real than real" (Barret and Griffiths 2018). At high doses, sensory filtration mechanisms are further modulated to the point that "mystical experiences" are induced. This involves an increase in the sense of the significance of the experience to the point at which the

experiencer is convinced they are perceiving ultimate, unfiltered, reality (Barret and Griffiths 2018). These experiences are often described using spiritual, mythical language, possibly because this vocabulary is likely to be the most semiotically rich within the network of signs available. Religious language referencing deities, the fundamental unity of being, and themes and figures from culturally relevant human origin stories are often part of the vocabulary used in these cases. For example, a self-described atheist who participated in the NYU psilocybin studies described their experience as "being bathed in God's love" (Muraresku 2020: 8). The overlap between neonatal and psychedelic-induced synesthesia suggests that, in a way, these people are on to something. Human babies are born synesthetic. They experience reality unfiltered, and quickly begin to develop a filtration system that engages with their environment to determine what information is useful and what is not. Psychedelic-induced synesthesia, then, is a sort of re-birth or return to a state in which reality can be experienced unfiltered, or less filtered. I quote Huxley as an example of these processes in action:

> I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence. . . .
>
> Istigkeit—wasn't that the word Meister Eckhart liked to use? 'Is-ness' The Being of Platonic philosophy—except that Plato seems to have made the enormous, the grotesque mistake of separating Being from becoming and identifying it with the mathematical abstraction of the Idea. He could never, poor fellow, have seen a bunch of flowers shining with their own inner light and all but quivering under the pressure of the significance with which they were charged; could never have perceived that what rose and iris and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than what they were—a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being. (Huxley 1953: 17-18)
>
> Reflecting on my experience, I find myself agreeing with the eminent Cambridge philosopher, Dr. C. D. Broad, "that we should do well to consider much more seriously than we have hitherto been inclined to do the type of theory which

> Bergson put forward in connection with memory and sense perception. The suggestion is that the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main *eliminative* and not productive. . ." According to such a theory, each one of us is potentially Mind at Large. But in so far as we are animals, our business is at all costs to survive. To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funneled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out at the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive on the surface of this Particular planet. To formulate and express the contents of this reduced awareness, man has invented and endlessly elaborated those symbol-systems and implicit philosophies which we call languages. Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born—the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people's experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things. . . . temporary by-passes may be acquired either spontaneously, or as the result of deliberate 'spiritual exercises,' or through hypnosis, or by means of drugs. Through these [by-passes] . . . there flows, not indeed the perception 'of everything that is happening everywhere in the universe' (for the by-pass does not abolish the reducing valve . . .), but something more than, and above ah something different from, the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient, picture of reality" (Huxley 1953: 22-24).

In the following section, supported by neuroscientific literature on the phenomenon of synesthesia, a Peircian semiotic analysis of music-and-psychedelic-induced synesthesia and reports I gathered during my ethnographic research in Perú, I seek to describe how curandero/as are able to bypass the "reducing valve" in order to heal their patients. I argue that Huxley was, essentially, correct and that his description of a psychedelic experience closely parallels the neurochemical processes that psychedelics, including ayahuasca can induce.

Synesthesia

Synesthesia is an experiential phenomenon in which the "stimulation of one sense involuntarily evokes an additional arbitrary stimulation of another sense" (Wagner and Dobkins 2011: 1067). In the academic literature on synesthesia, the phenomena that cause synesthetic experiences are called *inducers* (or, less formally, *triggers*) and the experiences that inducers elicit are called *concurrents*. Psychologists and neuroscientists have hypothesized that developmental synesthesia—that is, synesthesia that has been part of a given individual's life since childhood and that persists into adulthood—is the result of either "activation of perceptual or sensory [brain] areas . . . by 'cross-activation' through increased local connectivity or by 'disinhibited feedback' from higher-level cortical areas" (Rouw et al. 2011: 4-5) or possibly a combination of these two factors. Acquired synesthesia, on the other hand, becomes part of a person's normal experience after injury to the brain. The working hypothesis is that damage to the brain from stroke, for example, can disrupt brain activity that would have inhibited feedback between different areas of the brain. Alternatively, the introduction of neuroplasticity due to the brain's efforts to heal damaged areas can result in the establishment of novel connections between different sensory areas of the brain (Rouw et al. 2011: 14). There is, as of yet, no specific neurological mechanism that is agreed to be responsible for synesthesia. Rather, the meta-analysis carried out by Rouw et al. (2011) suggests that, even given the small number of such studies that have been done, whole-brain analyses have been among the most informative because, even though area-specific studies have provided some insight,

they are likely missing the wider picture. Synesthesia likely involves cross-talk and feedback between several areas of the brain simultaneously.

This proposition is supported by the neonatal-synesthesia hypothesis: that synesthesia is a universal experience for human and most, if not all, mammalian infants. Maurer (1993) proposed that, "With development any such synesthesia will decrease both because the cortex functions better [to separate sensory input into divergent categories] and because transient connections [between different brain areas] have been pruned. As a result the sensory systems will become more differentiated and so will the baby's perceptions" (Maurer 1993: 113). Nearly twenty years later, Wagner and Dobkins (2011) published one of the first studies demonstrating neonatal synesthesia. They found that infants younger than three months do not differentiate between shape and color categories. However, by the time an infant reaches eight months old, these categories have typically been separated and remain separated into adulthood. This is strong evidence that supports the developmental synesthesia hypothesis. Research that found that there is a genetic component to synesthesia suggests that developmental, and thus neonatal, synesthesias almost certainly involve both heightened latent connections and reduced feedback inhibition. This research found that if a given person has synesthesia, their first-order relatives have a 40-percent increased chance of also developing synesthesia. However, this does not predict what type(s) of synesthesia the second individual will experience (Rouw et al. 2011: 18-19). Thus, it appears that a predisposition for synesthesia can be passed on genetically, but the specific type(s) of synesthesia that will develop depend on the neural connections that are made as a child

learns to recognize, differentiate, and attach significance to phenomena in their environment.

Drug-induced Synesthesia and Psychedelics

It is my hope that, even though this dissertation is mostly in conversation with musicological and anthropological research, it can contribute to cross-disciplinary scholarship. As pharmacological studies of psychedelics are becoming more common and more visible outside of academic circles, it is my hope that research on ayahuasca will be informed by Amazonian perspectives on its use. Here I seek to engage both ethnographic research on curanderismo and neuroscientific research on synesthesia and psychedelics to begin a conversation that will hopefully lead to a deeper understanding of each of these topics. I am not putting readers interested in musico-cultural details through a neuroscientific slog arbitrarily. I am arguing that ethnomusicological research can and should be of interest to psychological and medical researchers working in clinical and laboratory environments, and I am trying to place my research in conversation with these fields of study in hopes that researchers from those fields might act in kind. I am taking seriously the words of anthropologist Dobkin de Rios, who wrote, “If these hallucinogenic substances are to be used psychotherapeutically in the future, the role of music as a primary conditioning agent of the experience will have to be taken into account. Any planning for psycho-therapeutic intervention in times to come would necessitate a clear musicological approach to create therapeutic states of consciousness” (2006: 100). In order to make my case, I must request your patience as I attempt to shape

an explanation that, much like synesthesia, connects areas that are normally separate and disinhibit some of the usual filtration mechanisms.

As Kaelen and colleagues (2018) found, recently developed models for psychedelic-assisted therapy have proven to be extremely successful in treating trauma-related depression, anxiety disorders, and addiction. Importantly, this research also found that music plays a fundamental role in shaping patients' experiences which were statistically, causatively linked to therapeutic outcomes. I argue that this is possible because psychedelics largely function by potentiating synesthetic experience. In other words, the neurophysiological action of psilocybin/psilocin on the brain, as described by Carhart-Harris and Friston (2019), induces entropic brain states, inhibiting certain neural processes while accentuating others. Stated in Huxley's more poetic language, by opening the reducing valve, psychedelics reliably produce synesthetic experiences.

To my understanding—and in my experience—psychedelic-induced synesthesia is more like neonatal synesthesia than developmental synesthesia, both mechanistically and phenomenologically. In developmental synesthesia, an inducer produces the experience of a concurrent, and the relationship between inducer and concurrent is built up over the period of early childhood development. Semiotically, through experience of co-occurrence, an indexical relationship is established between the two so that they are inseparable—like hearing a song from one's childhood might induce memories of a certain time and place when the song was previously heard[71]. Psychedelic-induced and

[71] This phenomenon is referred to in music psychology research as music-evoked autobiographical memory—M.E.A.M. (Belfi, Karlan, and Tranel 2016), and has been discussed in Peircian semiotic terms

neonatal synesthetic experience, rather than being indexical, function more on the iconic level, which, as Kohn makes a strong case for (2013: 32), has as much to do with a failure to notice difference as it does with mutual similarity. Psychedelic-induced synesthesia often involves moment-to-moment shifting in heightened relationships between colors, textures, sounds, written and spoken words, and other sign vehicles. However, especially at higher doses, rather than sensory information arriving with extra information attached (a word being related with a color, for example) the inducer is experienced *as* the concurrent. That is to say, sound is experienced *as* color, image, physical touch, or other sensory information without losing its initial character. The inducer and concurrent merge.

One could argue that this is a distinction with only a minor difference from descriptions of developmental synesthesia. I argue, however, that the difference, though subtle, is significant as it shows the close, overlapping, nested, and dependent relationships between the different layers of the semiotic process. It shows how their differences are diminished or, in some cases, eliminated in psychedelic experiences.

Curandero/a ayahuasquero/as are extremely sensitive masters of using music and other techniques to productively modulate the experiences of those in the synesthetic state induced by ayahuasca. Shanon singles out synesthesia as an important and common experience had by those who drink ayahuasca (Shanon 2002), and Luna goes as far as referring to ayahuasqueros as "masters of synesthesia" (1986: 106). As Carhart-Harris

by Turino (1999) as being based in music's tendency to confer most of its meaning, especially its emotional content, indexically.

and Friston (2019) also point out, the dissolving of categories not only has great therapeutic potential but also potential for catalyzing personal and social change outside of a strictly therapeutic context. Categories that psychedelics dissolve include sensory categories, epistemological categories—such as the ideologies underpinning political and religious affiliation—and ontological categories—such as the understanding of the self (Carhart-Harris and Friston 2019). The evidence presented in the article by Kaelen et al. supports the point that Dobkin de Rios made over a decade earlier, which was echoed by me and some of my colleagues from the research team at Centro Takiwasi (Graham, Rojas Saucedo, and Politi 2022): music is fundamental to the therapeutic functioning of psychedelics, and bio-medical researchers and therapists would do well to respectfully consider the knowledge of curandero/as who not only are the beneficiaries of traditional, cultural information on the topic but each have a life-time's worth of experience healing with music and consciousness-altering plants.

Ayahuasca Experiences and Synesthesia

The first time I drank ayahuasca at Takiwasi, Dr. Jacques Mabit was the curandero leading the session. There was a slow buildup of the brew's effects. The serving I was offered seemed tiny to me—only a third of the small, ceramic cup, slightly larger than the average shot glass. In retrospect, I cannot imagine that the serving was more than an ounce, yet it was thick and took several gulps to get it all down. The taste lingered in my mouth for several minutes: like dark chocolate, espresso, cough syrup, and

mossy earth. During this first ceremony, I experienced mild visual imagery which was tied to intense physical sensations. I described the most intense of these in my notes:

> When [Dr. Jacques] sang one of his faster icaros with the maraca, I understood words related to the theme of cleansing. He vigorously shook the maraca in a fast tempo and repeated the words '*limpia, limpia cuerpecito medicina, medicina*.' I could feel the quick, unceasing, piercing rattle of the maraca. It felt like someone was rubbing a block of cement full of small, sharp stones on my skin and inside me—scrubbing my intestines. At the same time, I saw faces reminiscent of Inca sculptures and gold figurines, all suspended in the black abyss of what I otherwise saw behind my closed eyelids in the dark maloca. But these figures were brightly colored: green, orange, and magenta shifting over their surfaces in a flowing camouflage pattern. The images shook with the vibrations of the icaro and stretched during longer notes. Dr. Jacques also sang an icaro that I recognized from the purga earlier that week. It was the *tabaco* icaro that one of the other curanderos sang. But Dr. Jacques' version was much faster. In his version, the calm, lilting rhythm became like a dance. I felt the notes moving inside my abdomen. The thought crossed my mind that ayahuasca was dancing inside me.[72]

In my notes, I also commented on icaros that Dr. Jaime sang in that same ayahuasca ceremony: "pleasant sounding, generally in a medium tempo; they are more melodically focused than Dr. Jacques' rhythmically driven songs. When Dr. Jaime sang about cleaning, even though the song was calm-sounding and would be relaxing under normal circumstances. . . it felt as if the songs were pulling something out of me."[73]

In the psychological and neuro-scientific literature on synesthesia, the experiences that I described in my notes would be categorized as "drug-induced," or more disdainfully, "narcotic-induced synesthesia," which implies non-medical, illegal drug use (Gatzia and Brogaar 2016; Rogowska 2011). Researchers of drug-induced synesthesia described commonly encountering the types of experiences I had. Specifically, I

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[72] Author's field notes. Tarapoto, Perú. September 25-26, 2019
[73] Ibid.

experienced auditory-visual, auditory-color, auditory-touch, and lexical-touch synesthesias. These are the most common types of synesthesia that I experienced, and these types of experience were also described to me by nearly all of my interlocutors who participated in ayahuasca ceremonies.

From my perspective, the songs were directly causing the visual imagery to appear, and then the images reacted to the sound. The physical experiences I was having, on the other hand, were experientially more complex. The painful physical sensations I felt did not seem to be caused by the sound, it was the sound. But I was feeling sound in a way I had never experienced before. The act of a curandero/a using icaros or other methods to pull negative energies out of a patient's body is referred to in Beyer's research as *jalando*, "pulling" sickness out of a patient (Beyer 2009). This is what curandero/as are doing when they perform a chupada, though some curandero/as report being able to accomplish the same result at a distance, as Bayer's interlocutor did. Without the altered state of consciousness, the process of jalando is not likely to be experienced by a curandero/a's patient. However, as exemplified by several of the reports provided by pilgrims in this dissertation, the physicality of the experience is iconicity that indexes healing. It makes what might otherwise be interpreted like Levi-Strauss's psychological cure more concrete.

During the ayahuasca ceremony, I had a hunch that the experiences I was having were caused by the songs—that, in my altered state, this was just how my mind-body was experiencing the songs. This hypothesis was confirmed when the ceremony paused halfway through while Dr. Jacques offered a second drink of ayahuasca to any

participants who wanted it. I quote again from my notes, “The second drink was like a break for me because the curandero/as stopped singing. In the faint moonlight and intermittent flare of a flashlight or lighting of a mapacho by one of the curandero/as, I could see the silhouettes of the people lined up to get their second drink, and the effects of the ayahuasca seemed to have almost completely subsided.”[74]

I remember sitting and thinking, “if the effects are wearing off, maybe I should go get a second drink.” But having those unpleasant, painful experiences—rocks grating over my insides—reinvigorated by another dose of ayahuasca was not something I wanted. I soon learned, however, that a second dose was not needed. The effects returned as soon as the curandero/as began singing again.

Having participated in several ayahuasca ceremonies throughout the course of my research, I have come to think of ayahuasca—in the psychedelic form consisting of the vine and the leaves of chacruna—as largely functioning through the activation of synesthesia. Personally, I know that the brew is starting to take effect when I have a synesthetic experience—usually the background noise of the rainforest insects becomes more apparent, and I begin to see dim, multicolored static as a moving image behind my closed eyelids. I experience the colored chaos of “static noise” to be caused by the forest noises, or rather to be a different way of “hearing” them.

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[74] Ibid.

Ayahuasca Ceremonies at Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina

Ayahuasca ceremonies at Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina share many important characteristics but differ most notably in 1) the steps taken to prepare the maloca for the ceremony and 2) the number of songs typically sung during the course of a ceremony. There are three icaros that were sung in every ayahuasca ceremony that I attended at both centers. These are “Paparuy,” “*Lupuna,*” and “*Vuela Vuela, Suy Suy.*” These icaros were originally received by Maestro Aquilino Chujandama who initiated both Dr. Jacques Mabit and Maestro Orlando into vegetalismo. He passed these songs on to them. Maestro Aquilino was also involved in the founding and early days of Takiwasi. There are a handful of his other icaros that are also sung at both centers, but these are important for structuring the ritual and, thus, are sung at least once near the beginning of every ayahuasca ceremony. “Paparuy” and “Vuela Vuela, Suy Suy” are also sung at the start of purgas at Takiwasi. In figure 17, I provide a photo of Takiwasi’s maloca, ready for an ayahuasca ceremony.

At Takiwasi, once the ayahuasca ceremony begins, the singing hardly ceases for the next six to seven hours, or however long a given ceremony lasts. Some ceremonies can be a few hours longer or several hours shorter than others. However, at Takiwasi, six to seven hours is standard in my experience. The curandero/a directing the ceremony may intuit or be advised by their spirit helpers how long a ceremony should last.

At both centers, it is typical for the curandero/a to sing an icaro into the bottle of ayahuasca before anyone drinks from it to prepare the brew for the ritual and to ask ayahuasca and other spirits for help and guidance. At Takiwasi, I found that the icaros

chosen for this purpose were either "*Madre ayahuasca*" (for more details on this icaro see Bustos 2006) or "*Paparuy.*" Both of these songs, in their own way and via their particular metaphors, ask the spirits of the forest for protection from negative spiritual forces and to help the participants learn from the experiences they are about to have.

Figure 17. The maloca at Centro Takiwasi, prepared for an ayahuasca ceremony. Photo taken by author May 19, 2022.

Maestro Orlando typically sings or whistles this preparatory icaro at a very low volume in an intimate fashion, as if the song is only for him and ayahuasca, which is, in fact, the case. I do not know if the few icaros I have heard him use for this purpose have words, but I have never heard a version of them that includes lyrics. I posit that the manner in which a curandero/a sings during this phase of the ritual implies a subtle

difference in the semantic frame. The curandero/a might make all of the participants aware of the invocation by singing at a volume audible to all present. In this way, the curandero/a is signifying that this ceremony will be conducted “out in the open,” as it were. When a curandero/a sings icaros that are hardly audible to anyone more than a few feet from them, this signifies that there is much occurring “behind the scenes”—that there is a flow of information happening that is important, but it is not necessary that the participants be involved or even aware of it.

I would not be the first to point out that there is a significant performative aspect to shamanic activity. Beyer (2009) treats this topic at length, mirroring, though with a critical angle, much of what Lévi-Strauss (1963) argued about the efficacy of shamanic activity. That is that the ritualization of action and metaphorical reference to culturally shared myths is what leads to a psychological cure. Beyer does not come down clearly on one side or the other of the “reality” of shamanic cures; rather, he leaves the case open and ambivalent. He argues that either the ritual activities of shamans “hack” the placebo effect (which is my own technological analogy)—that is, that physical action taken by the shaman is believed by observers to be effective, so the psychological cure proposed by Lévi-Strauss is the result—or there is a both/and effect in play. Beyer proposes that shamans–in this case, curandero/as working in concert with spirits of the forest–may enact cures on a physical and spiritual level, but that the performative dimension of ritualized activity plays a psycho-physical supportive role. In other words, a spiritual cure is made more “real” and more believable through ritualized action. Thus, shamans take advantage of the compounding effects of a cure that is enacted on a physical and spiritual

level, and the shaman's performance of the cure heightens its effectiveness through what Western medical science calls "the placebo effect." This analysis has parallels in Turino's argument that performance art carries indexical meaning that can support the development of ideologies by subverting symbolic, intellectual analysis (Turino 2008). The intense, embodied, experience of the altered state of consciousness induced by ayahuasca–which I have argued is fundamentally synesthetic (Gatzia and Brogaard 2016), opens ritual participants up to re-forming the indexical links in their semiotic networks and, thus, how they interact with and understand their relationship to the world (Carhart-Harris and Friston 2019). For shamanic pilgrims, this challenges the gap assumed in Western-influenced epistemologies between the spiritual, psychological, and physical dimensions of existence. Ayahuasca, by dissolving epistemic, and thus semiotic, boundaries either creates a situation whereby the potential of "psychological cures" are maximized or where the spiritual, psychological, and physical dimensions are experienced at the same time as an undivided whole. Outside of a synesthetic state of consciousness, these dimensions of experience are split by the filtering mechanisms of the human sensory apparatus during each individual's neurological development out of a synesthetic state of existence through their enculturation and development of semiotic categories.

Dr. Jaime described to me that Takiwasi structures their ayahuasca ceremonies the way they do because they are almost always holding the ceremony for twelve to fifteen rehabilitation patients, each of whom may bring a lot of psycho-spiritual chaos with them into the ritual. The careful preparation of the ritual space and constant singing help the

curandero/as contain and control the chaos. Maestro Orlando's ayahuasca ceremonies that I have attended have included relatively few participants, the largest of them including Maestro Orlando and three other people. While Maestro Orlando used icaros to prepare the ritual space and performed mapacho sopladas to prepare each participant, he took fewer measures to put up barriers around the maloca. In both cases, curandero/as' actions communicate that they are taking measures to protect the participants. In Takiwasi's case, because ayahuasca ceremonies are regularly held for over a dozen people, the additional protective measures index the seriousness with which the curandero/as approach the ceremony. In Maestro Orlando's case, the more understated preparatory measures indicate that he is confident that, with the help of spirits he can call on in the moment, he will be able to handle any situation that arises.

The icaro "*Lupuna*" is an important part of preparing the ritual space at both Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina. This icaro is a method by which curandero/as put in place what they refer to as *arkanas*. This word does not come from the Latin *arcanus*, "a secret." Rather, it has a Quechua root: *arkay* means "to block" or "to obstruct." *Arkana* is the nominal form of the word. It means "something that blocks or gets in the way of something else." In this case, the arkana blocks spirits and spiritual energy (positive and negative) from entering or leaving the ritual space without the curandero/as' permission. Looking at the words of the icaro in detail may give a sense of how this is accomplished.

"Lupuna" [75]

Lupuna sikimanta kani, kani	I come from the base (or root) of the lupuna
Lupuna sikimanta kani, kani	I come from the base of the lupuna
Lupuna sikimanta	I come from the base of the lupuna
Kani, kani, kani, kani	I come, I come, I come, I come
Fire, fire, fire, fire	Air, air, air, air
Ya se fue, eeh, eeh	It already left, eeh, eeh

The lupuna tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) is one of the larges trees that grows in the Amazon Forest, considering both width and height. It can grow to over seventy meters in height and produces a very wide canopy. Horák (2013: 94) reported that this icaro invokes the spirit of the lupuna and, via a metaphor that the curandero/as understand, asks the tree to cover the maloca with its broad canopy. This icaro is often sung just before or just after one of a number of songs that reference the flight of birds. At Takiwasi, it will commonly be "*Vuela Vuela, Suy Suy*," an icaro that entreats a long list of Amazonian birds (one of which is the suy) to take flight, "*vuela*." I was told by curandero/as that these birds represent the energies of the plants and the experiences that they will go through during the ceremony. This icaro is sung to activate the *mareación* (this word literally means "dizziness" but in curanderismo refers to the effects of the ayahuasca brew). As Horák pointed out (2013), the canopy of the lupuna, invoked by one icaro, serves as a type of spiritual ceiling so that the spirits of the participants, activated by ayahuasca and the other

[75] Maestro Orlando sings "Lupuna-ra" in this icaro. To my understanding of the regional dialect of Quechua, which is at an intermediate level, in this context, this suffix -ra signifies imminence and closeness. If it were attached to a noun referencing a period of time it would be emphasizing that an event just happened or is about to happen. Since it is attached to a noun referencing a tree, I understand it to signify physical and relational closeness.

icaros, will not fly too far. The lupuna icaro places a protective barrier over the ceremony.

I was able to dig a little deeper in conversations with curandero/as and found more that is potentially relevant to understanding what this relatively simple song might be doing. Don José and Maestro Orlando both described a hierarchy of forest trees that are difficult and dangerous to take during a dieta, but if one is strong enough to ingest them, these trees will instill physical and mental strength along with powerful lessons and medicine. Both of these curandero/as described the lupuna as occupying the top position in this hierarchy of trees. The lupuna icaro, then, is also likely petitioning the tree to pass on some of its strength to the participants to help them persevere through any difficult moments that might arise during the ceremony.

Importantly, there is an aspect shared by many of Maestro Aquilino's icaros that I learned about piece by piece in conversations with Maestro Orlando. Several of Maestro Aquilino's icaros end with the phrase "*Fire, fire, fire, fire / Ya se fue*" (the IPA pronunciation of "*fire*" is fiɾe—fee-reh with a flapped R). Maestro Orlando informed me that *fire* in Quechua is "air." I already understood the Spanish phrase, "*Ya se fue*" ("He/She/It already left") but, as is the intended effect of the twisting metaphors of icaros, I did not understand who or what this sentence was referencing. Eventually, after nearly four years of knowing him, Maestro Orlando explained the meaning of the phrase to me, "*Lo que se fue es el aire maligno*." ("What left is the bad/evil air.")[76] I then asked for clarification that the icaro is replacing the "bad air" with the strength and protection

[76] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Personal communication. WhatsApp audio message. May 23, 2023.

of the lupuna and Maestro Orlando confirmed this interpretation. In that case, this seemingly simple icaro not only provides protection, sets a spiritual boundary for the ritual, and seeks to instill strength and resolve in the participants, but in it is encoded the understanding of how icaros function via the curandero/a's breath. By singing the icaro, the curandero/a is injecting participants with good, powerful, air charged with the spirit of the lupuna, and this air is pushing out and taking the place of the "*aire maligno*" that may be causing harm from within them.

We can see similar processes in action if we investigate another of Maestro Aquilino's icaros that Maestro Orlando and the curandero/as at Takiwasi all sing, the icaro "*Paparuy.*"

"*Paparuy*"[77]:

Paparuy, paparuy, paparuy paparuy[78]	My dear little bird…
Paparuy, paparuy, paparuy, paparuy	My dear little bird…
Wayruruy, wayruruy, wayruruy,wayruruy	My dear little tree…
Wayruruy, wayruruy, wayruruy, wayruruy	My dear little tree…
Otorongo waway, shina purikuykanki waway	Dear baby jaguar, how you walk around
Iwaway, kawaway, iwaway, kawaway	Care for me, watch me

This song goes on, naming several more animals and ending with the phrase about the bad air leaving. Maestro Orlando explained to me that this icaro calls the spirits of many

[77] Paparuy is a type of bird.
[78] This icaro is a notable exception to consistent tempos being a characteristic of icaros received by Quechua-Lamista healers. All curandero/as who I heard sing this icaro slowed down while repeating "paparuy" and "wayruruy" at the ends of lines and sped up while repeating "iwaway, kawaway." I was not able to glean the significance of these tempo changes during this project, but I hope to investigate this point in the future.

plants and animals from the forest and asks them to protect and teach the participants as if they were their own children.

According to Maestro Orlando, the paparuy is a bird that lives in dangerous areas, especially near water. It has a white head that makes it easy to see in the forest, especially in and around water, where there is little cover from foliage available. Yet this bird is agile enough and wise enough to live in these areas and avoid predators. The icaro calls on this bird to teach wisdom and discernment to help participants avoid danger. The wayruro tree has black and red seeds that, in Quechua-Lamista culture, represent the duality of existence and the balance of opposites in the universe. This tree is called on to teach balance and awareness amidst the ambivalence of existence. Next, the icaro calls on the spirit of the jaguar: the strongest and most fearsome animal in the forest. No other animal can harm the jaguar's progeny, even while it is clumsily learning about the world as a baby. This line is sung from the perspective of the "parent" jaguar ("Dear baby jaguar, how you walk around"). The icaro then switches perspectives to that of the baby jaguar, asking its parent to teach it, care for it, watch it grow, "*iwaway, kawaway*." The icaro goes on similarly, invoking other denizens of the forest and asking for their protection and for them to teach or pass on some of their essential nature to the participants.

In a 1975 article, Dobkin de Rios and Kats proposed an analogy: the songs that ayahuasquero/as sing are like a jungle gym on a playground in that they provide a structure on which the psychedelic ayahuasca visions can play. A child could choose to play a nearly infinite number of games, but the metal bars of a jungle gym simultaneously

offer adventure and limits. “Given the way in which hallucinogens cause dissolution of ego boundaries and the concomitant biochemical effects of generation of extreme anxiety—music replaces with its own implicit structure a set of banisters and pathways through which the drug user in a non-Western ritual setting negotiates his way” (Dobkin de Rios and Katz 1975: 65). I reiterate that the description of the paparuy icaro above is based on what Maestro Orlando told me the song is communicating. It is possible that some of these meanings could be inferred by native Quechua speakers enculturated into local understandings of the character of each of these non-human beings. However, the icaro only names these beings and hints at a relationship between them and their progeny. Even for a fluent speaker of Quechua, the specifics of this icaro’s symbolic meaning would be opaque without the help of a curandero/a’s explanation. Based on my findings working in cross-cultural settings, then, I must argue that one of Dobkin de Rios and Katz’s conclusions is, at least partially, incorrect. That is that musically structured, psychedelic visions are used “so that an individual can achieve his culture’s goal of drug use—namely, to obtain a stereotypic visionary experience programmed by his culture” (Dobkin de Rios and Katz 1975: 65). The obtaining of a culturally significant, stereotypic vision portends wellbeing or healing, returning us to Levi-Strauss’s culturally bounded, psychological cure. While the foundation of their case stands—that music provides structure to psychedelic states of consciousness—the second step, that the content of these visions depends on the healer and patient sharing a culture does not. As the pilgrims’ stories I have shared here illustrate, the content of ayahuasca visions, shaped by icaros, is a blend of signs relevant to both healers and participants, and, in some cases,

participants have pre-symbolic (iconic and indexical) experience of the meaning of icaros without being able to analyze their relevant symbolic content. This was the case with Amir's experiences of Dra. Rosa's icaros "Ábrete Corazón" and the Icaro of the letter S, related to serpents. His experiences during the ayahuasca ceremony and ensuing dieta matched the linguistic content of these icaros and the lessons he learned were directly tied to the songs' intent as described by curandero/as. All of this occurred despite him not being able to understand the Spanish or Quechua lyrics of the songs and coming from a background living in the middle east and urban Australia. Thus, it would seem that icaros function in the way that Maestro Orlando described—they are a tool with which the curandero/a facilitates a meeting between the plant and the patient that results in healing. The content of ayahuasca visions can be relevant to and engender healing and learning without the imagery being culturally relevant to the patient. Beyond this, as I have already shown, icaros function for healing and structuring rituals other than ayahuasca ceremonies which also involve participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. So, while ayahuasca experiences can be helpful supports and catalysts of healing in vegetalismo, they are not required.

Given, then, that it is not imperative or even expected that non-curanderos will understand the songs, why, as the anecdote I am about to recall demonstrates, is it important for them to listen to the songs?

One night, I attended an ayahuasca ceremony at Takiwasi with a large group of pilgrims about to begin a dieta. I had an agreement with Dr. Jacques that I could be present and make an audio recording of the ceremony, but I had to drink a small amount

of ayahuasca to be a participant in the ritual—no passive observers allowed. I felt some mild effects from drinking the miniscule dose I was given, and, by three hours into the ceremony, the effect had all but worn off. When the curandero/as stopped singing and invited those who wanted a second drink to approach, I thought to myself, "I have another three or four hours to sit here; let me go ask for a little bit more ayahuasca so I can continue participating in the ceremony. The curandero/as know why I am here, and if they tell me 'No,' no problem." So, I got in line with the others to ask for a second drink. When I arrived at the front of the line, Dr. Jacques leaned forward to see through the dark and asked, "*¿Quien es?*" (Who is that?) I responded, "*Soy Owain. ¿Sería posible tener poquito más?*" (It's Owain. Would it be possible to have a little more?) Dr. Jacques sat back and took a few puffs from his pipe of tobacco, thinking for a moment. Then he grabbed the ayahuasca bottle and poured some of the thick liquid into the cup. He lit his flashlight to check how much he had poured, then he poured a little more. He leaned forward and handed me the cup—full almost to the brim. Surprised by the large dose I was just given to drink, I thought to myself, "Oh, I guess I will be doing a little more work tonight than I thought." I drank the dose, handed the cup back to Dr. Jacques, and returned to my seat.

Similar sudden changes in my role from observer to fully participant occurred repeatedly throughout my research with healers. As one of their patients, there were moments when I was asked to put my research project aside for a moment and focus on my own work with the plants. More commonly, however, they would first ensure that I had my audio recorder running before asking me to temporarily step outside of my role as

researcher and step into my role as a human seeking healing through an encounter with the plants. This is what Dr. Jacques was asking me to do when he handed me the full cup. He and I had spoken earlier that day about how once I had set up my microphones and started the recording, my activities as a researcher were limited to sitting in the dark and listening to the ceremony taking place around me. Being that I had already recorded and observed the first couple of hours of the ceremony, he determined that this was a good opportunity for me to jump back into the role of participant.

The effects from the second dose came on strong and fast. It couldn't have been more than five minutes from the time I drank to the time that the curandero/as started to sing again. Somehow, I was already entering into a full psychedelic experience and was quickly losing control. The synesthesia came over me so quickly and completely that I lost contact with any reference point for meaning at all. I did my best to "keep it together" for the next few minutes, but the effects kept getting stronger. So, I asked for help. Listening back to the audio recording of the ceremony, I can hear myself weakly calling out, "*Edgardo, ayúdame*!" (help me!) I called for don Edgardo because, with what sense I was able to make of the ceremony going on around me, I remembered he was seated only a few feet to my left, and, as far as I could tell, he was not singing at that moment, so it was likely that he would be available to help right away. I was correct, and he was in front of me seconds later asking how I was doing and what was wrong. The best I could muster was, "*No sé, estoy perdido*" (I don't know, I'm lost). He responded, "*Vas a estar bien. Escucha los cantos*" (You're going to be okay. Listen to the songs). He quickly retrieved some implements from near his seat and returned to me. He virtually

drenched me with a spray of sweet-smelling agua de florida from his mouth, which I experienced as an orange-blue explosion enveloping my rapidly expanding field of awareness. He began to fan me with his shakapa, tapping out a rhythm on the top of my head as he began to sing. My senses were completely overwhelmed as smells, sounds, and my ability to feel that I was a person, sitting on a floor in a room, blended together in a rush of color-sounds and geometric-smells. I am unable to communicate much else about the rest of that night because, for most of it, my awareness was flowing between and among senses and levels of synesthetic semiosis. From time to time—which was a concept that had no meaning to me—I would remember those last words that don Edgardo said, "Listen to the songs." This moment, more than any other during my time in Perú, has stood out to me as significant. An experienced, master curandero came to help me as I slipped out of control—a situation that I am sure he has seen hundreds, if not, thousands of times. In that crucial moment, while I was still able to speak, the piece of information that was most important for him to communicate to me was, "*Escucha los cantos*." I followed his advice. Every time I started to become overwhelmed by the intensity and chaos of the experience, I returned my focus to the songs, and the experience would take on a new organization.

Even though I did not, and still do not, understand most of the symbolic meaning of the icaros—I only understand what curandero/as have interpreted for me—when I was unable to do anything else, it was essential that I listen to the songs. This harkens back to Maestro Orlando's explanation that the three necessary pieces of a cure are the plant, the patient, and the curandero/a. Listening to the songs involves a willingness on the part of

the patient/participant to play their role in the triad. Actively holding one's attention on the songs is, in a way, an acceptance of and engagement with the semantic frame of the ritual. In an ayahuasca ceremony, the participant's role is to invite the plant into their body by drinking the brew and then allow the curandero/a to use their techniques to call in other plants and work with the ayahuasca in the participant's body. The curandero/a sustains the meeting of the participant/patient and the plants by singing icaros. The part that the participant/patient plays in this interaction is to hold their attention on the songs and allow the curandero/a and the plants to heal them.

The dissolving of sensory and semiotic filters during an ayahuasca ceremony is an effective catalyst to the processes of an isolation diet. Psychedelic experiences have been shown to catalyze changes in psychology, epistemology, and even ontology (Carhart-Harris and Friston 2019; Zeifman et al. 2022). The clinical literature suggests that this is because tryptamine-based psychedelics such as DMT-containing ayahuasca engender neuroplasticity that gradually tapers off over the weeks following a psychedelic experience. Semiotically, after a psychedelic experience in which symbols and indices have been collapsed into icons, an individual is afforded an opportunity to re-examine their relationship to the world and how they make sense of it. As the neuroplastic state fades, the meanings of interrelated signs—the building blocks of ontology and epistemology—can be re-examined. It is precisely during this window of semiotic flexibility that dieters are secluded in the forest while ingesting plantas maestras. This renders individuals who were not enculturated into an animist epistemology more likely to accept the ritual framing of dieta and relate to the plants as other selves (Kohn 2013).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided historical and cultural context for understanding icaros. Undoubtedly, they are caught up in a complex and fraught history of cultural mixing. As the recently published article by Suárez-Álvarez shows, the histories of the shamanic practices in which icaros are involved are poorly understood and still being pieced back together. What these differing strains of historiographic study show is that there has likely been continuous use of psychedelic ayahuasca in the Southeastern Peruvian Amazon since before the arrival of the Spanish. There is also ample evidence that a blended complex of shamanic practice developed through the mixing of various Indigenous cultures in the missionary camps which was then spread throughout the Western Amazon by subsequent waves of missionization, colonization, and resource extraction projects—primarily the Rubber Boom. Important pieces of this evidence include the existence of a shamanic vocabulary whose etymology is traceable back to Kukama and forest Quechua dialects. This vocabulary is closely related to the use of psychedelic ayahuasca, especially for healing in group settings. In the Northern Peruvian Amazon, icaro is a general term for healing songs. According to Brabec de Mori (2011), as we move south, the use of the word becomes more specialized and refers specifically to one type of ayahuasca songs that are similar in musical form to northern icaros and feature lyrics in Spanish and Quechua as opposed to the respective Indigenous languages of the curandero/as who sing them.

I explored the significance of the orthography and pronunciation of the word icaro/ikaro/ícaro/íkaro through a semiotic analysis of the word's use in various

ethnographic and literary contexts. I noted a trend in which the spelling *icaro* (using the letter C) implies a semantic frame emphasizing the mixed cultural history of Amazonian shamanism, while stressing the penultimate syllable in pronunciation emphasizes the word's connection to Kukama- and Quechua-speaking Indigenous peoples. Alternatively, the spellings *ikaro* and *íkaro* (using the letter K) emphasize the words connection to Indigeneity, as K is used in the orthography of Indigenous languages in Perú while C and QU are used in Spanish spellings (e.g., ayawaska versus ayahuasca). In online discussions of ayahuasca shamanism and in touristic contexts in which forwarding the idea that the most "authentic" ayahuasca shamanism is found with the Shipbio-Conibo people has cultural and market value, the most common spelling and pronunciation is *íkaro*. This spelling not only emphasizes the word's connection to Indigeneity, it underlines the connection to the Shipibo-Conibo people, as Panoan languages typically emphasize the first syllable in the pronunciation of nouns.

The second half of this chapter was an ethnographic and semiotic analysis of icaros as used in the healing rituals of plant baths, perfume rituals, purges, in the application of containment plants, and in ayahuasca ceremonies. In all cases, icaros function semiotically by indexing the curandero/a's relationship to the plants and spirits of the forest who empower the curandero/a to heal. The musical elements and lyrics of the songs make up a semi-secret network of metaphorical symbols, the specific meanings of which are known only to the curandero/a and the plants. The icaros are also iconic of the plants in that they are a sonic reproduction of the plants' essences which are made physical as they charge the curandero's breath. In ayahuasca ceremonies, the

psychedelic-induced experience of synesthesia collapses the semiotic processes into each other. This also induces neuroplasticity and, as the sensory apparatus's filtration systems and semiotic processes return to equilibrium, a person who has gone through a psychedelic experience is able to reevaluate the significance of the networks of signs that make up their respective ontology and epistemology. For shamanic pilgrims, this primes them for "taking animism seriously" (Willerslev 2007) as they enter isolation diets and begin to form relationships with master plants.

Chapter Four

Shamanic Pilgrimage and the Online Dissemination of Vegetalismo

Introduction

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the online side of my hybrid ethnographic research with the Amazonian medicine centers Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina. Significantly, Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina disseminate information about vegetalismo through their own websites and social media, but they have also been highlighted in emergent, influential forms of new media, especially podcasts and independently produced documentaries published on websites such as YouTube.com. As I explore here, these media become sites for multidirectional flows of information, especially in comments sections of videos and audio recordings. In addition to this hybrid project, I conducted online ethnographic research in the ayahuasca Facebook group and followed the dissemination of one of Takiwasi's most well-known icaros online. This further contextualizes shamanic pilgrimage within the globalization of vegetalismo as described in existing research, which takes online discussions to be indicative the future of the globalization of ayahuasca and Amazonian shamanism (Conrad 2018; Echazú Böschemeier and Carew 2018; Labate 2014). Careful consideration of these topics is important as global awareness and engagement with Amazonian shamanism is increasing. This is evidenced by the increasing number of celebrities openly discussing their engagement with ayahuasca (Smith 2023, and the podcasts discussed in this chapter). I argue that the prevalence of conflicting ideologies in the most active online discussion forums and the emergent trend of shamanic pilgrimage as an Indigenous

tourism strategy (Bunten and Grabern 2018) suggest that the cultural flows across the global landscape tend to concentrate in localized, physical and digital nodes that allow for the exercise of agency and nuance in how individuals and groups engage in the processes of globalization (Lysloff 2016). The medium is the message, but the message of every medium is to amplify its contents which are media that carry their own messages.

Conrad (2018) proposed that the format of websites, especially social media sites, directs and limits how various narratives around ayahuasca, Amazonian shamanism, and the related cultures are developing outside of Amazonian locales. Though Conrad did not cite Marshall McLuhan, his analysis of technology and media encapsulated in the phrase "the medium is the message" (McLuhan 1994: 7) is relevant when considering Conrad's proposition. While not trying to be comprehensive, Conrad provides the only example of any scholarly work of which I am aware that synthesizes the major trends of online discussions of ayahuasca and Amazonian shamanism. For this reason, I use his analysis as the basis for much of the discussion in this chapter. He performed a cross-platform analysis looking at prominent themes in these discussions and, pointing to the format limitations of social media and other forums as the causative factor, concluded that "the structure and potential" of online discussions of ayahuasca and vegetalismo are limited "within the context of Western individualism" (Conrad 2018: 96). While this is his overriding conclusion, he includes many caveats that, to me, raise serious questions about his conclusion. These include that social media— to an extent limited by access to technology—democratizes online discussion and enables the existence of various subcultures, including those organized around vegetalismo (Conrad 2018: 97). He also

points to tensions between discussants who 1) argue that experiences had while taking Amazonian plant medicines are best understood from a pharmaco-psychological perspective, 2) proponents of a piece-meal spiritual interpretation, and 3) proponents of interpreting these experiences in light of Amazonian cultural perspectives. He also writes, "of course, the various social media platforms simply provide a spatial apparatus through which cultural flows may pass and converge. The ideas and experiences brought to discussions within online social networks are partly tied to offline contexts and embodied encounters with ayahuasca and related cultural trends" (Conrad 2018: 99). Despite noting multidirectional trends and a plethora of competing perspectives, he maintains that, "Various features of vegetalismo may be incorporated into an individual's fluctuating cultural assemblage" (Conrad 2018: 100). So far, I am in agreement. However, he continues with a generalization that, "Online, such features are appropriated and positioned within a Western framework of meaning and value, whereby signifiers that complement Western cultural narratives are adapted to satisfy individual contexts, producing a syncretic assemblage of spiritual, ontological and health beliefs" (Conrad 2018: 100). It appears that, despite doing so much work to point out some of the complexities and tensions involved in online discussions of these topics, Conrad has concluded that the various media of online discussion are products of a culture of Western individualism, thus, whatever they produce will be limited by Western individualism.

The medium is the message.

Conrad does not cite McLuhan, but his argument relies on two assumptions, one of which I will address later in the chapter and the other of which is analogous to a surface-level understanding of the processes involved in McLuhan's argument about the functioning of media. In his well-known essay, McLuhan follows up the title line that "The Medium Is the Message" with a clarification. Some media exist without a message until information of one kind or another is filtered through them. "The 'content' of any medium is always another medium" (McLuhan 1994: 8). What he means by "the medium is the message," then, is that the "psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns [that characterize inter-nested media] amplify or accelerate existing processes. For the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (McLuhan 1994: 8). Therefore, the message of discussions of vegetalismo on social media is not necessarily, in the final analysis, that Western individualism must subsume everything. The flexibility of social media married with the creativity of the diversity of humanity makes me skeptical of anyone who proposes that they know what the message of all social media platforms, taken as a whole, is—other than that proposed by McLuhan: to "amplify or accelerate existing processes." The creation of spiritual amalgamations that include decontextualized elements of vegetalismo, which, as I have explained at some length previously in this dissertation, is itself characterized by its history of changeability. It is an amalgamation of elements from several Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, and its practitioners specialize in crossing epistemological and ontological borders. However, as Conrad points out, there are strong contingencies in these discussions who each support different

interpretations of and approaches to engaging with vegetalismo, including a vocal contingency who emphasize the importance of including Amazonian perspectives (Conrad 2018: 101).

It may appear that I am critiquing Conrad for this single entry into the academic discussion. That is not my intention. To the contrary, I think he has done rather a good job of laying out the complexities of the involvement of online media in the development of narratives about vegetalismo. In fact, he wrote that "Simplistic unilinear notions of colonialism and cultural ownership obscure an appreciation of the active and dynamic scenario unfolding online" (Conrad 2018: 104). He points out, instead, that online communication has empowered some marginalized groups while some online "spaces and communities [tend to] generate notions of Amazonian culture that may be limiting in ways detrimental to cultural well-being" (Conrad 2018: 104). My criticism is that he seems to be arguing for two antithetical conclusions: 1) online discussions are complex and important for researchers to pay attention to as an increasing diversity of people are taking part; as such, online forums are playing a role in neo-colonial, anti-colonial, and many other strategies for engaging with vegetalismo, and 2) online discussions are unilaterally re-inventing vegetalismo in the image of Western individualism. This leads me back to the two assumptions that underlie Conrad's discussion, which are also common to other analyses of shamanic tourism and the globalization of Amazonian shamanism. These interrelated assumptions are that 1) the medium is the message (in a simplistic sense—contrary to McLuhan's more nuanced discussion—in which a medium necessarily imposes the limitations of the dominant ideology from the cultural milieu in

which it originated on the content flowing through the medium) and 2) in the long term, globalization, which includes communication in online subcultures, is the process of all cultural forms being destroyed by or, where sufficiently compatible, subsumed into "Western culture." Conrad's work is one example of a trend in scholarship countered by René Lysloff in a 2016 article.

Lysloff raised an important issue about scholarly attempts to understand globalization (citing such influential scholars of the globalization of music as Erlmann 1999; Feld 2001; Stokes 2004; and Taylor 1997, 2007). The problem he found was that much of this discussion implies that there is so much complexity and momentum behind the flows of global culture that any individual, society, or nation can only embrace it, resist it, or hope to find ways to temporarily negotiate it until such time as they are overwhelmed by it. Despite the detail of analysis or depth of theoretical discussion presented by this body of scholarship, "the narrative tends to be the same story of inevitability" (Lysloff 2016: 486). That is that, while globalization involves flows from the global to the local and back, the "global" is a euphemism for "Western." In this formulation, Western culture subsumes and homogenizes cultures in "third-world" locales even as it is consumed there (Hall 1997: 28). One of the threads woven throughout this dissertation is my attempt to raise a question about most of the scholarship concerned with the globalization of ayahuasca, vegetalismo, and ayahuasca tourism. This body of work has—too quickly, in my estimation—concluded that ayahuasca tourism is a display of exactly this type of totalizing, Western hegemony and

that the globalization of Amazonian shamanism is characterized by the same fatalistic inevitability that Lylsoff questioned.

I would also question some of the researchers who have pointed to multi-directional flows in the globalization of Amazonian shamanism, as they have characterized the spread of information about Amazonian culture along with ayahuasca as "reverse colonization" (Labate 2014). Here, I have presented a case for shamanic pilgrimage as an example that complicates both the Western hegemony and the reverse colonization perspectives, which are not mutually exclusive. The strategies employed by Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina are resistant to homogenization and the imposition of narratives about Amazonian people and shamanism from the outside in a way that ayahuasca-focused discussions are not. This is because, at these centers, ayahuasca is not decontextualized from a broader practice of curanderismo except as a strategic move to redirect global interest in ayahuasca toward a personal relationship with curanderismo through dietas. While resistant, these strategies are not efforts at reverse colonization. Rather, these centers seek mutual understanding and mutual benefit through collaboration with the pilgrims who visit them and through the development and maintenance of hybrid, physical-digital networks of pilgrims, curanderos, and information about curanderismo and Amazonian peoples. By being collaborative and invitational, their strategies are more akin to what Lysloff (adapting a concept from Appadurai 2003: 3) called "nodes for grass-roots globalization" (Lysloff 2016: 486) than a type of colonization, which implies the imposition of power.

In this case, the nod to the grass-roots of the botanical realm is especially apt. In one instance, when I asked Maestro Orlando what he thought about ayahuasca being drunk in foreign countries and how he felt about hosting foreigners for dietas, he responded that he did not understand exactly how it would be accomplished, but the plants had told him that using interest in ayahuasca to spread awareness of traditional medicine from the Amazon and the ciencias ancestrales was the plants' own plan. So, he is doing what he has always done: following the guidance of the plants. From his perspective, as long as the people involved are being respectful of the plants, it is a legitimate way of engaging with curanderismo. On this topic, Maestro Orlando told me,

> *En el mundo de la medicina, no hay fronteras. No hay raza, no hay color, no hay idioma, no hay cultura. No hay nada. Es el universo—es universal. Puede recibir a que venga y que trabaje. La gente que viene a trabajar—con buenas intenciones que trabaja. No hay raza, no hay color, no hay nada con el mundo de las plantas, en la medicina tradicional. Así es.*[79]
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> (In the world of the medicine, there are no borders. There is no race, there is no color, there is no language, there is no culture. There's nothing. It's the universe; it's universal. It can receive anyone who comes to work: the people who come to work—those who come with the intent to do good work [will be received by the medicine]. There's no race, no color, there's none of that in the world of the plants, in traditional medicine. That's how it is.)

Taken in the context with the many conversations that I have had with Maestro Orlando over the past few years, I am confident that he was not making a facile argument about a "colorblind" approach to inter-ethnic relations with this statement. He is personally torn about the effects that globalization is having on his culture.[80] What he was trying to get

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[79] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. March 28, 2022.

[80] During my dieta at Mushuk Pakarina, Llucanayacu's first hard-wired internet connection was installed. Maestro Orlando expressed his concerns about this to me. He could see the advantages that easy access to

me to understand was that he acts in the world as an agent of the plants who are themselves active agents. The plants welcome anyone who has the intent to do good work because if these people respect the plants and respect the processes of the ciencias ancestrales, they will be personally invested in a relationship with Amazonian plants, people, and culture. This is a message of the medium of the ciencias ancestrales, and that means that, Mushuk Pakarina, as a node in a globalizing network, is adding that message to the online conversations about ayahuasca and Amazonian shamanism. This shows how, with the every-increasing availability of technological means, the nodes of grass-roots globalization are hybrid, physical-digital spaces in which people in different locales "use media technologies in developing their own global networks" (Lysloff 2016: 486).

The medium is the message, but the message of every medium is to amplify its contents which are their own messages.

AyahuascaWorld on Facebook.com

Due to the limitations of time and space, when referencing scholarship about the globalization of ayahuasca and Amazonian shamanism online, I reference Conrad (2018) as his work is the most up-to-date and his argument is, essentially, a synthesis of main

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the internet would offer the community, but, with it, he saw a major advance in the process of modernization erasing Native culture. He expressed to me that sometimes he questions his own status as a "Native," because, to him, being Indigenous means being part of a community that maintains a connection to traditional lifeways. He lamented that most of the children in the community barely spoke Quechua; their primary language was Spanish, and they were more interested in learning English than Quechua because of the opportunities that knowing English represents. I asked him if he thought that "modernization" (this is the word he used) and Native culture could coexist, and I pointed to the way he hosts foreigners for dietas as an example. He replied, "we cannot know the future; this [hosting pilgrims for dietas] works for now, but in a generation or two—who knows?"

points made by other scholars who have delved more deeply into specific areas of the online discussion. Other notable works in this area are a dissertation by Davidov (2008) on the exotification of Amazonian culture and ayahuasca in tourist blogs; a dissertation by Heuser (2006) focused on reports on internet forums of encounters with "entities" in ayahuasca visions; and an article by Holman (2011), which is an analysis of the website of a single ayahuasca retreat center, Blue Morpho Tours.

The ayahuasca Facebook group (facebook.com/groups/ayahuascaworld) is the most active online forum for the discussion of ayahuasca, dietas, and Amazonian plant medicine practices. The vast majority of discussion in this group is focused on ayahuasca. In 2018 Conrad noted that the group had 69,255 members. As of January 26, 2024, the group has grown to 90,509 members. The ayahuasca Reddit page (r/ayahuasca) is the second largest at 72,646 members (as of January 26, 2024). The site forums.ayahuasca.com is, as far as I found, the third largest with 21,831 members (as of January 26, 2024). As it is not my intention to conduct a survey of online discussions of ayahuasca or vegetalismo, I present these data for future researchers who might be looking for information about these pages and to point out that these are very active spaces that should be studied both broadly and in depth. For my discussion here, I will focus on the Facebook group as it represents the largest sample of people online engaging in discussions about vegetalismo. Thus, it provides a snapshot of important trends in these discussions. I have also chosen to focus on the Facebook group because, though Maestro Orlando and Centro Takiwasi are both active on Facebook and use it as a platform to disseminate information about Amazonian medicine and their centers, they

are not active in the ayahuasca group. Their contrasting uses of the Facebook platform are representative of a difference between shamanic pilgrimage and more common approaches to shamanic tourism. I should note, however, that Takiwasi did make a small number of posts to the ayahuasca Facebook group between July and September of 2018. Their final post was to share the calendar of upcoming dietas that they were hosting, which received very little attention (total interactions with the post amounted to two "likes," which means nobody shared the post or commented on it). The rest of their posts during this short stint were to share research about Amazonian plant medicines.

Lucia's study of transformational festivals (such as Burning Man and Lightning in a Bottle) in which a "subsection of the SBNR [spiritual but not religious] population adopts religious exoticism to produce mystical experiences, awakenings of consciousness, and spiritual growth through meditation, yoga, chanting, visualization, dreaming, psychedelics (medicine), and ascetic practices," (Lucia 2020: 11) bears a striking resemblance to the processes involved in the discursive reinvention of vegetalismo as "ayahuasca shamanism." Her research elucidates how people who are in or who assume positions of authority in transformational festivals (e.g. yoga teachers) "reiterate and reinforce communally supported ideals, sermonizing to somatically receptive audiences" (Lucia 2020: 12). Fotiou (2020) calls attention to a similar mechanism for reinforcing the meaningfulness and presumed authenticity of ayahuasca retreats during speeches given by shamans at the beginnings of ceremonies. The common lexicon used in the ayahuasca Facebook group by retreat centers and private members with varying levels of experience with ayahuasca and vegetalismo suggests the existence

of a feedback mechanism at work in the production and reproduction of these discourses between physical ayahuasca retreats and discussions in online forums. There is likely a significant overlap between the groups of people that Lucia discusses in her research and those engaging in ayahuasca tourism or discussions of ayahuasca online, though research on that topic would be necessary to find out if or how much they overlap. There are, at the very least, common features to the set of values that govern conversation in transformational festivals, ayahuasca retreats, and online discussion forums. These values include "a focus on health, vegetarianism, connection with others, personal feelings of harmony, peak experiences, eco-consciousness and environmentalism, spiritual exploration, and personal development" (Lucia 2020: 13). Much of the discussion in the Facebook group is also underpinned by what Lucia calls "utopian visions of religious exoticism" which,

> are defined by a particular notion about the other. In its most idyllic form, the other is romanticized as an untouched essence—timeless, pure, and uncorrupted by modernity. The utopian vision of the other must be constructed as such in order to be conceived of as an oppositional solution to the existing order of things. If it were similarly corrupted and corruptible, then it would be no solution at all. (Lucia 2020: 18)

However, likely because of the democratization of access to the online groups through technology, critiques of these values and assumptions are ever present, if voiced by a minority contingent, in the Facebook group. In the following section I provide examples of trends active in the Facebook group similar to those noted by Lucia and Conrad and the resistance introduced by critiques of these trends.

To conduct research in this private discussion forum, I applied to join the ayahuasca Facebook group and notified the administrators that I am a researcher and that

I wanted to join for my own personal interest in the topic but also to include discussions from the group in my research. I was granted membership and began interacting and watching posts to get a sense of the group's norms and culture. I quickly found that interacting in the way that I would prefer, so as to follow best practices for ethical research, was going to be difficult. I hypothesize that this was the case for a number of reasons which include the size and demographic diversity of the group, the fact that members expect a certain level of anonymity outside of the group, and because of the legal status of ayahuasca in much of the world. These and likely other reasons go together to result in a tendency in the group to avoid interacting with researchers or, in rare cases, to be moderately, if politely, hostile to them. For example, another researcher in the group commented on a post, providing a link to what they said was relevant information to the conversation being had. The link redirected to material that the researcher had written; this chain of events outed this individual as a researcher of Amazonian medicine even though they were not participating as a researcher in this case. By which I mean that they had not identified themself as a researcher or stated that they were interacting with and observing the post for research purposes. Another member, in what I read as a half joking tone, called the researcher out for advertising their own work. After this, the conversation was dominated by members sharing differing opinions—pro, con, and in between—of having a professional researcher involved in the conversation. A cultural value of the group became apparent to me through observing this conversation and also helped me realize one of the reasons that I was having difficulties. Members of the group tend to value information hard-won through first-hand experience. Beyond potentially

being a path through which privileged information could leave the bounds of the group, researchers interpret and communicate other people's experiences. Though this is not necessarily a negative thing, this is not the type of information for which people come to the group.

In my case, even though I mostly interacted with people through direct messaging to show that I take group members' anonymity and informed consent seriously, I rarely received responses. While I wanted to follow best practices by regularly making it known that I was participating as a researcher, to do so would halt the research process—as it should if someone does not want to participate. So, I was effectively relegated to the role of "lurker" (a user of an internet forum who mostly observes rather than participating), which is an ethically complicated and uncomfortable place to be as someone trained in ethnographic research methods. This did not stop me from trying to participate, but I was forced to rethink my approach to conducting research in this group. Drawing on Przybylski's work for developing methodologies for online and hybrid cultural research (2021), I determined that the best way forward was to draw on what participatory research I was able to accomplish while continuing to conduct observational research. However, in presenting this research I am doing my utmost to follow "community expectations" (Przybylski 2021: 23) and internal cultural standards to determine how to limit the information I provide here (Przybylski 2021: 20-21). Since group members participate with their personal or organizational Facebook accounts, it is standard to know with whom one is interacting. However, despite its size, it is a private group organized around a controversial and sometimes illegal substance. Therefore, there is an

implied expectation that discussions will stay within the bounds of the group and private messages between group members. To respect these norms, I do not name any participants or directly quote any posts (which could then be found through Facebook's internal search engine, even if only by other members). Even though this limits me to providing a generalized overview of interactions in the group, this information is still useful for my project. I am able to compare my analysis with research on the globalization and online discussion of ayahuasca and Amazonian shamanism and the more detailed hybrid ethnographic research that I have conducted regarding Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina.

Regarding the Facebook group, Conrad's 2018 assessment of the dissemination and interpretation of information about Amazonian shamanism mostly holds true. "Discussions that take place within social media sites inevitably contribute to a broader negotiation of the authenticity and value of particular configurations of [the features of vegetalismo], resulting in a variety of new formulations, mixtures and standardizations of the tradition" (Conrad 2018: 100). Here, I will provide some examples of the primary themes that come together in these negotiations in the ayahuasca Facebook group to show how some of these "new formulations" are active in the ongoing development of sense-making narratives about vegetalismo.

There is a lexicon that has developed within the networks of the globalization of ayahuasca that is especially prominent in online and touristic spaces. The use of this lexicon illustrates a connection to the values that Lucia noted underlie engagement with transcendental festivals (Lucia 2020: 13). The most commonly used words from this

lexicon are names for ayahuasca: aya, mama aya, grandmother aya. These are not formulations that would be used in Amazonian contexts in which the meaning of the Quechua root-words are understood or in use. This is because *aya* refers to a dead human, either in body or spirit. In Amazonian contexts, then, these phrases would sound like the person is speaking about someone who has died, perhaps their mother or grandmother. In some cases, this renaming of ayahuasca moves a step further into ontological reinterpretation of ayahuasca. While ayahuasca is an important plant, medicine, and teacher to the curandero/as I work with, at most they categorized it as the highest-ranking teacher plant, though some placed it on equal footing to or just below tobacco. In a prominent vein of online discourse, ayahuasca has been subsumed into the adaptation of Lewis and Margulis's Gaia hypothesis—that the Earth is "a planet-scale-integrated entity" (Boston 2008), which is a prominent part of environmentalism in eclectic, "New Age," spiritualities (Pinto and Vilaça 2023). In many cultural spaces, ayahuasca is conceived of as a feminine entity, but, in some eclectic spiritual circles, is sometimes reinterpreted to be a manifestation of Gaia herself often named as *pachamama*, an appropriation of a Quechua term which literally means "Mother Earth" ("pacha," earth; "mama," mother). This term is used in daily life by Quechua-speaking people that I have encountered to refer to the Earth in an animist perspective in which it is a living, agentive being. However, these people do not equate ayahuasca with pachamama. Nor is ayahuasca equated with other entities who are thought of as guardians of the forest and water. Typically called *sachamama* (forest mother) and *yacumama* (water mother), they are described as giant anacondas who rule over and protect their respective realms (Luna

1986: 78-79). In my experience with curanderos in San Martín, ayahuasca is typically thought of as predominantly feminine in character, just as other plants are mostly masculine (e.g., ajo sacha, tobacco). However, every curandero that I have asked about this topic explained that the plants do not have genders in the way humans do. The plants are shapeshifters. When a plant interacts with a human in dream, a vision, or a dieta they can take whatever form they choose. So, while a given plant may have a character that humans tend to interpret in a gendered way, that is a human proclivity that the plants sometimes play into. The elevation of ayahuasca to the level of Mother Earth and goddess, while using Native terminology, is one of the ways that this discourse exotifies, centers, and decontextualizes ayahuasca. Though pushback against these terms is not so common in the Facebook group, I have seen some members reply to posts of this type with sentiments such as "please stop fetishizing Native culture" in an effort to encourage more careful consideration of Amazonian concepts rather than equivocating ayahuasca and pachamama as Native American versions of Gaia/Mother Earth.

Another set of terms is "the medicine" or "plant medicine," used to refer specifically to ayahuasca. While these phrases are usually used as a sign of respect—referring to the plant as medicine rather than a drug—they ignore the many other plant medicines that are part of vegetalismo. Furthermore, the curanderos that I know regularly use the terms *la medicina* and *plantas medicinales* to refer to curanderismo and the plants that it involves. This suggests that while certain words used in Amazonian contexts are easily translatable into English, in the case of *aya* and *pachamama*, local Amazonian uses are often at odds with they are used and understood in online discussions.

In the Facebook group, it is not uncommon to see members refer to participating in an ayahuasca ceremony as "sitting in ceremony." While I do not see any immediate tension between this term and those used in the Amazonian context with which I am familiar, it is simply not used at Takiwasi or Mushuk Pakarina. At these centers, participating in an ayahuasca ceremony is usually referred to as *tomar ayahuasca* (taking/drinking ayahuasca), *hacer una ceremonia/sesión [de ayahuasca]* (doing an ayahuasca ceremony/session), or sometimes *estar en una ceremonia/sesión* (being in a ceremony/session). From my observations, it seems that "sitting" has been adopted as a replacement for "taking" in the same way that "medicine" is used to refer to ayahuasca: it is employed to avoid the negative connotations of taking drugs. Though more study would be needed to follow up on this specific question, it is also possible that "sitting" is being used to equate taking ayahuasca with a type of sitting meditation, such as *zazen* which is sitting meditation as practiced in Zen Buddhism (Leighton 2008). Labate (2014) noted the use of this term in non-Amazonian contexts and also made the connection to meditation practices. This would mean that referring to an ayahuasca ceremony as "sitting" would be to reinterpret this Amazonian practice through the lens of Eastern religion and philosophy, which is very much in line with "New Age" spirituality.

One of the most common types of posts is something along the lines of, "I have decided to travel to X Latin American country (most often Perú) to attend an ayahuasca retreat; I would prefer something not too expensive while still being authentic. Can anyone recommend a center or shaman?" These posts usually receive a variety of responses including invitations directly from retreat centers. Over the past several

months, the administrators of the page have asked retreat centers not to do this and have limited retreat centers to one advertising post per week, preferring that independent group members recommend centers based on personal experience. Other common responses to recommendation requests include a maelstrom of questions including things like: “What do you mean by ‘authentic’?”; or “What part of X country will you be in?”; or “You don’t need to travel to experience ‘the medicine,’ just find a local retreat in your country or take whatever psychedelic substance is most readily available in your circumstances”; or “Ayahuasca is a medicine, so you should only take it if you are trying to heal from something.” At first glance “authentic ayahuasca retreat” appears to be an oxymoronic concept, being that an ayahuasca retreat implies decontextualizing ayahuasca from the broader practice of vegetalismo. What comes out in conversation, however, is that the most common usage of “authentic” by group members assumes it to mean “experienced shaman who heals with ayahuasca.” This meaning of “authentic shaman” involves what Echazú Böschemeier and Carew (2018) consider to be the foundational “myth” in what they see as the developing dominant narrative in discussions about vegetalismo in non-Amazonian spaces. What they point out is that, in the discursive creation of this mythical ayahuasca shaman, important pieces of information about local conceptions of health and disease, the existence of different types of healers, and the place of ayahuasca among other methods of healing in Amazonian societies are left behind. While some of the responses to recommendation requests are an effort by some members to bring some of this nuance back into the conversation, the majority of interactions assume the myth’s validity.

Echazú Böschemeier and Carew are clear that they developed this model of the mythical shaman through an analysis of discussions of vegetalismo on the global stage, and they offer it as a tool for further investigation of these discussions. They describe it as "a type of analytic loupe, designed by the exaggeration of the traces of quotidian reality. In this way, diverse aspects that we have observed are continuously repeated, and this repetition is revealed in the present caricature" (Echazú Böschemeier and Carew 2018: 138). Though their wording does not make this clear (and I am not sure that they realize it themselves) their model reflects a dual caricature: 1) the "ayahuasca shaman" is a reductionist representation of Amazonian actualities; 2) the model itself is a caricature of the global discussion of vegetalismo. This is clear in that the model was developed for political reasons in order to highlight and exaggerate (the very definition of a caricature) politically significant elements that they found (Echazú Böschemeier and Carew 2018: 137-38). In a sense, this is where the utility of the model lies. By exaggerating these prominent trends, they are made obvious for research purposes and for attempts at forecasting future developments in the globalization of vegetalismo. In pointing out contrary points to their model, then, I am not arguing that it is wrong; I am using it as intended: to fill in the gaps between the exaggerations with more detail, highlighted by the contrast with the model itself.

The mythical shaman model includes one aspect that is in tension with what I have observed, and it leaves out an important aspect that, I argue, should be added. Their model shaman is made of four principal aspects; the shaman is: 1) a male, 2) a shaman (which obscures the presence of non-shamanic healers), 3) who heals (which obscures the

presence of shamanic warfare [Whitehead and Wright 2004], 4) with ayahuasca. The association of maleness with the shaman is the part of the model that I would like to explore. This is, again, a piece of the model that they include as a politically motivated exaggeration of actual discussion. What they are highlighting is an historical lack of female researchers in academic discussions and a lack of discussion of female vegetalistas, by researchers and in general (Echazú Böschemeier and Carew 2018: 139-42). They cite the most relevant literature on this topic of which I am aware. Some of the most prominent researchers of Amazonian shamanism of the last fifteen years are female. For example, they point to the work of Evgenia Fotiou and Bia Labate, who I have cited frequently throughout this dissertation. Another important researcher in this area is Clancy Cavnar whose dissertation (2011) and continued research (2018) has focused on how ayahuasca use affects personal experiences and understandings of sex and gender among gay and lesbian populations. Publications by Fotiou (2014) and Peluso (2014) have highlighted that a process referred to as the "feminization" of vegetalismo is ongoing, but this is less due to the added perspective of more female researchers than because of the increase in demand for female vegetalistas. This demand comes from female tourists who are not comfortable working with male healers after having heard about cases of sexual abuse. In line with this research, I have noted that, in the Facebook group, there is a centering of discussion about female vegetalistas (proportionally to current demographics), as searching for centers that work with female "shamans" is a regular occurrence in the group. I have yet to see a member question the "authenticity" of

female shamans. Thus, even though most ayahuasqueros are male,[81] the assumption that authenticity and maleness go together regarding ayahuasca shamans is not part of the normal discourse in the Facebook group. The case of vegetalismo raises potential contradictions in political projects that simultaneously seek increased gender equality and decolonization. This is because the centering of female vegetalistas is mostly due to the influence of ayahuasca tourism (Fotious 2014; Peluso 2014) and the relatively open discussion in online forums of the occurrence of abuse by shamans (Conrad 2018).

An aspect that is conspicuously not included in Echazú Böschemeier and Carew's model of the mythical shaman is the ethnic identity of the shaman. As I discuss in more detail in the chapter on shamanic pilgrimage, there is a widespread assumption that is a shaman is made proportionally more authentic through a connection to an Indigenous lineage, which, supposedly, makes them the inheritors of the prehistoric tradition of the use of ayahuasca. The Indigenous groups that are most commonly referenced in the Facebook group as being connected to a shamanic lineage are the Huni Kuin (Cashinahua/Kaxinawá) and the Shipibo-Conibo. Healers of these ethnicities are specifically mentioned by group members in response to recommendation requests for authentic retreats/shamans, with the implication being that X retreat can automatically be

[81] A socio-cultural study of the factors that go into why this is so has, to my knowledge, not been done regarding vegetalismo. However, based on my knowledge of the academic literature and my experience as an ethnographer in this area, I suggest that the main reasons for this are 1) a persistent divide in gendered labor roles that is pre-existent in various Amazonian Indigenous cultures and is also present in Catholicism, which is the most common religious affiliation in South America and 2) the necessity of long periods of dieta and social seclusion necessary to the training of a vegetalista. Because the role of most women in Amazonian cultural areas has historically been to dedicate their early and middle adulthood to childrearing, vegetalismo is only accessible if they resist the normal order and forgo that role or if they develop their practice later in life. As Echazú Böschemeier and Carew 2018 point out, however, there are other approaches to healing in Amazonian cultures in which female practitioners are more common.

assumed to be authentic because they work with shamans from one of these groups. These ethnicities are also the most commonly named in advertisement posts by retreat centers, often accompanied with photos of Huni Kuin people adorned in traditional garb (large, feathered headdresses; face paint; headbands; necklaces; and bracelets often woven with colorful geometric patterns reminiscent of ayahuasca visions) selling the retreat's connection to authentic Indigeneity. If a retreat center wants their advertisements to emphasize that they work with Shipibo healers, they will include photos of Shipibo people covered head-to-toe in garments featuring the recognizable kené patterns synonymous with the group and the healing power of ayahuasca and icaros. This association of kené and healing with icaros and ayahuasca is largely due to the work of anthropologist Gebhart-Sayer on what she called an "aesthetic therapy" (Brabec de Mori 2012; Gebhart-Sayer 1986).

Other common posts to the Facebook group are questions or comments about "la dieta." In this context, posters are almost always referring to the pre-ayahuasca dieta, which Gearin and Labate (2018) argue has become confused with the types of diets I write about in the chapter on dietas. Gearin and Labate are concerned that, as a downstream effect of the globalization of ayahuasca, the pre-ayahuasca diet is supplanting the types of ritualized dietas that involve extended seclusion in the forest. The pre-ayahuasca dieta has become a normal part of ayahuasca tourism partly because it adds a ritualistic mystique and a sense of "authenticity" to touristic ayahuasca use, but some curanderos challenge this apparent authenticity by pointing out that they do not follow these diets nor have preparatory diets of more than a few days or hours historically

been part of how ayahuasca is drunk (Brabec de Mori 2014). Aside from questions of perceived authenticity, there is a pragmatic reason for asking tourists to observe a restricted diet before drinking ayahuasca; abstaining from alcohol, recreational drugs, unnecessary pharmaceuticals, and certain foods can make taking ayahuasca safer. For example, there are some pharmaceuticals that are contraindicated with ayahuasca—e.g. selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs). More data and analysis are needed to confirm or refute the hypothesis that SSRIs and MAOIs—common types of antidepressant medications—cause serotonin toxicity when taken with ayahuasca (Callaway and Grob 1998). There is some evidence to suggest that these combinations might not be as dangerous as some research suggested; however, there appears to be a serious risk when MDMA (street name "molly" or "ecstasy/XTC") is involved as, unlike the tryptamine-based psychedelic compounds, this amphetamine increases the production of serotonin. In the presence of MAOIs, MDMA can potentially raise serotonin to toxic levels (Malcom and Thomas 2022). As Frecska, Bokor, and Winkleman (2016) pointed out, an increasing number of people from the Global North are seeking ayahuasca in hopes of easing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and various trauma disorders that are often treated with SSRIs and MAOIs. Until these individuals are able to wean themselves off of these medications, it is likely safer for them and the retreat centers if they avoid ayahuasca.

While Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina both have pre-dieta processes that involve weaning off of pharmaceuticals, they only ask participants to abstain from sexual activity and not to eat meals heavy in meat, oils, and spices two days before the dieta process

begins. At Takiwasi, the first or second ritual that most pilgrims participate in is a purga, and at Mushuk Pakarina the first ritual is typically an ayahuasca ceremony. From the perspective of the curanderos at these centers, these restrictions are both pragmatic and ritually significant. As I discussed in the chapter on dietas, plants are said to abhor human sexual activity so they will likely be less effective for healing a person who has recently been sexually active. As far as the restrictions on eating are concerned, purging is much less unpleasant if one has not been eating large, heavily seasoned meals. Adjusting behavior in these ways is also a sign of respect for the plants.

Members of the Facebook group often enter into discussions about "la dieta" assuming that dieting in preparation for an ayahuasca retreat is, in some sense, reflective of the authenticity of shamanic practices at the center they will visit. These assumptions are reinforced when centers ask participants to observe particular diets in the weeks leading up to and during their retreat. A significant number of retreat centers require a vegan diet and advertise that this is the shamanic diet prescribed by the shamans they work with. On several occasions I have seen group members call the authenticity of the retreat center into question on this basis, arguing that Native Amazonians have not historically followed vegan diets. While I am not aware of a Native group for whom a vegan or vegetarian diet has historically been part of daily life, vegetalismo isolation diets often require not only abstinence from meat but, as I discuss in more detail in the chapter on dietas, are much more restrictive than a typical vegan or vegetarian diet. Some curanderos told me that, during a long dieta, a small amount of boiled chicken or fish can

be eaten if necessary to keep one's strength up. Similarly, one of the curanderos that Beyer worked with recounted that he sometimes ate fish during dietas (Beyer 2009: 52).

Other themes of discussion related to pre-ayahuasca dietas in preparation for "sitting with aya" are often started with questions like: "I am having trouble weaning off of X pharmaceutical, how important is it that I am off of the medication before taking ayahuasca?" Or, "I am supposed to attend an ayahuasca retreat in less than a week, and I just found out that my medication doesn't mix well with ayahuasca, what should I do?" These types of questions usually receive answers in the form of something like, "You need to talk to your doctor, the retreat center, and the shaman to figure this out. You probably shouldn't trust strangers on the internet with medical advice." Sometimes, retreat centers or group members purporting to be ayahuasqueros, shamans, or curanderos will respond with medical advice, often following it up by inviting the person who asked the question to their upcoming ayahuasca retreat. The frequency of the co-occurrence of these types of interactions raises ethical dilemmas when it comes to questions of cross-cultural meetings organized around ayahuasca retreats. Retreat centers who are willing to forego some safety measures in hopes of increasing business might invite tourists into situations in which there is potential for harm. Researchers from humanistic disciplines have raised concerns about the scientization of Amazonian shamanism which most commonly takes the form of pharmacological analysis of plant medicines. These researchers are concerned that this type of discussion downplays and potentially endangers the role of cultural knowledge in using these medicines while making them more available for decontextualized use (Brabec de Mori 2021; Conrad 2018; Labate

2014). From another perspective, there is a substantial amount of evidence that ayahuasca and other psychedelics can be used to treat a number of disorders more effectively than the commonly prescribed pharmaceuticals and therapeutic protocols (Griffiths et al. 2006; Kaelen et al. 2018; Garcia-Romeu, Griffiths, and Johnson 2014; Carhart-Harris et al. 2016). It seems that as long as tourists are seeking out ayahuasca, a certain amount of scientization is necessary to avoid the potentially wide-reaching detrimental effects of a tourist being injured by unknowingly mixing ayahuasca or another plant medicine with the wrong pharmaceutical. What the cultural effects of these multifaceted interpretations of Amazonian plant medicines will be remains to be seen. If the discussions in the ayahuasca Facebook group are any indication, there will likely be a wide range of effects including the type of epistemologically limited reinterpretations that Conrad (2018) and Lucia (2020) discussed, mutually informative collaborations between different systems of knowledge, and many alternatives in between. What I hope to have shown in this discussion is that the ideologies highlighted by Conrad and Lucia are prevalent in discussions on the ayahuasca Facebook group, and I hope to have elucidated some of the specific ways in which these ideologies manifest. However, their assumptions are often challenged, signaling the possibility that, as access to technology continues to democratize, so might online discussions of vegetalismo. Though I have no direct evidence of this yet, other than some of the contested conversations in the Facebook group, increased access to the internet in Perú is likely to be among the factors contributing to democratization. I point to footnote 80 in this chapter—regarding the installation of a fiberoptic internet connection in Llucanayacu during my stay there in

2022—as having the potential to increase the community's connectivity as a node in the globalization of these phenomena.

In the rest of this chapter, I turn to the online portion of my hybrid ethnographic project. For purposes of comparison with interactions between group members and ayahuasca centers in the ayahuasca Facebook group and to more fully illustrate the phenomenon of shamanic pilgrimage, I will discuss how Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina engage with the networks of globalization online.

Hybrid Ethnography: Takiwasi.com

Conrad (2018) points to Wikipedia's entry on ayahuasca as an example of a site for information about vegetalismo that is updated fairly regularly. Although this page is focused on ayahuasca it does include links to sources that, if a reader follows them, lead into more extensive information about vegetalismo and Amazonian cultures. It involves a certain amount of multi-directional informational flow because it is a community-sourced page. Centro Takiwasi's website, Takiwasi.com, though curated by staff at the center, provides a wealth of information about traditional Amazonian medicine. The majority of this information is in the "research" page of the site in the form of PDFs of journal articles, theses, and dissertations, many of which were produced in collaborative projects between researchers and the center. This website amounts to a multi-lingual, multi-perspective library on topics related to traditional Amazonian medicine and Amazonian cultures. Takiwasi's website also includes informational articles written by some of the center's most experienced therapists and members of the center's research division.

Topics covered in these include, among others, overviews of various Amazonian plants and their medicinal uses, the role of ayahuasca in treating addiction, and therapists' and curanderos' perspectives on ritual plant dietas. Some of these informational pieces were written by individuals who are practicing curanderos and all of whom have extensive experience working in the context of vegetalismo. Most of these pieces are also published in refereed journals. Some of these articles are included in the packet of information that Takiwasi provides to dieters during the orientation process discussed in the chapter on shamanic pilgrimage.

Beyond being a source of information about vegetalismo and the center's history of researching and treating substance use disorders, Takiwasi.com is also the main portal through which pilgrims initiate contact with the center in order to visit and undertake a dieta or other treatment. Takiwasi.com is also the central online location to which their posts on Facebook and their YouTube videos direct those who interact with those media. In this way, takiwasi.com is not immediately apparent as a site for multidirectional communication, but it is a node through which pilgrims and Takiwasi connect. It also a significant site for the dissemination about vegetalismo from the Amazon into the global discussion.

Takiwasi's Facebook Pages

Centro Takiwasi has four public Facebook pages: "Takiwasi" (a public group page), "Takiwasi Centro" (a page mostly dedicated to news about the goings on at the center), and "Laboratorio Takiwasi Productos Naturales Amazónicos" (a business page

dedicated to advertising products made for sale by the center's laboratory division), and "Biblioteca Takiwasi" which is primarily dedicated to disseminating information from various research projects in which the center was involved or that the center's leadership deems important to share. In contrast with the ayahuasca Facebook group, Takiwasi's Facebook pages are not generally sites for heated discussions about vegetalismo or competing interpretations of what makes up authentic Amazonian shamanism. Other than "Laboratorio Takiwasi" these pages are largely a way for the center to communicate with people around the world who are already connected to the center in one way or another. For example, if there are openings in an upcoming dieta, the center might post to their page in hopes that someone who has previously come to the center might see the opening as an opportunity to return. Though I have seen members of the ayahuasca Facebook group share information about Takiwasi, as I stated above, the center itself does not share information or advertise its services or products on any of the ayahuasca discussion webpages.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Facebook was an important way for the center to stay in touch with the network of people who support its work. An important source of income for supporting its primary function as a rehabilitation center was cut off when shelter-in-place orders and travel restrictions made it impossible to host pilgrims for dietas. Facebook was an important avenue through which Takiwasi could organize fundraising programs. Among these efforts was a program that offered the opportunity to support the center by sponsoring the planting of an ayahuasca vine. The rise of ayahuasca tourism has greatly diminished the prevalence of wild-growing ayahuasca vines in areas

of the Amazon near tourist hubs like Iquitos and Pucallpa. This trend has sparked programs like the one at Takiwasi to replenish the population of ayahuasca vines and other master plants (Kilham 2019). As some of the curanderos and leadership at Takiwasi described the situation to me, they would have been planting ayahuasca vines regardless of sponsorships. However, they have had to make serious budget cuts to stay operational since 2020, and offering a way for people in their network to contribute both to keeping the center open and to replenishing ayahuasca vines was one mutually beneficial strategy.

The Nuwa Project on Facebook.com

A significant portion of Takiwasi's posts on Facebook over the past several years have been to promote the *Nuwa* project. Nuwa, means "women" in the Awajún language, and it is the brand name for a line of products developed by a group of Awajún women in collaboration with Centro Takiwasi and the NGO Conservation International. To quote a post from January 26, 2024 by the "Nuwa infusiones" (Nuwa teas) Facebook page,

> Since 2018, we have worked to transform two of our medicinal plants into teas to be sold in specialized markets to support the conservation of our forest and cultural patrimony. Conservation International and Laboratorio Takiwasi have been and continue to be key partners in this process in which they have not only been involved in the development of the products, but they have also contributed to the recognition of the importance of our traditional knowledge as a means for us to obtain income, conserve our forests, and better the quality of our lives" (my translation from Spanish).

I interviewed the head of Takiwasi's laboratory, who has been at the center of the collaboration between these three groups. In 2016, Conservation International approached Takiwasi about collaborating with the women of the Awajún community of Shampuyacu (Conservation International 2022). Takiwasi has a decades-long relationship

with Awajún communities of the Alto Mayo River valley, especially with curanderos. For example, Awajún community leader and vegetalista Walter Cuñachi worked with Takiwasi on the inclusion of *purgahuasca* (a term that highlights the emetic qualities of ayahuasca) in their rehabilitation protocol (Horák and Torres 2013; Politi et al. 2021). This ritual involves ingesting large quantities of an ayahuasca brew that does not include other admixture plants. It has historically been a rite of passage for young Awajún men and women to help them find discernment and direction as they enter adulthood. At Takiwasi, it is used for similar reasons as a support to the rehabilitation process, and it has been included in Takiwasi's repertoire since 1998 (Horák and Torres 2013; Politi et al. 2021). Psychologist Miroslav Horák, in his study of Takiwasi's protocol, stated that a continued form of collaboration between the center and Awajún communities involves younger Awajún healers sometimes coming to Takiwasi to learn healing techniques that are no longer accessible in their home communities but were taught to Takiwasi's curanderos by older Awajún healers (2013: 39).

The Nuwa project started because women of the community wanted to do something to protect their inherited knowledge of plant medicines while economically supporting their community. Takiwasi's role has been to help the women of Shampuyacu use their botanical knowledge to create a self-sustaining business. Their first products that this project has produced are herbal teas made from medicinal plants. The Awajún women grow the plants and Takiwasi processes and packages them at their laboratory while helping Shampuyacu community members to learn these processing techniques. At the same time, Takiwasi has been collaborating with the community to help them get up

to speed on the laboratory and packaging technology and to develop a business plan so that profits can be put to use to expand the project while increasing the community's independence. Specific examples from this plan that Takiwasi's laboratory director mentioned were to procure machinery for processing and packaging that would be owned by the community and the expansion of the line of products to include ginger and vanilla, the latter of which is an especially lucrative crop that the Nuwa are expert at cultivating.

Beyond using social media to help advertise the products, Takiwasi has helped to distribute them for sale in local markets and facilitated business relationships between these markets and the Shampuyacu community, again with the plan moving in the direction of the community carrying the project on independently.

Maestro Orlando Chujandama on Facebook

Though there are two websites that are affiliated with Maestro Orlando's center (thenewrisingsun.wordpress.com and musuk-pakarina.negocio.site), they were set up by pilgrims, people who had visited Mushuk Pakarina multiple times, become friends with Maestro Orlando, and wanted to do something to help his business. When I asked about the websites, he told me that he did not ask for them to be set up, and that they did not seem to make much difference because nobody advertises them or shares them online. "But if they help someone contact me, okay."[82] He does not advertise online because he prefers to establish his network through word of mouth, with one notable exception that I

[82] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Field notes. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. October 12, 2019.

discuss below. Maestro Orlando does most of his communication with potential dieters with his phone (voice calls and text messages) via the communication application WhatsApp or through his private Facebook account. I first got in touch with him through Facebook, and this is where he updates those in his personal network about the goings on at the center. These posts are mostly photos of him with pilgrims as they are arriving for a dieta or as they are leaving the center. They are usually accompanied by a short caption like "(the pilgrim's name) retuning for a dieta at Mushuk Pakarina." Mastro Orlando and Mushuk Pakarina's online presence is small and unassuming except when more prominent people are sharing information about him, as has occurred on some popular podcasts, discussed below.

*The Online Dissemination and Interpretation of an Icaro: The Case of "*Ábrete Corazón*"*

Dr. Jaime told me that the curanderos/as at Takiwasi initially started recording and selling CDs at the request of dieters and patients so that they could stay better connected to their processes with the plants. I have personally experienced hearing certain icaros triggering memories of being-with-plants that then cascade into what Turino termed "semantic chaining" (Turino 1999) in which the symbolic, musical signs of lyrics, melodies, rhythms, and vocal timbre are impregnated with layers of indexical meaning from my own personal associations of hearing those icaros during ceremonies and then carrying them with me, repeating over and over in my head, during dietas. I also regularly heard patients at Takiwasi softly singing or whistling icaros to themselves as they went about their daily activities, an experience also noted by Horák (2013) during

his research at the center. As mentioned in the chapter on icaros, Stephanie came across a recording of an icaro related to the plant bobinsana which ended up being the primary plant that she dieted and to which she attributes important aspects of the significant psychological relief she found through doing a dieta. She told me that hearing that icaro weeks before she made the trip to Perú was the event that she felt started her process of working with the plants. Even though, at that point, she knew nothing about bobinsana, she felt a personal connection to it, as if the icaro somehow put her in contact with the plant at a distance. As Dr. Jaime explained to me explicitly, and as I came to understand by working firsthand with plants and curanderos, when sung or encountered with intention and knowledge to heal, icaros are a method—one technique (Eliade [1951] 2004) among many—by which curanderos and ritual participants contact plants at a distance or bring their essence into the ritual space, often when the physical plant is not present. When an icaro is sung without intent to heal, by someone who does not have a personal relationship with the plant(s) to whom that song is related, it is just a song, like any other song (i.e., performed for diversion and not carrying the plants' healing energy).

The dissemination of icaros through recording technology does help to strengthen people's relationships to specific plants and their broader processes working with curanderos. Perhaps the most notable example of this is Stephanie's story, in which she encountered an icaro to the plant bobinsana. She felt a personal connection to this plant through the icaro and, through this connection, her ritual process began before she ingested the plant, while she was thousands of miles away from the Peruvian Amazon. Recording technologies are also what makes icaros so readily available for global

dissemination. This makes the icaros available to be incorporated into other practices and to be reinterpreted outside of the context of the reciprocal interspecies relationships that are fundamental to curanderismo. Decontextualized in this way, these icaros come to represent “Native shamanic music,” “medicine music,” and exotic, alternative spirituality in a general sense rather than being rooted in close, personal relationships with plants and the relationality that gives the songs their specificity of meaning and power to function in rituals (see chapter three).

As I am drafting this chapter in early 2024, an album of Takiwasi’s icaros can be found on the streaming service Spotify. The center published the album in 2023 in celebration of its thirty-year anniversary (1992-2022). “Ábrete Corazón” is Takiwasi’s most streamed song, with 3,861 streams. The runner up is “Ayahuasca Curandera,” with 2,813. The cover version of “Ábrete Corazón” by the Polish, all-female group Laboratorium Pieśni (Song Laboratory), has been streamed 135,180 times on Spotify. It is also the most streamed song from their 2023 album *Hé Oyáte*[83]. The next most-streamed song from the album has been listened to less than half as many times. All of these, however, are far outpaced by the live video performance that this group posted to their YouTube channel in December of 2020, which has 1,177,372 views. This highlights

[83] As far as I was able to find, *hé oyáte* is “this/that tribe/people group” in Lakota. In promotional material for the album, the salutation is “Our Tribe!” So, it seems there is some connection between the album title, and likely its conceptualization, and Lakota people and culture. I attempted to contact Laboratorium Pieśni but received no response. Their website indicates that some of the songs they sing were collected directly from communities around the world. It is possible then that some members of the group have a personal relationship with Lakota people. Without the group’s comment to provide further context, however, it seems that this album and elements of Laboratorium Pieśni’s performance of “Ábrete Corazón” on YouTube (e.g. playing “shaman drums” and while wearing dreamcatcher necklaces) are a more recent examples of European exotification of the Native American peoples of the Great Plains (Howard 1978).

a trend—that, in nearly all cases, covers of icaros get more attention than recordings by curanderos/as—and it raises a number of questions about the dissemination of icaros via digital technology.

Dr. Rosa Giove Nakazawa (whom I knew as doctora [Dra.] Rosa, which is how she was and is known at Takiwasi) received the icaro “Ábrete Corazón” (“Open [yourself], Heart”) during the course of her life dieting and working with plant medicines in the context of vegetalismo as practiced at Takiwasi. It is one of the songs sung at the center that is most beloved by the rehabilitation patients, pilgrim visitors, and those who knew Dra. Rosa and had the privilege of hearing her sing it herself. Dra. Rosa passed this icaro, as well as several others, on to the curanderos at the center before her death in 2022. This song is also, if such a thing could be said to exist, the best candidate for greatest hit of the icaro song form. It would be an interesting study to track the history of this song’s spread across the world. Though I will highlight a few examples here, such a study could be a book all its own. “Ábrete Corazón” is now sung or played for entertainment and during medicine ceremonies of various kinds all over the globe. If one searches for this song on popular streaming sites, such as YouTube or Spotify, one can find hundreds, possibly thousands of covers and reinterpretations of it alongside a few recordings of Dra. Rosa. While some of those who post these renditions credit her as the originator of the song, many do not, and some seem to take credit for authoring icaro themselves. The way that some cover artists give credit to her raises questions about how these media contribute to the decontextualization of this song form even if they attempt to direct listeners to the original “author.”

For example, let us take the case of the YouTube channel *Tarot el camino*, a mostly Spanish-language channel, that has an eclectic, "New Age," spiritual theme—as its name (Tarot, the path) might imply. As of January 2024, the channel has just over 66,000 subscribers, yet the version of "Ábrete Corazón," performed by Chilean Singer, Claudia Stern, that they posted on June 9, 2019 has 580,406 views. While the channel has several videos with over 100,000 views (most of these being audio recordings of mantras performed in a New Age style over videos of nature scenes), the majority of their videos have fewer than 1,000 views. The channel describes the icaro as "a beautiful 'shamanic song' in Spanish. It was written by Rosa Giove. . . . It is a song that allows you to arrive at your deepest inner self and find spiritual peace (Tarot el camino 2019). While this is not entirely inaccurate to how I have heard the song discussed at Takiwasi, there are a few points that are contrary to the ways that curanderos explained authorship and use of icaros to me. There are also a few points that run contrary to Dra. Rosa's own explanations of this song. The first contradiction has to do with a subtle difference in perspective about how icaros are written or received. Dr. Jaime, Don José, Maestro Orlando, and Dra. Rosa—in an interview about this specific song on Takiwasi's YouTube channel (Takiwasi 2021)—described that icaros are the result of the meeting and combining of a plant or plants and the curandero/a to whom the icaro is given. The icaros sometimes "arrive" completely organized, exactly how they should be sung (melody, rhythm, lyrics all in place). Sometimes, as was the case for "Ábrete Corazón" the different elements of the icaro are given to the curandero/a who must then organize them into a song. In either case, the icaro bears the character of both parties. It is not a

song by a plant, given to a human, nor is it a song about a plant by a human. It is a song that comes into being through the union of a plant and a human.

The explanation that an icaro is “authored” through the process of a plant and a healer building a close relationship with each other such that the plant becomes part of the healer’s being is a somewhat esoteric and complex thing to expect to be put in the description of a YouTube video. However, especially in this case, the technology of the website makes it simple enough, if one does a little bit of legwork, to link to Dra. Rosa’s own explanation of the song. The issue of what the song does for the listener is more complex. It is certainly possible that listening to a cover of it could facilitate a deep spiritual experience for someone. However, the curanderos I know said that the power of icaros comes from the curandero’s experience and relationship with the plants and their intent to use the songs to call the energy of the plants into a ritual. Icaros also have a heightened power regarding a person who has experienced them in a ritualized context. Listening to a recording of a particular icaro is likely to be indexed to experiences of hearing that icaro during a ritualized process of “being with plants.” But, as each curandero explained to me, an icaro sung outside of a ritual context by a person who has not received the icaro from a Maestro or a plant does not carry the plant’s power to heal.

To frame the ensuing discussion of how this icaro is interpreted by the YouTube channel’s viewers, I would like to first paraphrase Dra. Rosa’s description of the meaning and use of the song. In working with people struggling with substance use disorders, the curanderos at Takiwasi noted that the patients are often “stuck in their heads,” intellectualizing their motivations and patterns of behavior, often to rationalize their

substance abuse. In contrasting their work with pilgrims and their working with Native community members, Maestro Orlando and don Edgardo both told me they have encountered a similar issue. Foreigners and even local Peruvians from urban areas are too "in their heads" and disconnected from their bodies. "Ábrete Corazón" is a song that was received to deal directly with this issue. With this framing, the meaning of the opening lines of the icaro is fairly clear. The icaro is speaking directly to the aspects of the listener's being having to do with the embodied experience of emotion, and it implores the listener to shine the light of emotional understanding on themselves without intellectualizing the process: *Ábrete corazón, ábrete sentimiento / Ábrete entendimiento, deja a un lado la razón / Y deja brillar el sol, escondido en tu interior* (open [yourself] heart, open [yourself] feeling/emotion / Open [yourself] understanding, leave reason to one side / And let the sun inside you shine). Without this context, however, it is easy to see how these words could be put to use in alternative interpretations.

The ongoing discussion in the comments on the *Tarot el camino* video reflect the bricolage of ideas that one would expect from an eclectic spiritual audience. In this case, the discussion does not reflect the potentially productive tension between differing perspectives as did the ayahuasca Facebook group. Even though most discussions on the Facebook group are undergirded by an assumption of ayahuasca being part of an eclectic spiritual practice, most group members at least try to be respectful of Amazonian cultures. They just do not seem to understand that what they are assuming to be authentic has already been reinterpreted and is presented to them to cater to an exotified mythical shamanism. Rather, the discussion of the *Tarot el camino* YouTube video is almost

entirely dominated by a "New-Age" style approach to spirituality. In this way, the icaro is reinterpreted to fit with concepts such as that the nature of existence is defined by universal one-ness which is juxtaposed with a motivation toward individual improvement through spiritual practice. There are hundreds of comments, many of which refer to the song as a "mantra," exemplifying the reinterpretation of one decontextualized spiritual practice in terms of another decontextualized practice. This is similar to interpreting an ayahuasca ceremony as a type of Zen sitting meditation (discussed above). Commenter @namastenaturalezaviva1234 (which, divided into its constituent parts and translated from Spanish, is namaste living nature) wrote,

> It's incredible; the information that the song contains is ancestral. Meditating with this song, I received [a message?] that the human being is complete, unique, and we have all of the resources we need to live our experiences and evolve. . . . Everything is within our reach: the knowledge, the nourishment, the relationships. Everything is in ourselves, connection with the soul. This is what this medicine song holds. It shows the truth and the purest essence of the human being. We are who we are and where we are going. You only have to remember to be able to be human and reach god [sic]. Blessings to everyone. Namaste. (my translation from Spanish)

The last phrase in this post, "*solo hay que recordar para poder ser humano y llegar a dios*," is difficult to interpret without more context. This a phrase that was added to the icaro in Claudia Stern's performance, though I have not been able to establish if she was the one who appended the line to the third verse. It is not in any of the recordings of Dra. Rosa of which I am aware, nor did I ever hear her sing it that way. Furthermore, it is in contradiction with the mixture of Catholicism and Indigenous spirituality that is the context within which Dra. Rosa was active at Takiwasi. In this case, in which the poster is writing about finding completion within the self in order to "evolve," the added phrase

could have two meanings. "*Llegar a dios*" can be translated literally to "arrive at/to God," meaning "to be in the presence of God." However, we could infer from context that this is a shortened version of the phrase "*llegar a ser*," which means "to eventually become." Either way, this person has written about ostensibly having received insight through listening to this decontextualized icaro to the effect of confirming a fundamental idea of New Age spirituality. That is, that the goal of each individual is to spiritually evolve into their true Self, who is either in close connection with God or is God. True to form, they sign off with the Sanskrit/Hindu salutation, "namaste," exemplifying that they are likely communicating with the best of intentions but have cherrypicked pieces of different spiritual and religious practices and reinterpreted and melded the pieces together as part of their own search for God through self-actualization.

A few commenters tried to provide a bit of further information. One wrote, "It's not just a song. It's an icaro, a healing song taught to Rosa Giove by the plants." The page's owner responded, "Thank you for your comment. I invite you to visit and follow my Facebook page. It's always good to share your opinion and learn the content so you can grow emotionally and find moments of peace." A few other people commented, supporting the page's owner in recommending emotional growth to the person who tried to add some culturally relevant information to the discussion of the song rather than engaging with them or potentially even adding that information to the description. One commenter wrote that they listen to this "mantra" when they take "bufo" [a name for 5-methoxy-N,N-dimethyltryptamine (5-MeO-DMT) and/or the resin made from the venom of the Sonoran Desert toad]. Another commenter wrote "I don't know what 'icaro' is, but

this song helps me with my emotions, it frees me." While the vast majority of those who commented on the video were sharing their positive experiences of the song, they were also reinterpreting the song through the frame of an eclectic spiritual ideology, calling the icaro a mantra and recounting how it helped them meditate more deeply. Many people commented on the added line about learning how to be human to reach God. This line seems to have been especially impactful to the channel's eclectic spiritual audience.

Following "Ábrete Corazón" along another chain of nodes in the global network, one of the videos that YouTube recommended to me once I clicked on the version on *Tarot el camino's* page was titled "Shaman Plays Abrete Corazon: Tiata [84][sic] Alejandro Rojas – Inner Rising Retreats." Clicking this link brought me to the YouTube page of a Colombian ayahuasca retreat center, Inner Rising Retreats, and a video of a man sitting in front of a waterfall in a tropical forest, singing yet another rendition of "Ábrete Corazón" while accompanying himself on the guitar. The video description is mostly an advertisement for an ayahuasca retreat center. It was recommended to me because I visited *Tarot el camino's* page, which was recommended to me after I visited the video of cover of "Ábrete Corazón" by Laboratorium Pieśni, discussed below. The video by Inner Rising Retreats credits Alonso del Río, who is a prominent musician and ayahuasquero in eclectic spiritual circles. According to his biography on ceremoniaayahuasca.com, del Río learned plant medicine through the Shipibo tradition and has been facilitating ayahuasca ceremonies for decades, at least since the early 1990s. For the past several

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[84] *Taita/tayta* means "father" in Quechua. This is a title often given to curanderos from certain regions, especially the Colombian Amazon.

years, he has been facilitating ayahuasca ceremonies at his center in Perú's Sacred Valley. "After learning traditional medicine songs from his maestro, he began to receive his own songs and introduce the use of the guitar in ceremonies" ("Alonso del Río"). Among the links on his biography web page is a YouTube video of his version of "Ábrete Corazón," which does not credit Rosa Giove. None of the listing of del Río's versions of this song clarify its origins,[85] as far as I found. So, it is possible that the people involved with the production of the music video on the Inner Rising Retreats page were unaware of the song's actual authorship. If one did not know any better, and encountered del Río's version first, it would seem as if he were the original author. Beyond misattributing the composition of the icaro, the video and description echoes tropes of eclectic spirituality and the reinvention of vegetalismo through the mythical shaman—highlighting a connection between Indigeneity and nature, spiritual development and healing with ayahuasca.

> Taita Alejandro Rojas brings musical medicine to life in his debut music video. Recorded deep in the jungle of his native Colombia, the Taita brings the message of awakening, connecting, and love to the light. Tiata [sic] Alejandro can be heard in person singing his magical Ikaros [sic] in Pitalito, Colombia, where he leads Sacred Ayahuasca Ceremonies [sic] at his Malcoa [sic] called Casa Munay ["House of Love": *casa* is "house" in Spanish and *munay* is "to love/to want" in Quechua]. We at Inner rising [sic] Retreats are privileged and honored to work with this amazing healer and talented man. To find out more about Taita Alejandro or how you can participate in these transformational ceremonies go to innerrisingretreats.com. (Inner Rising Retreats 2022)

[85] I checked the recordings available on YouTube, Spoitfy, Apple Music, Amazon Music, and several popular sites that provide lyrics and publishing information for music such as Genius.com and Letra.com. All of these sites had listings for Alonso del Río's version of "Ábrete Corazón" but credited del Río without mentioning Rosa Giove.

This video exemplifies how retreat centers play a role in the decontextualization of ayahuasca and the reinterpretation and reinvention of vegetalismo, and it exemplifies how the functionality of certain websites plays a role in the dissemination of information about vegetalismo (Conrad 2018).

Another important rendition of “Ábrete Corazón” for consideration is the version by the Polish, all-women, singing group Laboratorium Pieśni (Laboratoriumpiesni 2020). While the group initially provided the ideal credit to Dra. Rosa by including a link to an interview with her about this icaro, the link has been broken since the middle of 2021 when Takiwasi had some problems with their YouTube channel and had to reupload the interview video. On July 21, 2021, the interview video with Dra. Rosa had 23, 211 views. In January of 2024, the reuploaded video had 17,003 views and is by far the most viewed video on Takiwasi’s YouTube channel. It appears that the popularity of Laboratorium Pieśni and the technological capabilities of the website have led a significant number of people to seek more information about the icaro directly from Dra. Rosa and Takiwasi. Though I do not have access to the analytical data, it would be important for future research on the dissemination of the icaro and online information about vegetalismo to track the analytics and see if there is a correlation between the posting of Laboratorium Pieśni’s video and increased traffic on Takiwasi’s YouTube channel, social media, and takiwasi.com, since all of these nodes are technologically linked. I hypothesize that every step further removed from Laboratorium Pieśni’s video would result in less of an increase in traffic, but it is likely that the millions of views on their video could result in several people following the chain of connections all the way to physically visiting Takiwasi.

The presentation of the icaro in this video and the discussion that it engendered once again present a complicated mix of results. The icaro, being displaced from ritualized use in the context of curanderismo, is open for varying interpretations. Even though the group shared accurate information about the song and linked to Dra. Rosa's interview, some audience members commented before engaging with that information. A now deleted comment that was present on the page from 2020 until early 2024, seemingly trying to be helpful, shared the misinformation that "This song is in Spanish is sang[sic] in Mexico by the Native people of Central Mexico, before starting ceremony." Another commenter asked, in Spanish "Which tribe? Could you explain more, please? Thank you." By the second reply to a commenter, again in Spanish, provided the corrective information that was included in the video's description: that the song was received by Peruvian medical doctor Rosa Giove, that there is a documentary (the interview) that tells about how she received this icaro and others by working with ayahuasca and other plant medicines. This individual ended their comment by sharing their opinion that "Rosa is an inspiration, and it is beautiful that her scientific work also considers the value of ancestral methods used by humanity since ancient times (*desde todos los tiempos*)."

While the information in the video description and the community of commenters act as mechanisms for providing clarification about the song and its history, New Age spiritual ideals are also present in the discussion. Many commenters thank the group for channeling the energy of divine femininity through their signing. Others congratulate the women on the quality of their performance. Issues of representation and differing

interpretations of the icaro are also complicated by the fact that many commenters from South American countries thank the group for representing them by singing a traditional song in Spanish.

I reached out to the group multiple times in an attempt to clarify the history of how they came to know this song and how they developed their version of it. Unfortunately, possibly due to a language barrier, I did not receive a response. As such, I am left to speculate on some aspects of their presentation that, without clarification from them, appear on the surface to be reflections of an underlying ideology of eclectic, "New Age" spirituality, if not a contemporary manifestation of European exotification of Native Americans (Howard 1978). On their website, the group describes themselves as performers of "world/ethno/spiritual/mystic folk music. . . . They sing a capella as well as with shaman drums and other ethnic instruments (shruti box, kalimba, flute, gong, zaphir and koshi chimes, singing bowls, rattles, etc.) creating a new space in a traditional song, adding voice improvisations, inspired by sounds of nature, often intuitive, wild and feminine" (Laboratorium Pieśni). They go on to describe that they often collect traditional songs "from their source" and that "Finally, they are performed in a new form – traditional or enriched" (Laboratorium Pieśni).

What this amounts to in their performance of "Ábrete Corazón" is that features of the song as sung by Dra. Rosa that give it its character—features that curandero/as say reflect the meeting of humans and plants—are altered to fit with the context of an ensemble performance involving percussion and śruti box accompaniment. The percussion instruments are a small, woven, reed-basket shaker and handheld, single-

headed, frame drums played with mallets. Their website refers to these drum as "shaman drums." These instruments resemble many frame drums played in Native North American music traditions (Haefer 2001: 505-06), sometimes for religious purposes and sometimes to accompany social activities such as dance games (as described by several authors in Browner 2009). Many areas of Europe also have histories of frame drum use, including Poland (Rice, Porter, and Goertzen 2000: 735, 1070-71), so I cannot be certain that these instruments are being used to reference a Native American tradition. However, I am inferring from context that by "shaman drum" they mean "Native American shaman." The śruti box (drone box) is an instrument that originates from the Indian subcontinent and is played in classical, popular, and religious musical contexts (Reck 2000). Where Dra. Rosa would sing this song unaccompanied with a relatively free rhythm that follows her natural speech patterns and elongates certain vowels, especially A, Laboratorium Pieśni has set the song in a straightforward, simple meter (in two- or four-beat measures, depending on how one chooses to count). Dra. Rosa sings a melody that hangs on chromatic notes and slides through quarter tones that may sound slightly dissonant to a listener accustomed to music that follows the principles of tonal harmony and a twelve-tone, equal-tempered scale. In contrast, Laboratorium Pieśni's version is identifiably in C minor/C Aeolian mode. It features rich vocal harmonies in thirds, call and response between the various members of the group, and melismas reminiscent of Indian and Middle Eastern musics, except that they stay within the bounds of a 12-tone scale. In keeping with the bricolage of influences, on the final repetition of the third verse, they sing the line that has been added in other covers of the icaro: "*Que para llegar*

a Dios, hay que aprender a ser humano." In so many ways, the details that give the song the character of Dra. Rosa have been removed and replaced with musical representations of the "exotic other," translated into the idiom of Western, tonal music and framed within a "New Age" spiritual ideology.

While it seems that Laboratorium Pieśni seeks to be serious and respectful when it comes to the many cultural forms on which they draw to create their music, the way they represent those forms and make them available for consumption raises as many conflicting questions—as do the differing perspectives represented in their video's comments section. Lucia provides useful commentary on the difficulties of traversing these complexities. "There is significant and measurable positive personal transformation that can emerge from spiritual explorations. . . . However, the story [in her case, of SBNR communities at transformational festivals] is fraught, and while there are many who are serious, religious exoticism easily devolves into cavalier forms of play when it is disseminated and commodified by the masses" (Lucia 2020: 56).

When I spoke with Dr. Jaime about these potentialities resulting from selling recordings of icaros, he was clear that Takiwasi understands these songs will be used in many ways. To Takiwasi and the curanderos who work at the center, the inevitability of inappropriate use of icaros does not outweigh the benefits gained by making them available to pilgrims. According to his interpretation, what makes the use of an icaro inappropriate is when someone purports to have received the icaro legitimately (from a maestro or the plants) and sings it as if it is theirs to use for healing. In his view, such people are charlatans and liars; they know they are misusing the songs and their poor

character is their own responsibility. However, people who sing or listen to icaros without intent to heal and who do not present themselves as healers (i.e. who engage with icaros as songs for entertainment or without pretentions of healing) are doing nothing wrong. The case of the genre of "medicine music" presents a gray area in which icaros are presented as spiritual music and a type of esoteric medicine that is readily available for consumption without necessitating that the performer or listener have a personal connection to curanderismo. In this way, medicine music has prominent characteristics of both what Dr. Jaime described as appropriate and inappropriate uses of icaros.

For me, personally, hearing covers of "Ábrete Corazón" might momentarily remind me of being in ceremonies with Dra. Rosa and hearing her sing. This all depends on the version. Some renditions activate chains of indexical association in my experience and transport me back to specific places and times during my field work in Perú. I feel my connection to the plants I was "with," and I am reminded that they are still with me. I am in the forest, in dieta in my tambo. The sun is setting, and the buzzing of insects intones the first syllable of the icaro. I smell the pungent tobacco smoke and the cloying sweetness of agua florida. I am in the maloca at Takiwasi during a particularly difficult ayahuasca ceremony. Feeling lost and confused, I hear Dra. Rosa clear her throat and intone the slightly nasal, elongated "Aah" that begins the icaro. I feel myself start to calm, remembering that this was a turning point in that ceremony. It didn't get easier, but I stopped fighting the pain and nausea, after which I learned some valuable personal lessons. In the next moment, the entrance of a synthesizer that seems to be emulating the sound of a didgeridoo is enough to break the indexical chain, and I am brought back to

my seat in front of my computer. I am listening to a not entirely unpleasant, ambient New Age song. But this is not the icaro that holds deep personal meaning for me and many others. Like Dr. Jaime explained, this might be a nice song whose mixture of timbres and textures could lead someone into a calm and, perhaps, meditative state of mind. The differences between the icaro as I know it and the covers creates a jarring dissonance that, for me, renders them “just songs”—Dr. Jaime’s way of expressing that these songs are not likely to connect someone to the plants.

Podcasts as Nodes in the Networks of the Globalization of Vegetalismo

As discussions of psychedelics, ayahuasca among them, have become increasingly common online and in alternative media, one of the most influential formats in which these discussions are held is the podcast. Several pilgrims recounted being influenced to search for more information regarding Amazonian medicine or to seriously consider visiting a medicine center in Perú after listening to or watching a podcast—usually a podcast focused on ayahuasca. This makes podcasts and the discussions attached to them in related comments sections important nodes for multi-directional flows of information regarding Amazonian medicine in the networks of globalization. Podcasts have become sites for hosting conversations informed by first-hand encounters with ayahuasca and Amazonian healers. This is the case for my hybrid field site specifically and for the broader globalization of ayahuasca. One of the characteristics—possibly an advantage—of this format is that it allows for long-form, in depth conversation in a way that traditional media forms do not. As Conrad (2018) pointed out,

the various websites or online locales through which podcasts are published also allow for a certain amount of multidirectional communication. In the case of podcasts, this usually occurs in the comments section. The functionality of each site, variation in levels of access to technology (which is increasingly becoming more democratized), size of listening/watching audience, and normative topics of conversation are all factors that limit and, to a degree, direct the frame (Goffman 1974) within which information is made available and interpreted.

The Joe Rogan Experience (JRE) has, almost since its inception, been among the world's most popular podcasts. The JRE, hosted by standup comedian, actor, martial artist, and commentator for the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) Joe Rogan, first aired in December of 2009. Only a year after starting, it was already among the top one hundred most popular podcasts listened to through iTunes (Business Wire 2010). According to a report from Spotify.com (newsroom.spotify.com 2023) the JRE has, from 2019 to 2023, been the most popular podcast in the world. This podcast has been controversial since its start but has grown increasingly so since the Covid-19 pandemic. It is beyond the scope of this project and my qualifications as an ethnomusicologist to untangle the various controversies in which Rogan has been involved. See the footnote on this page for a summary of one major area of contention. [86] The JRE has featured

[86] To summarize some of the more controversial events related to the podcast, among the medical doctors and researchers that Rogan hosted to discuss the complexities of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent development and deployment of vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 were some who questioned the safety and necessity of the aggressive vaccination strategy adopted by the U.S. public health institutions. Some of these conversations also included discussion of off-label medications as potential treatments as alternatives to vaccination for the treatment of Covid-19. As a result, Rogan was widely criticized as having misused his platform (An Open Letter to Spotify 2022). While I do not have the knowledge base to assess these claims in detail from a medical perspective, this controversy overlaps with the spheres of music and

presidential candidates from a wide variety of political perspectives. These have included sitting congress people including Bernie Sanders and Dan Crenshaw. Rogan has also interviewed musicians, stand-up comedians, martial artists, actors, physicists, physicians, biologists, historians, research scientists, and so-called "conspiracy theorists" among guests from many fields and specialties.

Rogan's willingness to host such a diversity of guests, some of whom have extreme views, is certainly a large part of why the podcast is controversial; no doubt it is also why it is so popular. Rogan's willingness to discuss taboo topics also makes it important to discuss in this dissertation. Several episodes of the JRE have focused, in large part, on the topic of psychedelics. For example, the guest for episode number 1,854 was Dr. Rick Strassman, the lead researcher of the project that relaunched clinical studies on psychedelics in the 1990s (Strassman 2001). Dr. Dennis McKenna, an ethnopharmacologist who has studied ayahuasca and other psychedelics, has been a guest on the JRE four times (episodes 298, 477, 946, and 1,133). Dr. McKenna is also the brother of the late Terence McKenna who was a lecturer, author, and advocate of

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culture. Some prominent musicians including Neil Young had their music removed from Spotify, the platform that hosts the JRE, in protest. Young stated that, for publishing the JRE, Spotify had become "the home of life-threatening Covid misinformation" (*The Guardian* 2022). The Wikipedia article on the JRE is not a bad place to start, if one wants to gather more information about this topic. However, as one might expect, the article is severely lacking in nuance regarding the controversies. For example, in its discussion of CNN's characterization of Rogan's off-label use of Ivermectin—which was prescribed to him to treat Covid-19 when he caught the virus in 2021—as him taking "horse dewormer" (Gupta 2021), the article neglects to mention that Ivermectin is a Nobel-Prize winning medication originally developed for human use and that it is on the WHO's Model List of Essential Medicines (WHO Model List 2023: 7). Evidence of Ivermectin being a potent anti-viral medication in *in vitro* studies had been mounting in the decade before the Covid-19 pandemic (Caly et al. 2020). However, a consensus about its effectiveness in treating Covid-19 remains elusive, with studies showing it to be both effective (Krolewiecki et al. 2021) and ineffective based on a variety of variables including dosage and disease severity (Naggie et al. 2023), hence the controversy.

research on and the legalization of psychedelics. Rick Doblin, the founder and executive director of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), has been on the podcast three times (episode numbers 371, 782, and 1,661). While the presence of these researchers on the podcast has done much to make information about psychedelics accessible, their discussions are part of a development referred to as the "scientization," "medicalization," and/or "psychologization" of psychedelics, which is sometimes referenced with an air of skepticism in anthropological discussions (Brabec de Mori 2021; Labate 2014). Conrad (2018) argued that the scientization of ayahuasca makes it more "authentic" for westerners. While I disagree with his expansion of the use of "authentic" to mean something along the lines of "more easily understood and accessible," Conrad makes a strong case for one of the consequences of pharmacological study being that component plants of the ayahuasca brew and alternative ingredients that contain similar active compounds are available for sale online. The result has been that, with a little effort, people almost anywhere in the world can buy and make their own ayahuasca or ayahuasca analogs (Ott 1994). Conrad argues that discussing the pharmacology of ayahuasca—as all of the JRE guests just mentioned do—alters "the shamanic system itself, this process also serves to make the system more accessible and even more authentic for certain individuals" (Conrad 2018: 101-02). Taken in the full context of his article, Conrad's argument is confused, self-contradictory, and/or suffers from a lack of clear exposition. He characterizes online discussions arguing that Amazonian shamanism "can only be understood from the point of view of local Amazonian culture" (Conrad 2018: 101) as "appropriative," yet a discussion that seeks to

understand the phenomena of Amazonian shamanism using the methods and terminology of "Western science" is among the ways that Amazonian shamanism is "re-invented to cater to Western health conditions or problems" (Conrad 2018: 101). This then contributes to the international sale of the physical components from which ayahuasca is made, which enables the literal appropriation of the brew. Throughout this dissertation, I have been arguing that an emphasis on recontextualizing ayahuasca within curanderismo as is it practiced outside of ayahuasca-focused tourism as being an important aspect of what includes shamanic pilgrimage among the strategies of Indigenous tourism (Bunten and Grabern 2018). Therefore, I agree with Conrad's point about the scientization of ayahuasca but only in cases in which the pharmacological perspective supplants or supersedes the perspective of curanderismo rather than being mutually informative, supportive, or giving rise to a productive tension. There is no reason that the pharmacological study of the plants involved in curanderismo cannot co-exist with an understanding of the agency of the plants. At Centro Takiwasi exactly this type of study has led to a more complete understanding of the phenomena experienced by participants in the rituals of curanderismo. But it works because neither approach takes precedence over the other. One would be incorrect, obviously, in asserting that curanderos need to study organic chemistry or that pharmacologists need a year of dietas to analyze the chemical composition of a medicinal plant. Though, of the two scenarios, I think the pharmacologists would benefit much more from a dieta than the curanderos would from reading a textbook. This is why I am bemused and a bit concerned about Conrad's application of the term "appropriation" to assertions of the importance of Amazonian

interpretations of Amazonian culture. The most charitable reading of his argument I can muster is that he is leaning heavily on the word "only" in the quotation above, and stretching his use of "appropriation" to allude to a type of essentialism in which "Westerners" discussing Amazonian shamanism are claiming possession of the knowledge of it as a clearly delineated, pure system and, from this perspective of assumed gnosis, are speaking for Amazonian peoples in declaring all other interpretations intrinsically invalid (as opposed to incomplete). This is a serious stretch on my part, however, as he does not imply that interpretation, and it is in direct contradiction with the main thesis of his essay which is that the technology and format of social media platforms limit potential interpretations of vegetalismo to those that fit within the ideology of "Western individualism" (Conrad 2018: 96). I propose that this line of argumentation commits the same deterministic error noted by Lysloff regarding academic discussions of globalization (2016). The nodes of the globalization of vegetalismo that connect my research and the JRE podcast, in all of its controversy, illustrate my point.

An important, recurring guest on the JRE is Aubrey (formerly Chris) Marcus. His appearance on episode number 127, a two-part episode that aired in August of 2011, is especially relevant to my research. To my knowledge, this was the first time that Rogan hosted a podcast focused on ayahuasca and Amazonian shamanism or spoke with someone on the podcast at length about their personal experiences in ayahuasca ceremonies. Regarding curanderismo, this episode represents a complex discussion; many themes that are common to the online discourse around ayahuasca, as characterized by Conrad 2018 and Labate 2014, are present. Examples include references to the ancient

origins and scientization of ayahuasca, as exemplified in Rogan and Marcus's discussion of the chemistry involved in the brew's psychedelic effects being discovered by Native people thousands of years ago. However, in this podcast, these themes overlap with topics that have been characterized by some researchers as antithetical to the scientization of ayahuasca. These researchers posit that the risk of "scientizing" is that positive outcomes from taking Amazonian medicine are attributed to chemical processes rather than to the abilities and knowledge of curandero/as (Brabec de Mori 2021; Castillo 2022; Labate 2014). Early on in the podcast Rogan and Marcus engage in what is actually a well-informed—or at least well-mimed—discussion of ayahuasca's psychedelic effects being the result of complex interactions between monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) from the ayahuasca vine and N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT), usually sourced from *P. viridis*/*chacruna* (Rogan 2011: 04:00). However, an important theme throughout the conversation is the importance of the knowledge and abilities of the "shaman" overseeing the ceremonies. This is directly relevant to the hybrid-ethnographic aspect of my project, as the "shaman" who facilitated the ayahuasca ceremonies in question was Maestro Orlando. Furthermore, this episode was the primary catalyst that motivated Maestro Orlando's apprentice to travel to Perú and undertake his first dieta at Mushuk Pakarina.

As I discussed in the chapter on shamanic pilgrimage, Maestro Orlando is periodically invited to facilitate ayahuasca ceremonies for independent groups and at tourist centers in several countries in Latin America and Europe. While this complicates his strategy to maintain the broader context of curanderismo by working with pilgrims through dietas, he straightforwardly explained to me that he accepts that some will see

this as a contradiction, but he does not. Firstly, these ayahuasca ceremonies often help participants with physical, spiritual, and psychological difficulties for which they are seeking help. Secondly, if people are to be involved with ayahuasca in a touristic context, Maestro Orlando opined that it is safest for everyone if an experienced curandero like himself facilitates those ceremonies. Thirdly, as he prefers to personally vet anyone who comes to diet at Mushuk Pakarina, he sees these ceremonies as opportunities to meet people who will be serious and respectful enough to undertake a dieta. If these people then spread word of Maestro Orlando's work through their direct social networks, that amounts to what he described as "*un tipo de 'marketing,' entre comillas*"[87] (a kind of "marketing," in quotation marks), with an initial round of vetting built in. In this way, Maestro Orlando intentionally participates in decontextualized ayahuasca ceremonies in an effort to motivate pilgrims to participate in and engage with curanderismo in a more complete and respectful way.

In episode 127 of the JRE, Marcus described that he was invited to participate in a week-long, three-ceremony, ayahuasca retreat at a center outside Puerto Maldonado, Perú. The center had hired three "shamans" to facilitate the ayahuasca ceremonies. The hosts of the retreat introduced the "shamans" so the participants could choose which ceremonies they would attend. The way that Marcus described these introductions coincides in interesting ways with the competing discourses of authenticity and legitimacy discussed in chapter one. The introductions of the first two "shamans" were

[87] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Interview with author. Audio recording. Llucanayacu, Chazuta, Perú. March 17, 2022.

lengthy, focusing on their lineage and many accolades. One of them was known for incorporating Christian elements in their ceremonies, and the other used ayahuasca in some type of clinical setting—possibly substance addiction rehabilitation, but not much is said about this on the podcast. When it came to Maestro Orlando's introduction, all that was said was "He is the most traditional and the most terrifying. He calls upon the spirit of the dragon"[88] (Rogan 2011, 23:08). While this is a dramatic, and, in my personal opinion, not entirely accurate way to introduce Maestro Orlando (he can be serious at times, but I would not call him terrifying), it does generally fit with his ethos: that taking plant medicine in a legitimate way is hard work.

The rest of the conversation illustrates McLuhan's argument that "the medium is the message" with the understanding that media are inter-nested and that the content of a medium is, itself, a medium. For example, Marcus clarifies some local terminology, that "shamans" are referred to as vegetalistas, often with the honorific titles "don/doña" or "maestro/maestra." Thus, a maestro vegetalisa is a "master of the plants" (Rogan 2011: 11:50). However, the format of this podcast, the demographics of the participants and the assumed interests of the audience not only frame (Goffman 1974) but, to an extent, dictate the bounds of the conversation (McLuhan 1994). For this reason, the bulk of the discussion was about Marcus's experiences drinking ayahuasca and what those experiences meant. While, to an extent, this supports pieces of Conrad's argument about online discussions of Amazonian shamanism being dominated by and shaped to fit within

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[88] See the appendix for Maestro Orlando's story of how he came to call on the dragon as one of his most powerful helpers by first conquering it in a vision during a dieta and later learning its icaro.

the ideology of Western individualism (Conrad 2018), it simultaneously undermines and transforms that perspective as the conversation highlights the importance of respectfully engaging with Amazonian culture (Rogan 2011: 11:50), highlights the importance of plants aside from ayahuasca (Rogan 2011: 20:18), underlines the role of the "shaman's" knowledge and technique (Rogan 2011: 27:40; 30:24), critiques the conspicuous consumption of spiritual identities (Rogan 2011: 13:10-15:00), and spends a fair amount of time deconstructing the effects of global capitalism and the international effects of U.S. drug policy[89] (Rogan 2011, Part 2: 34:15).

Connections in the network grew from the nodes of Marcus's retreat, where he met Maestro Orlando, to Rogan's podcast and on from there. Marcus started his own podcast, the *Aubrey Marcus Podcast* (formerly the Warrior Poet Podcast), in 2012. Since then, his podcast and online presence have grown substantially. His YouTube channel, which is mostly dedicated to sharing the podcast in video form, has approximately 580,000 subscribers. Several of the videos on the channel have over one million views. The podcast features an eclectic group of guests focusing on topics including physical and psychological health, martial arts, spirituality, psychedelics, and shamanism, among others. Marcus has also been open about his participation in transcendental festivals, and posted a video in August of 2023 explaining that he would not be attending Burning Man that year, citing "trends that have been—to me, frankly—a little bit disturbing. One of

[89] Rogan and Marcus discuss the arrest of a Colombian curandero in Houston for possession of ayahuasca, which leads into a lengthy discussion about international drug policies and the history of the criminalization of psychedelics. They were most likely referencing the story of Taita Juan Agreda Chindoy, who was arrested in Houston, Texas in October of 2010 while on his way to facilitate ayahuasca ceremonies in Oregon. He faced federal charges for possession of a schedule-one substance with intent to distribute but was released and deported back to Colombia (dosenation.com).

which was the politics of the large players." He clarifies that by this, he has noticed that competition dynamics mirroring the corporate world have emerged in the festival. Along with that, he cited emergent animosity between different groups taking the place of the radical inclusion that has been at the center of the festival's ethos since its inception (Marcus 2023). Marcus is among the communities of people discussed in Lucia's study (2020) of transcendental festivals, and his podcast reflects many of the values that shape the activities of those communities. Notable discussions of vegetalismo on the Aubrey Marcus Podcast include five episodes with curandero Maestro Hamilton Souther, a white curandero from the United States who apprenticed for many years in the Iquitos area of Perú and founded the retreat center Blue Morpho Tours (a luxury ayahuasca retreat center located outside Iquitos), and NFL quarterback Aaron Rodgers who has been in the news in recent years because of his openness about taking ayahuasca (CBS News 2023). On the episode featuring Rodgers, published in August of 2022, Marcus and Rodgers discuss a series of ayahuasca ceremonies in which they both participated at the Soltara retreat center in Costa Rica. The ceremonies were facilitated by Maestro Orlando in April of 2022. This was the first time since travel restrictions were put in place in March of 2020 that Maestro Orlando was able to travel to facilitate ayahuasca ceremonies. He was also able to earn more money for facilitating that retreat than he had since the start of the pandemic because so few people had been able to come to Mushuk Pakarina for dietas.

That retreat also resulted in a short documentary about Maestro Orlando. The documentary was directed by Max McCoy, and Marcus was involved in producing it. The documentary, titled *Ayahuasca with "The Dragon of the Jungle,"* was published on

Marcus's YouTube channel on August 1, 2022. While this video was made in part to honor Maestro Orlando and his work as a curandero, it was also, as Maestro Orlando explained to me, another type of "marketing" that he had begrudgingly agreed to. Number of dieters visiting Mushuk Pakarina had still not increased to a sustainable level, and Maestro Orlando needed help increasing interest in dietas. While publishing a documentary that would no doubt be seen by hundreds of thousands of people was not the way that he preferred to get the word out, he had not recovered economically and his two youngest children were quickly approaching the age to enter university, an opportunity he wanted them to have. So, he agreed to let a film crew record some activity around the ayahuasca ceremonies and to record an interview with him at Soltara for the documentary. This project also resulted in the creation of the second, new website for Mushuk Pakarina; there is a link to this site in the description of the documentary video.

The documentary includes interviews with several of the people who participated in the ayahuasca ceremonies. While these interviews show extreme respect for ayahuasca, Maestro Orlando, and his work as a curandero, they also reproduce many of the themes of "New Age" spirituality that I have discussed in this dissertation. In the documentary when Maestro Orlando was asked what the role of ayahuasca is among the other plants, he responded, "In our culture, ayahuasca is a plant of guidance and a plant that teaches." While the way that the participants described ayahuasca is not in contradiction with how curanderos and pilgrims have described their experiences to me, they have adopted some of the same concepts and vocabulary that are used in online discussions of ayahuasca (e.g. sitting in ceremony). One participant described ayahuasca

in this way: “My feeling and my interpretation of what ayahuasca is is [that] ayahuasca is an expression of the consciousness of our Earth” (Marcus 2022: 09:39). This is very similar to members of the Facebook group discussing ayahuasca as if it is a manifestation of the Earth goddess, Gaia. Later on in the video, this same person continues describing ayahuasca: “it is—she is, grandmother—is a being of unconditional love. If you imagine your grandmother, imagine the way your grandmother would teach you, that’s ayahuasca—it’s with so much love” (Marcus 2022: 12:06). This person goes on to describe how the lessons taught by ayahuasca are not always easy, but they are always taught in the way that will be most helpful to each individual, “in the way that you’ll listen, in the way that I [ayahuasca] see you, in the way that you’ll evolve.” While curanderos use ayahuasca to aid in processes of learning and self-transformation, the ones that I know do not typically use language of personal or spiritual “evolution” to describe these processes. This phrasing, however, commonly appears in conversations along with these other eclectic spiritual formations (ayahuasca as Gaia, sitting in ceremony, etc.) on the online ayahuasca forums.

The examples outlined thus far show that ayahuasca retreats, dietas, podcasts, news stories, documentaries, social media, and this dissertation are all examples of nodes for grass-roots globalization (Lysloff 2016). They are concentrated moments in space and time in which the multi-directional cultural flows of globalization meet, reinterpret each other, and then flow out into the cultural landscapes charged with new content (McLuhan 1994). These flows are influenced by multifarious ideologies and strategies of interaction. Some of these reflect ideals of individualism and “New Age” spirituality, others seek to

directly counter those ideals. Shamanic pilgrimage seeks to carefully direct these different motivations to encourage pilgrims to personally and seriously engage with Amazonian people, plants, and culture through curanderismo. It is not a perfect solution that would satisfy all critics, but it is a strategy that some medicine centers have taken up in order to collaboratively make sense of the ever-increasing, cross-cultural contact that the global focus on ayahuasca has created while supporting local communities in the Amazon.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that there is a prominent strain of discourse in many of the nodes in the network of the globalization of vegetalismo that is, consciously or unconsciously, reinterpreting vegetalismo within an ideology of eclectic, "New Age" spirituality. However, following Lysloff (2016) the phenomenon of shamanic pilgrimage and counter-hegemonic elements in online discussions provide reasons to question the determinism assumed in the argumentation in which Conrad (2018) and others have engaged. Shamanic pilgrimage is one such way that Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina are pushing back against more extractive, ayahuasca-focused tourism. Especially in the case of Takiwasi, they use their online presence to share ethnographic and laboratory-based research about vegetalismo and plant medicines and as a mechanism for leveraging interest in ayahuasca to attract pilgrims to have deeper encounters with the practice of vegetalismo and with non-human selves in dietas.

Conclusion

One of the chief criticisms that anthropological researchers have, justifiably, directed at ayahuasca tourism is that the combined motivations for economic opportunity and the inculcation of ayahuasca into individualistic spiritual practices have led to extractive and exploitative results (Brabec de Mori 2021; Fotiou 2016, Labate 2014). Brabec de Mori has been among the more critical of these researchers, stating that even the foreigners who spend months or years living in Native communities while apprenticing with curandero/as are ultimately motivated by a desire to learn Indigenous knowledge and take it back to their home countries with little or no concern for the wellbeing of those Native communities (Castillo 2022: 49:30-50:12). To close this dissertation, I present a case study that demonstrates that the heightened level of personal connection that the shamanic pilgrimage strategy engenders mediates, to a degree, against ayahuasca tourism's tendency to reduce cross-cultural relationships to extractive, economically motivated exchanges. I was personally involved in the series of events in question and they were part of my own participation as a pilgrim-researcher and exemplify some of the way in which I sought to conduct collaborative research since the outset of this project. As such, my involvement fits within the collaborative, ayni/yanapay ethos in which Maestro Orlando and I established our research relationship and friendship.

On December 8, 2022, I sent Maestro Orlando a message through WhatsApp. I had been seeing posts on social media from acquaintances in Perú and reading news stories about political unrest and other reports of particularly bad weather in the

lowlands of San Martín. So, I enquired as to Maestro Orlando's wellbeing and the wellbeing of his family and the community in Llucanayacu. He replied that he had bad news: it had been raining for several days without ceasing. The Huallaga and the quebrada *of Llucanayacu, the river and stream that border the village, had flooded, damaging the houses of several community members. Furthermore, the rain had caused a series of landslides that blocked the road and the bridge that are the only way for motor vehicles to get in and out of the village. One of these landslides also demolished half of a family's house and made the structure unsafe to live in. These destructive forces had also damaged the community's water-catchment and distribution system. Maestro Orlando had been working with the community, physically and economically, to complete the installation of this system while I was in the last days of my dieta at Mushuk Pakarina only a few months earlier. When I expressed my great concern at hearing this news, he sent me some photos of the damage (Figs. 18 and 19) and replied that at least "nobody was badly hurt, and there was no loss of human life, but there was significant material damage."*[90]

He followed that up with a series of messages about the strained emotional and political situation that had overtaken the country of Perú. On December 7, 2022, in a final attempt to make progress in his political efforts, which had been continually blocked by his (mostly right-wing) opponents in congress, Perú's president, Pedro Castillo took executive action to temporarily dissolve congress with plans to hold new elections for all

[90] Chujandama, Maestro Orlando. Personal communication with author. WhatsApp text message. December 8, 2022.

congressional seats. Castillo's opponents in congress accused him of staging a coup and held an emergency vote to remove him from office. The vote passed; Castillo was arrested, and the vice president, Dina Boluarte, took his place (Morales Isla 2022). As of January 2024, Castillo is still imprisoned and is possibly facing up to thirty-four years in prison (Al Jazeera 2024). With all of this, Perú's already contentious political situation exploded into turmoil and a period of political violence and unrest (Ritter 2023) that continues until today.

Figure 18. A Llucanyacu community member examines the aftermath of the landslide that covered the road to the Llucanayacu bridge. Photo by Maestro Orlando Chujandama.

Figure 19. A photo of the Llucanayacu stream two days after the landslides. The tree line in the background of the photo marks where the bank of the stream typically is. Photo by Maestro Orlando Chujandama.

Maestro Orlando told me that with the combination of the natural disasters and the political upheaval that had engulfed the country, the community was in a moment of deep uncertainty, and many were feeling quite hopeless. I expressed my sympathies and told him that, though I did not know how, I would do what I could to help. I asked for his permission to search for emergency funds for the community. He told me that any help would be welcomed.

Over the next few days, I contacted several governmental and non-governmental organizations based in several different countries who listed themselves as supporting Indigenous communities and having emergency funding for that purpose. Not one of them replied to me. Perhaps I did not follow the correct protocol for contacting them. Perhaps they were busy with larger emergencies. Llucanayacu was certainly not the only community to face difficulties during the rainy season that year. Whatever the reason, my

efforts to find emergency funding from the institutions that purported to exist for that reason produced nothing.

I came up with another idea and sent Maestro Orlando a message to see what he thought of it. The idea was that I would organize a crowdfunding page online and reach out to Aubrey Marcus to ask if he would do us the favor of sharing the link to the page on one of his social media accounts. Since I had been following Maestro Orlando's online connections for my research, I was aware that Marcus and Maestro Orlando had a great deal of respect for each other and that they had been in touch fairly recently. Maestro Orlando had told me stories about traveling to the Soltara center in Costa Rica in 2022 to host a series of ayahuasca ceremonies for a group that Marcus had organized. The documentary Ayahuasca with "the Dragon of the Jungle" *was the result of that trip. Marcus also has a relatively wide reach online (as I described in chapter four), especially compared to an ethnomusicology graduate student and an Amazonian curandero.*

My experience and position as a researcher situated me well to facilitate the necessary communications for this plan. I could translate the needs and situation of Llucanayacu from information provided by Maestro Orlando for the mostly English- and Spanish-speaking group of people we hoped to reach with Marcus's help. Maestro Orlando agreed that this was a good plan. We were hopeful that Marcus would agree as there would likely be many people in his network who had been to Mushuk Pakarina, participated in ayahuasca ceremonies with Maestro Orlando, or were otherwise motivated to support an Amazonian healer and his community. So, I reached out to

Marcus through his website, and he responded quickly, saying that he would be happy to help but asked that I first have Maestro Orlando contact him so that he could confirm that I was who I said I was. I copied Maestro Orlando in a reply message, and Maestro Orlando followed that up with his own description of Llucanayacu's predicament and his assurance that I was a friend who could be trusted. That exchange happened on December 20, 2022, and the link to the crowdfunding campaign that I had organized was shared on Marcus's Instagram page that evening. By January 4, 2023, sixty-eight people had contributed to the fundraiser—mostly small donations but some amounting to multiple thousands of dollars—totaling $15,479.

Maestro Orlando met with the community's leaders to deliver the funds, and he was present in the discussion of how the money would be used (Fig. 20). The community decided that the first priorities were to repair the water-catchment and distribution system and to help the family whose house was most severely damaged. As the repairs were completed over the next few weeks, Maestro Orlando sent me progress updates through WhatsApp, and I passed that information and the gratitude of the community on to the donors through the fundraiser webpage. The amount that was donated to support Llucanayacu's recovery effort was enough to completely cover the cost of the two top priorities.

Figure 20. Maestro Orlando meeting with the community leaders to distribute and discuss the plan for using the money from the fundraiser. Photos provided by Maestro Orlando Chujandama.

The Globalization of Vegetalismo and "What People are Actually Doing"

The case of the fundraiser for Llucanayacu illustrates that shamanic tourism and shamanic pilgrimage are overlapping phenomena in the globalization of Amazonian shamanism. The multi-directional flows of these processes do not only involve cultural information or the exchange of money and services. Though there are important trends in the globalization of Amazonian shamanism that seem to dominate these processes, it is important for researchers engaged in the "grand theorizing of globalization" to pay attention "to what people are actually doing" (Taylor 2007: 115) in the many different

nodes that make up globalization’s networks. Brabec de Mori can be correct in observing extractive interactions between “gringos” and one Native community while the same systems of connection that enable exploitation can result in collective, international support of another Native community in crisis. Both cases stem from nodes of grass-roots globalization that have arisen due to the rising interest in ayahuasca.

To return to McLuhan’s argument about the function of media, cited in chapter four, within the globalization of vegetalismo, especially online and through tourism, the focus on ayahuasca has decontextualized it from the rest of vegetalismo, facilitating the reinterpretation and reformalization of ayahuasca shamanism in new contexts (Warden 2015). This started a chain of global flows in which ayahuasca has been further separated from Amazonian culture, contexts, and peoples. However, if ayahuasca is not the primary medium from the “local” side of the equation, if ayahuasca is rather maintained as “content” within the medium of vegetalismo/curanderismo, the “message” of these inter-nested media is “framed” in a meeting and negotiation between curandero/as, the ethos of ayni/yanapay/collaboration, non-humans, and pilgrims. Rather than one dominating or consuming the other, there is a type of alchemical combination in which the technological mechanisms of global capitalism can be put to use for collaborative purposes. While this is not the primary ethos active in the globalization of vegetalismo, my project has elucidated instances of prominent medicine centers in which it is. Shamanic tourism in contexts that actively promote close, collaborative interaction and personal investment in the sustainability of curanderismo and support of communities in the Amazon are examples of this important development, which I call shamanic pilgrimage.

The icaros are a fundamental aspect of vegetalismo and the touristic development of ayahuasca shamanism. As curandero/as that I conducted research with and researchers have pointed out (Labate 2014), the singing of icaros can be an aspect of the performative "authenticity" of an ayahuasca shaman. However, unless the icaro was learned from the spirits of the forest or from a master curandero/a, it is not part of a legitimate practice of curanderismo. It was not learned through the first-hand engagement with non-human selves that is entailed by Maestro Orlando's concept of the ciencias ancestrales. As I explored in chapters two and three, this is because the singing of an icaro indexes the establishment of an intimate relationship between the healer and the plant, who confers the icaro and knowledge of how to heal. In order to be a maestro/a who oversees healing ceremonies, one must learn many icaros and maintain many intersubjective relationships with the ecology of selves that constitute the forest. It is principally for this reason that curandero/as I met criticize ayahuasca shamans who forgo the laborious observance of dietas and years of "being with plants" to pursue facilitating ayahuasca ceremonies for tourists.

In following with this logic, Takiwasi and Mushuk Pakarina redirect rising interest in the psychedelic brew ayahuasca in order to host pilgrims for vegetalismo isolation diets. The maintenance of ayahuasca's role as a support to these diets, in which pilgrims engage directly with the non-humans of the forest, acts as a catalyst for epistemological openness on the part of pilgrims. As I discussed in chapter three, the synergy between ayahuasca-induced synesthesia, curandero/as expert ability to modulate participants' synesthetic experiences by singing icaros, and ayahuasca-induced

neuroplasticity function together to prime pilgrims to seriously and respectfully engage with non-human beings during the ensuing period of isolation in the forest during dieta. For every pilgrim I interviewed, this was a life-changing, positive experience. Some were left unsure about the ontology of the beings with whom they interacted. However, even these individuals allowed the agency of the plants into their lives—as when Bruno improved his psychological wellbeing and his relationship with his mother by following the plants' advice to move out of her house. For other pilgrims, the depth with which they felt their experiences was sufficient to impel major changes in their worldviews—as when Amir, a self-professed atheist, determined he needed to find a spiritual practice that could encompass his experiences with plants.

Throughout this dissertation, I have provided examples of a prominent strain of discourse in many of the nodes in the networks of the globalization of vegetalismo that is, consciously or unconsciously, reinterpreting vegetalismo within an ideology of eclectic spirituality, which includes individualism as one of its core values. However, following Lysloff (2016) the phenomenon of shamanic pilgrimage and counter-hegemonic elements in online discussions provide reasons to question the determinism assumed in the argumentation in which Conrad (2018) and others have engaged. While it is likely that ayahuasca focused tourism will be the main way in which non-Amazonians engage with and contribute to the decontextualization of vegetalismo, my hope is that more medicine centers develop their own strategies for resisting these trends and for using the networks of global communication to engage in the wider discussions about vegetalismo. This dissertation is but one way in which I, as a pilgrim, seek to continue my relationship with

curanderismo, with the plants, and with the curandero/as and pilgrims who shared their time and experience with me. It is a way in which I continue to support their efforts to share knowledge about vegetalismo and to help local communities. It is a way in which I continue to collaborate with both centers to support their efforts to encourage respectful, first-hand engagement with plants, recognizing them as subjective, agentive selves.

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Appendix
El Dragón: *The Story of the Maestro Orlando and the Dragon*

The following is a transcription of a story that Maestro Orlando told me during an interview that took place at Mushuk Pakarina on October 12, 2019. The story is presented in Spanish and with my translation to English.

> Mira, voy a contar un poco esta anécdota del dragón. Mushuk Pakarina, es el logo, el dragón. Cuando hice mi primera dieta de tres meses, ya, en aislamiento, mi abuelo, mi guía, él me hizo pelear con dragón. Él me lo puso: ¡*fah*! (He gestured with his hand to indicate the dragon appearing in front of him.) En esta experiencia me recuerdo, en la dieta, Yo estaba en una cabaña pequeña como esa (he pointed past a large tree to a tambo), como una cabaña pequeña. ¿Ya? Y viene mi abuelo, me dice: unas cuantas personas, a estas personas lo vas a llevar a ese lugar. Pero di, ¿cómo? ¿Cómo lo voy a llevar? "Tú veras." Entonces, yo agarro dos niños. A uno lo pongo al hombro, y el otro lo cojo el brazo. Y mi abuelo me dio una vara. Una vara así. "Toma, este es tu arma." Entonces, yo tomo la vara, y empiezo a caminar. Y cuando yo pongo el pie, era agua. Pongo el otro pie y empezaron a ser dragones. Yo mataba el dragón, mataba el dragón, y cuando yo estaba más o menos a esta altura en el agua (he indicated that the wáter was at chest height), caminando, pero era un arroz verde, y aparece el dragón. Un animal, pero inmenso, Con doce patas. Y ¡*vah*! (He gestured upward with his hand and looked up as if seeing the dragon in front of him.) Y yo lo miro así. Y cuando bote el fuego por la boca, ¡*Fwooh*! Yo agarro la vara y luego con la vara así, ¡*pah*¡ (He gestured as if he were holding the staff in front of him for protection.) Choqué en la vara y el fuego iba, ¡Ah-voom! (He gestured to show the fire being deflected.) Y empiezo a pelear con la vara, ¡*Bop*! Cada esto, como bien toco así ya, le cortaba la pata al dragón, ¡*Bah, bah*! Y al final, que me quedé con la cabeza. Y cuando yo estoy en eso con la cabeza, el niño lo pongo a un lado. Y mi abuelo me dice, "¡No dejas que te golpee el dragón!" Y el dragón con una de las patas, me agarra de acá. Y yo con la vara, ¡*Pchh*! le corto la pata. Y mientras estoy sacando la garra del dragón, y en este lado me da un golpe con la cola, así, el dragón ¡*pahh*! Y en eso dice mi maestro, "¡No dejes que te golpee!" Y cuando me dio el golpe con la cola, me hace largar la vara. Y yo me quedé con la cabeza. Luchando. Pero no tenía con qué. Y no sé, me doy la vuelta así. Y como era una cabaña, vi un machete grande, nuevecito brillante, y que tenía el mango en la agarradera roja. Entonces yo saco, y le parto la cabeza al dragón así, ¡*Pchh*! Y todo el agua—empezaron a secar el agua así, *ssss*. Y los dragones muertos, pequeñitos, de todo tamaño. Y en eso, entonces agarro a la gente, y empieza a caminar. Caminamos, caminamos. Todo era como un sembrío de arroz, verde. Con cada paso que daba, el arroz se abría. Y cuando yo doy la vuelta atrás, el arroz estaba lleno de frutos, amarillos, así amarillos. Entonces, cuando estoy a esa

dieta, le domine el dragón. Y le digo a mi abuelo, "Acá está la gente." "Ya, vuelva. Tienes que volver." Yo me regreso, y eran 4:00 de la mañana, me desperté.

Y después de eso, yo aprendí el canto del dragón. Pero, el canto del dragón yo no aprendí en la selva. Aprendí en Europa. Con los escandinavos. Cuando estuve en la región de escandinavo. Yo estaba haciendo una ceremonia en Dinamarca. Ahí aprendí el canto del dragón. Yo estaba con un grupo de 22 personas en una ceremonia. Y había una chica que se estaba tan mal, mal, revolcando con la ceremonia. Y yo me salgo un rato del grupo. Y tú sabes que Dinamarca hace frío. Yo me fui en época de frío. Salí. Y me encontré con el aire así. Y ve tan lejos, tan lejos una estrella que brillaba. Lejos, una luz. Yo me quedo mirando. Y doy la vuelta así como si alguien caminaba por los jardines. Y digo, "¿quién es?" Y cuando estoy así, sentí esa luz que se impactó en mi cuerpo, así, ¡*Pahhh*! Y una iluminación, ¡*Peww*! Y esa, esa—una voz me dice, "Canta el dragón." Digo "Pero yo no sé." En ese momento, vino a la melodía a mi cabeza. Entonces, yo salgo, me meto a la ceremonia, le llamo a la chica, la chica se siente en mi delante, y empiezo a cantar el dragón—el icaro del dragón. Canto el dragón. Yo iba cantando el icaro del dragón, yo estaba subiendo mi energía. Y desde arriba veía mi cuerpo sentado haciendo el tratamiento a la persona. Y cuando empiezo a cantar, toda la gente se quedó en silencio. Y al final cantaron todos conmigo. Toda la gente. Empezaron a cantar el canto del dragón. Y después, yo me quedé así, ¡*Zhya*! Y la chica se desmayó. Se descompuso, cinco minutos. Después reaccionó, y me decía, "Gracias maestro. Me salvaste la vida. Volví a nacer. Soy una nueva persona y nueva imagen."

English Translation

Look, I'm going to tell you the story of the dragon. Mushuk Pakarina, it's the logo, the dragon (Fig. 21). When I did my first diet of three months, there, in isolation, my grandfather, my guide (who had died some years earlier), he made me fight with the dragon. He put it front of me, *fah*! (he gestured with his hand to indicate the dragon appearing in front of him). In this experience, I remember, in the dieta, I was in a little cabin/tambo like that one (he pointed past the tree we were seated near, indicating one of the tambos). And here comes my grandfather, and he says to me, "There are some people, these children you have to take them to another place." But I said, "How, how am I going to take them?" "You will see," he said. So, I picked up the two children. I put one on my back and grabbed the other one's hand. And my grandfather gave me a staff, like this, "Take this, it is your weapon." So, I take the staff and I start to walk. And when I put my foot down in front of me, there was water. I took another step and dragons started to appear. I killed a dragon, killed a dragon, killed another dragon. I kept walking, and, when the water was about this high (he indicated the middle of his chest), and I realized the water was a rice paddy—green. The dragon appeared: an

animal, but immense, with twelve feet, and *yahh*! (he pointed up with his and looked up as if seeing the dragon in front of him). And I am looking at it like this, and when it spit fire from its mouth, *fwooh*! I grab the staff, and then I hold it like this, *pah*! (He gestured as if he is holding the staff in front of him for protection.) I blocked the fire with the staff and sent it flying *ah-voom*! And I started to fight it with the staff. Every time I hit it with the staff, I cut off one of its feet, *bah*, *bah*! During the fight, I put the children down to one side, and my grandfather told me, "Don't let the dragon hit you!" And then, the dragon grabbed me with one of its feet, and I cut off the foot with the staff. But while I was pulling the claws off me, the dragon hit me from the other side with its tail, *pahh*! And my maestro told me again, "Don't let it hit you!" And when it hit me with its tail, it made me drop the staff. But I had cut off all its feet, and it was left with only its head. But I didn't have a weapon. Not knowing what to do, I turned to look for anything, and I saw a little cabin/tambo (the tambo he was staying in during his dieta). And I remembered there was a machete in the cabin. And I saw it, but it was brand new and shining, and it had a red hand guard on the handle. So, I grabbed it, and I cut the dragon's head off, *pshh*! And then all the water started to dry up, *ssss.* And there were dead dragons of all sizes scattered around. And that's when I grabbed the children and we started to walk. And we walked and walked. Everything was a rice paddy, all green. With every step, a path through the rice opened in front of us. And when I looked behind me, the rice was full of yellow fruit. So, when I was in that diet, I defeated the dragon. And I told my grandfather, "Here are the children." And he said, "Go back now, you have to go back." And I returned. It was 4:00 in the morning, and I woke up in my tambo.

And after that, I learned the song of the dragon, but I didn't learn it in the forest. I learned it in Europe, with the Scandinavians when I was in Scandinavia. I was doing (facilitating) an ayahuasca ceremony in Denmark. That is where I learned the song of the dragon. I was with a group of twenty-two people in a ceremony, and there was this young woman that was having a really hard time, suffering in the ceremony. And I stepped out for a moment. And you know that Denmark gets cold, and I went during the cold season. I went outside and it was cold and clear. And I see far off, very far, a star that was shining brighter than the others. And I stood there looking at it. And I thought I heard someone walking behind me, and I turned and said, "who's there?" And while I was turned like that, I felt a light impact my body, *pahh*! And my vision was filled with light *pew*! And a voice told me, "Sing the dragon." And I said, "But I don't know it." In that moment, the melody came into my head. I returned to the ceremony. I called the young woman. She sat in front of me, and I started to sing the dragon, the icaro of the dragon. While I was singing, my energy went up. And, from above, I saw my body sitting there doing the treatment for the woman. And when I started to sing, all the people went silent, but by the end they were all singing with me—everyone. They started to sing the dragon. And then I returned to my body, *zhya*! And the woman fainted. She was unconscious for five minutes, then she woke up

and said to me, “Thank you Maestro. You saved my life. I was born again. I’m a new person, a new image.”

Figure 21. The dragon in the logo of Mushuk Pakarina, printed on a mosquito net. Photo taken by author in October 2019.